

# [Comparison of sandra cisneros’ novel, love in the kitchen in the house on mango s...](https://assignbuster.com/comparison-of-sandra-cisneros-novel-love-in-the-kitchen-in-the-house-on-mango-street-and-amy-tans-novel-the-joy-luck-club/)

The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros, Krik? Krak! by Edwidge Danticat, and The Joy Luck Club by Amy Tan all have one thing in common…food. Each novel from within the heart of their own history magnifies the important and culturally diverse association between the importance of interactions in the kitchen and cooking food while telling stories. The differences lay in each of the stories’ ethnic backgrounds and how each “ kitchen interaction” or “ cooking story” is meaningful to each culture, in each book. In addition to there being significant moments in each novel that have stories that take place in the kitchen or dining room, the stories that are associated with food take the reader into the character’s life memories of love, concern, and compassion. Love is present in the kitchen.

First, let us examine Cisnero, Danticat, and Tan’s general similarities from their three novels, The House on Mango Street, Krik? Krak!, and The Joy Luck Club. All three women are literary artists. “ Literary” by definition from the Online Merriam Webster Dictionary is “ having a lot of knowledge about literature : known for reading or writing books,” while the definition of “ artist” is “ a skilled performer” (2016).

Both of the novels Krik? Krak! and The House on Mango Street are comprised of short stories and Krik? Krak! has an epilogue, while The House on Mango Street has an introduction, both referencing their personal stories and motivational aspects to write their literature. The Joy Luck Club has an introductory story in italics that is titled “ Feathers From a Thousand Li Away”. The next few examples are ones that contain a more in depth observation into the similarities and slight differences between each of the author’s novels and the functions of love in reference to the kitchen.

The epilogue in Krik? Krak! has an unnamed narrator who notices her similarities to her mother and her female ancestors. These ancestors and the narrator’s mother use cooking to express sorrow, but the narrator chooses to write. Her mother does not approve because Haitian writers are often killed. However, the narrator’s female ancestors are united in death, and she uses stories to keep their history alive. “ They slip phrases into their stew and wrap meaning around their pork before frying it” (Danticat 220).

This phrase from the book is a direct correlation between the importance of storytelling and cooking in Haitian culture. While being a writer is frowned upon, being a storyteller comes naturally to the women in Danticat’s epilogue. Maybe the narrator’s mother does not even realize that if she externalized the stories she told to her daughter while cooking, she could likely be a writer if only she wrote down what she says to her daughter while being in the kitchen. This quote represents the authenticity and appreciation behind a home cooked meal, placing emphasis on the story behind each particle of food that went into the stew.

In Haitian culture, harvesting and cooking is an important part of life. The women and men both had different roles in gathering food. The men would farm and till and the women would harvest and sell produce. It was uncommon to ever find a man in the kitchen because Haitian culture in gender roles looked at men in the kitchen as a sign of “ over-femininity” and because the men were working to support their families, the women were working in their house to care for themselves and their children. Because most Haitians primarily lived in small homes, shacks, and flats, they valued their time together through conversations and storytelling, over a home cooked meal; that home cooked meal represented hard work, authenticity, pride, and love for family (“ Gender Roles”).

In Krik? Krak!, Danticat’s short stories have a strong, female, Haitian character presence that shows the real struggles of everyday life of Haitian women not only as women, but mothers as well. Although cooking is not mentioned in the story “ Night Women” the reader can still deduct the presence of love for a child through his mother. The roles that Haitian women play as a caretaker are beyond just the kitchen, and in that sense, one can conclude that a mother’s love is vital to a child’s growth and understanding, regardless of what the mother does. In “ Night Women” we see Danticat telling a story of a sex worker who is humanized by the unconditional love that a mother has for her son. Although the mother in “ Night Women” is working in what is considered a very taboo occupation to some, we see as readers that her love for her small family permeates much stronger than her words of disdain for her job. The female character very whimsically describes her son in “ Night Women” as “ soft” and “…like a butterfly.” The character in “ Night Women” also makes sure to protect her son from realizing too young that his mother is a sex worker. Whether she is really protecting him or sheltering him is up for debate, but it is undeniable the extreme love she as for him as his mother (Danticat 85).

One could argue that the type of protection displayed in “ Night Women” is a function of love, just like cooking a home cooked meal is a representation of a function of love. Love comes in many forms from many different places in many different ways that define us, and cannot be defined under one generic description.

The function of love is determined by the reasons behind doing things to show love and how the person receiving the love understands it. Many of the characters in each novel struggle with the concept of love and learn that there are different “ languages of love”. In an article by Dr. J. Richard Cookerly, online, titled “ A Functional Definition of Love”, he talks about the five functions of love being “ to connect us, to safeguard us, to improve us, to heal us, and to reward us with joy” (2010). The story “ Night Women” reflects Dr. Cookerly’s theory on love to “ safeguard us” in which the mother is trying to protect her son by keeping him a separate factor in her life, away from anything that has to do with her work as a prostitute.

