

# Impressions from six stories literature review sample

[Family](#), [Parents](#)



The six stories that we have read as a part of this unit are rich in terms of expression of theme and characterization. All of the authors weave images together to create powerful rhetorical arguments that entice the reader. From battlefield scenes to questions of the meaning of life, each story has a vivid collection of images that serve to bolster the ideas that the authors want to express.

The actual battlefield in which “The Field” takes place sets the tone and mood for the entire story. The three characters must hide in an underground crate to avoid the continuous gunfire. Having to be in such close confinement also affects the way they treat each other. The climax of the story is specifically dated: “On January 7, 1949, the thirty-eighth year of the republic, snowy winds whipped across the plains of Xuhuai. At about three-thirty in the afternoon, the frozen and hungry militia camped between Chenguangzhuang and the Lu River awoke” (20). The cold, snowy weather highlights the dismal and dreary life they have to endure. Li Jiming, the younger of the two brothers, has the hardest time accepting his fate and situation. He is motivated by the future, of a life outside the crate and battlefield. “Let’s wait till the regiment has gone by, then watch for a chance to run back home” (19). Even though Junni was a whore back in the city, Jiming is optimistic about marrying her. “I always thought there’d be a day with banging gongs and a big red sedan chair, when I could marry you the proper way” (20). Jiming is truly upset when Junni offers sex to both brothers when they know they’re not going to survive, “I went through hell to save a fucking whore like you I wanted you to be my fucking wife” (22). Jiming’s naivete in this scene is poignant: he doesn’t get what he wants, they don’t

survive, which he was optimistic about, he doesn't get to marry Junni, and he has to watch his cruel older brother sleep with her. In the end Junni asks if he is content, but Jiming does not die happily. Junni understands and accepts her fate of death in the battlefield, and knows she wants to die happily. She is realistic, honest, and blunt with Jiming and Sonny. When the idea of running out of the crate comes up, she attempts to comfort the brothers: "Don't be so depressed. Why do we have to go anywhere? Isn't it nice here, all of us together" (19)? Junni is grateful for the brothers keeping her alive and having the company of them both. She considers herself "dirty" and she could never have a pure marriage because "heaven and earth know" (20) about her career as a prostitute. I believe she gets what she wants in the end; although she dies, she dies happily. She sleeps with both brothers, knowing the sexual act will be fulfilling. "If we're going to die, why not die happy?" (21) she asks.

In Tong's story, "The Brothers Shu," the street the families live on, the building they live in, and the nearby river are all referred to as dirty and/or black, and these images refer not just to the physical surroundings but the situation that these two families are in. The Shu brothers and the Hanli sisters share a converted house that is described as "blackened" (25). They live on "Fragrant Cedar Street," which is described as "narrow" and "dirty" (25). These words also describe the fact that the senior Mr. Shu is having an affair with Mrs. Lin, and the two girls are rumored to be his daughters. The dirt extends to the fact that Mr. Lin knows about the infidelity and does not care. It further extends to the fact that Gong and Hanli begin an affair, even though they are half-siblings (Gong does not know). Hanli Lin is aware of her

mother's affair and is angry and resentful. She tells a classmate: " My mother is a slut, and I despise her" (39). She wants Mr. Lin to stop ignoring the rumors and gossip and do something about it. He tells her, " What you people do is your business" (42). He has no intention or incentive to stop the affair, because he does not like his wife. So Hanli does not get what she wants. Then she decides to start the affair with Gong to show her mother " that she knows a thing or two about being shameless too" (43). This results in an unwanted pregnancy. She wants Gong to commit suicide with her by jumping in the river. At the last minute, despite how her " fingers groped frantically for him"(55), Gong pulls away and she dies alone.

The narrator in " A String of Choices" is obsessed with his toothache. He comes to the realization of life's many choices, though, searching for a solution for his teeth. Looking for a specialist " infuriate[s him], and [he himself begins] pushing right and left"(79). He is easily agitated while searching for help with his tooth. Believing that he is more important than other patients, he is angry and frustrated when specialist after specialist dismisses his letters of referral. He is easily swayed by professional opinions and puts complete trust in these doctors and " healers." Professor Shi is comes off as a very intellectual man, knowing a great deal of information about teeth and toothaches. He declares that he is the " only president of the Toothology society"(73). The protagonist looks up to Professor Shi and is inspired by him. He introduces some methods of Chinese medicine, which the narrator decides to try. He seems like he is helping the protagonist, but in the end he is charged with fraud. His purpose in the story is to play on the on the narrator's naivete and gullibility. His opinions are easily swayed as he

is desperate to find a cure. The narrator shares his opinions on Western medicine as opposed to Chinese medicine. Mr. Liu claims that Western medicine "take[s] the human body apart for vivisection"(76). In Western culture, doctors focus on the problem and find the cure or solution. Because they are often distracted with technology and new gadgets, they forget to focus on the entire person. Western philosophy "treat[s] people like machinery with so many parts"(76). Chinese medicine "treats the human body as an entity, a system"(76). This practice looks at the entire body, then makes a diagnosis, looking at every aspect of one's life. The balance of life will help the body and its parts move in "unison" with one another. The body works together creating perfect harmony. Chinese medicine is also viewed as a long process, requiring dedication from the patient. The last two paragraphs are significant because the narrator settles his obsession with his toothache. The theme of the story is realization that different cultures have different viewpoints and opinions. The purpose of the story is to show the reader that different religions and cultures possess different methods for medicine. The narrator learns from his experience and comes to understand a bit more about religion, culture, and medicine.