In The House on Mango Street, Cisneros concentrates mainly on one protagonist throughout her short stories named Esperanza. In the short story “ A Smart Cookie”, Esperanza explains that her mother is cooking over the stove talking about what her life used to be, and how she was “ a smart cookie” when she was younger. Esperanza’s mother explains her memories in a regretful way because she wishes she had done more in her life with her potential. She describes how she used to draw and sing, and how those things made her feel liberated. Esperanza’s mother tells Esperanza not to make the same mistakes that she did; she tells her to go to school and study hard, implying that later she can be whomever she wants when she grows up. Although there is a scolding tone to this mother’s story- almost threatening Esperanza to stay in school and study hard, there is also a loving sense of comfort in her mother’s undeniable love for her daughter. Esperanza’s mother is trying to protect Esperanza from making the same mistakes that she, herself, was thought to make by telling her to stick to her education and have the ability to do whatever she wants to do in life (Cisneros 90).

In The Joy Luck Club by Amy Tan, we see a group of women who have a feast every week to drown their sorrows, vent their problems, and tell their stories. The character, June-Woo aka “ June”, had a mother, Suyuan Woo, who recently passed away and was a member of the “ Joy Luck Club”. The other members of the Joy Luck Club are called “ aunties” by June, and each one has a different take on life and a different relationship with their daughters. This book revolves around the stories told from within the Joy Luck Club and June’s memories of her past and her relationship with her mother. The Joy Luck club is thoughtful tradition that involves cooking and serving while storytelling.

In the story “ Best Quality” June reflects on the day her mother gave her a jade pendant during the Chinese New Year. At first, June did not like the pendant; it seemed too big and ornate. After her mother’s death, however, the pendant will begin to assume great importance to her, even though she does not really understand the meaning that her mother assigned to it. June had helped her mother shop for the crabs that she served at the New Year’s dinner. That day, her mother was annoyed about the tenants living in the second-floor apartment of a six-unit building that she owns. She was especially bothered by their cat, which June and the tenants suspect that she poisoned. June listened patiently to her mother as she poked the crabs to find the liveliest ones. As she was spearing the live crabs from the tank, one of them lost a limb. Mrs. Woo refused to accept it because a maimed crab is bad luck for the New Year. After a lengthy discussion, the fishmonger threw it in for free. When they return home, June watches her mother cook, but she leaves the room when Mrs. Woo begins to boil the crabs; she cannot bear to see them die.

There are eleven people at the New Year’s celebration. Mrs. Woohadn’t counted Waverly’s daughter, Shoshana, and so she purchased only ten whole crabs. When she sees the extra person, she decides to cook the eleventh crab, the one missing a limb. At dinner, Waverly takes the best crab for her child, and Mrs. Woo ends up with the maimed one, which she doesn’t eat. June voices that she does not like crab, but picks one anyway.

Later that night, after everyone has left, June asks her mother why she did not eat her crab. Her mother tells her that it was already dead before she cooked it, and thus it was not edible. She cooked it merely because she thought that it might still be good and because she knew that only June would pick it, because June would never choose the “ best quality.” She sees this virtue as one of June’s best qualities. Then she gives to June her “ life’s importance”, also known as the jade pendant necklace. This was a way to show June that she loves who June is, although her mother never shows it.

Although June is discouraged in always trying to please her mother and did not want to eat crab, she understands that love comes in many different forms by saying “ That’s the way Chinese mothers show they love their children, not through hugs and kisses but with stern offerings of steamed dumplings, duck’s gizzards, and crab” (Tan 202). This quote embodies a lack of understanding in the relationship between June and her mother through tradition and love. Where June can see love in some ways through Chinese traditions, she cannot see love in other situations like the giving of the jade pendant from her mother to her.

In both stories and the chapter, “ Night Women” and “ A Smart Cookie” and “ Best Quality”, each mother is trying to protect their child in different ways. In each of these stories, each mother is showing love in a way that can only be expressed by the reaffirming tone of the text. In “ Night Women”, Danticat beautifully and softly describes her sleeping son by saying “ I watch his shadow resting still on the curtain” (Danticat 84). Danticat’s delicate and specific description of the character’s son conveys that the woman’s child means everything to her, and by titling the story “ Night Women” and not “ Night Woman”, it also implies that it represents multiple situations in which Haitian mothers by instinct and tradition, would do anything to sustain their family and provide the best life they can for their children.

In “ A Smart Cookie”, although a shorter story than “ Night Women”, Cisneros uses her own childhood experiences as a Mexican-American and remembers herself and her mother through the character of Esperanza. “ A Smart Cookie” shows a mother and her unconditional love for her daughter by inspiring her to stay in school. In a cultural sense, Cisneros also talks about how Esperanza’s mother was cooking over the stove while talking with her and cooking and motherhood is also a staple tradition in Mexican, Haitian, and Chinese origins.

In “ Best Quality” it is important to note that the last section of this chapter is set in the present. June is cooking dinner for her father, who has not been eating well since his wife’s death. She hears the tenants upstairs and now understands her mother’s former complaints. The tenant’s cat appears at the window, and June realizes that her mother did not poison it, after all.