The narrator in "The Cure" is the second oldest son. He seems to be very obedient and more than a little afraid of his father. Even though he is terrified of the dogs under the bridge because they "[are] glaring at me as if they want to tear me limb from limb" (174), he would not move out of their range because of his father's earlier order to stay there. By having the son as the narrator, Yan is able to give crucial background through the son asking his father questions about what is going on to elicit information about the

villagers who are about to be executed. After the first shots of that morning's execution, the line about the sun is especially haunting: "rimmed by a blood red halo" (172). This seems to be a reflection on the bloodshed that just occurred. When the dogs move in on the recently felled bodies: "their eyes [are] red as hot coals razor-sharp fangs [are] bared" (180). The image brings to mind not just the madness, greed, and primal nature of the dogs hungry for attack, but also the humans in the village who have been granted the power of life or death over their fellow villagers. Chief Zhang, for instance, seems to have gone mad with bloodlust and power, attacking even those who have previously given him shelter.

The epigraph in "Green Earth Mother" describes an object of worship, which seems to be the way the husband views his mother. The purpose is to point out differences between this "mythical saint" and the mother. The saint is described as having mercy, which the mother most definitely does not. Mimi is the narrator of the story. From the beginning she has a tense relationship with her mother-in-law, which is completely understandable all things considered. The mother-in-law resents her intrusion into their lives. She feels Mimi is unnecessary, "superfluous" (189). Mimi has some cracks in her psyche and, unfortunately for her, entering this extremely dysfunctional household turns the cracks into gaping holes. The mother-in-law has taken guilt trips and refusing to "cut the cord" to a whole new level. It is so bad that the son feels uncomfortable showing affection to his wife in her presence. His mother is constantly trying to drive a wedge between them and accuses Mimi of having "emotional problems" (191). She is conniving, pretending to be concerned and caring when really she just wants her son

back to herself. Mimi is married but has no husband. She has made a grave mistake in assuming that what she thought was only " filiality,"(187) and deep caring for his mother would give her a husband that was sensitive and affectionate with her. She wants him to act like her husband not just in the dark, but in front of his mother as well. She says: " No, I don't want any more stolen kisses in the dark you have to kiss me in front of her" (183). But she realizes that he is a lost cause, telling him, " You'll never have the courage to cut the umbilical cord, and, of course that's what She's counting on" (193-194).

The narrator's father in " The Ancestor" displays xiao toward his grandmother (narrator's great-grandmother). She lives with him and sees to her daily needs. He also is concerned with her approaching hundredth birthday. According to their customs, if she still has her teeth at that age she will turn into a demon. He " takes care" of her by planning to remove the teeth with his brothers. There are several differences among the three generations. The great-grandmother does not believe in brushing her teeth, airplanes, or television (215). The great-grandmother and the narrator's father believe in burying their dead in the house, under the bed, and of course, the demon theory. The narrator believes it is okay to sleep in coffins and also in the inhouse burials. His wife, though of the same generation as he, does not understand and is frightened by both customs. She says, " The living can't live with the dead, no matter what" (218). Xiao is one of the Confucian values demonstrated in the story. The narrator's father shows xiao towards his grandmother by taking care of her and her needs until she passes away. He holds a belief that a person would turn into a demon if she

still has teeth when she is 100 years old. As a way of saving her, he plans to remove her teeth on her birthday.

There is a vast difference between the older and the younger generation. For instance, the narrator's great-grandmother "[maintains] the customs and attitudes of the Late Qing dynasty," by not bathing or brushing her teeth (215). The narrator's father and the great-grandmother believe that a burial must take place at home, under the bed. The son acknowledges these rituals, although his wife, though she is from the same generation, does not understand, and claims that the "living cannot live with the dead, no matter what" (218). One example of this from Korean culture involves giving an elder a pair of shoes: this is considered a bad omen because some Koreans believe that somehow, the elder is going to run away after wearing that shoes or die. Perhaps the great-grandmother wants to be with the spirits of her loved ones by keeping their shoes.

While all of these stories set up different situations, the struggles among generations, the tensions between Chinese and Western cultures, and the desire of the individual to find happiness are all themes that run through the six tales. Through the use of powerful narration that brims with imagery, the authors render stories that imprint their rhetorical arguments in the minds of the reader.