In Krik? Krak!’s “ Caroline’s Wedding”, the reader sees a divide between family members; there is concern from a mother towards the idea of how “ Americanized” her daughter is/has becoming/become because she is not marrying a Haitian man. We often see a clash of tradition and modernism in age differences and in life, as it is illustrated by this story. In the end, Caroline’s mother comes around and reassures Caroline that “ everything will be okay,” despite her personal views on traditionally marrying a Haitian man. Her love is shown through her concern with her daughter; she feels that no one else will love her except her husband Eric, if she marries him. Caroline’s sister, although seemingly young, is very mature and tells her mother that Caroline should be able to marry whomever she wants to because she is an adult. There is this extreme family bond between the characters that proves to be endearing in this story. It represents letting go of some old ideas, and also in a way is like a mother bird setting her daughter free to fly (Danticat 161).

There are similarities between Krik? Krak!, The House on Mango Street, and The Joy Luck Club in that there is a traditional divide in viewpoints from Esperanza and her family as well. Esperanza always seems to be clashing heads with her father. Jun is always clashing heads with her mother, constantly trying to figure out why she can never attain her mother’s full approval in her life decisions.

Esperanza’s father believes in tradition, and that hard work and being proud of your heritage is a factor in being a true Mexican. In the introduction of The House on Mango Street, Cisneros’s father cannot understand why his daughter chooses to live in a shabby apartment when he has worked hard for a nice home that she is welcome to stay in. He does not want to let go of the fact that his daughter, Sandra, has grown into an independent adult, much like her mother. This love through concern is typical in both stories when it involves family and tradition. We are all safe in our comfort zones and often do not want to accept changes in our lives, especially when it comes to family. All novels beautifully capture the strong bond and yet divide between Haitians and their family members, Mexicans and their family members, and the Chinese and theirs. All three novels show the bravery in letting go of someone or something, despite the unknown outcome.

The child characters in each novel fail to understand “ the bigger picture” in that their parents are working hard to provide the best life they can for them. In The House on Mango Street, despite Esperanza’s move from a much lower quality of living into a much nicer one on Mango Street, she still dreams of having “ more”. Esperanza’s new home on Mango Street is not like she pictured it would be; it is still disappointing to her because it did not meet her standards of what her “ dream home” should look and feel like. Moments like these could also portray “ hope”. There is an ongoing sense of hope within both of these novels for a better relationship, a better outcome, and a better life. Sometimes this is a false sense of hope that borderlines fantasy, but nonetheless, still drives the characters to remain as strong willed as possible.

In Krik? Krak! we see the story “ Between the Pool and the Gardenias” in which the character Marie initially finds a little baby on the street and names her “ Rose”. She brings her home and treats her nicely; she cares for Rose and cradles her in her arms, making the reader believe that she has found a new love through the child. Come to find out, Rose is deceased, her body is decomposing, and to cope with her own past of having miscarriages, Marie scooped the dead baby off the streets because she was delusional in her traumatic realities of her own life. She also has slept with a Dominican man who works where she has brought Rose. Marie had viewed their time together very differently than the Dominican, who denies her and calls the Police, accusing her of procuring Haitian Voodoo on the dead baby. This tragic story relays a false hope in which Marie cannot deal with her own life so she creates a new story for herself with Rose (Danticat 89).

In The House on Mango Street we see Esperanza, different than other little girls in her neighborhood. In the story “ The Monkey Garden”, Esperanza witnesses her “ friend” Sally interact with boys. She watches as the boys tease Sally and take her keys and then sees that one of the boys, Tito, will not return Sally’s keys until they kiss. Esperanza instantly and intuitively feels like this is wrong and that she needs to tell an adult, because she does not want anything to happen to Sally that could lead to unwanted advances. Esperanza in this moment has a high hope, like a superhero, in that she wants to save Sally, so she runs to tell Tito’s mother what is happening. Here the reader is able to see the reaction of a mother of a son, as compared to a concerned response from a mother about her daughter. Esperanza’s tall hopes in saving Sally from inappropriate interactions falls on deaf ears when Tito’s mother responds, “ What do you want me to do, call the cops?” (Cisneros 97).

In this instance the reader feels empathy for little Esperanza, in hopes that the superhero falsities become a truth and reality for Esperanza to prevail in “ saving Sally”. This story conveys a false hope versus a reality, and although “ The Monkey Garden” is very different from “ Between the Pool and the Gardenias” their similarities lie in the protagonist’s reality for young girls in a hopeless situation. In The Joy Luck Club June experiences her identity is lost and has hopes in finding in upon traveling back to China to meet her sisters that her mother left behind.

All three novels tell impacting stories of the different kinds of love and heartache that little girls and women from Haitian, Mexican, and Chinese heritage endure. Krik? Krak! , The House on Mango Street, and The Joy Luck Club may have different writers, but all three women, Edwidge Danticat, and Sandra Cisneros, and Amy Tan, intertwine their life experiences through their realities and hopes that make them all astounding female authors who have vivid memories of love and community through cooking.