

# Joe louis and fish cheeks



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Being a different nationality than those of a more prevalent country can easily dictate whether one feels misplaced, different, or mistreated. In Maya Angelou's "Champion of the World", she recounts a scene of a boxing match between Joe Louis and Carnera in which the outcome of the match was very important because it would determine whether the blacks would be subjugated to the whites or not. Similarly, in Amy Tan's "Fish Cheeks", she remembers a story of when she was fourteen during Christmas when her crush and his father were invited to their house, she felt embarrassed at her family, the food, and Chinese traditions.

Both stories mention nationalities which feel inferior to the white race. Despite having common ground, the two stories have different perspectives and points of view. Additionally, they use different literary devices, making one story more effective than the other. Literary devices are tools and techniques of language that authors use to convey meaning and enable the audience to produce a vivid mental image while reading the story. The use of different literary devices generates different reactions and tone.

For example, using tone, Angelou recounts, "Women greedily clutched the babes on their laps while on the porch the shufflings and smiles, flirtings and and pinchings of a few minutes before were gone. This might be the end of the world" (17). She uses a serious tone while saying that the outcome really means much to the black race and it is a completely crucial issue to them. On top of that she includes irony, saying, "Those who lived too far had made arrangements to say in town."

It wouldn't do for a black man and his family to be caught on a lonely road on a night when Joe Louis had proved that we were the strongest people in the world" (28). This final paragraph of "Champion of the World" is ironic, because the black people should be openly proud that Joe Louis had won, yet, they cower away in fright of the white people who would be enraged at the outcome. Angelou also said that if Joe Louis had won, blacks would not be subjugated. However, the last paragraph shows that they still would be, despite the match's outcome.

This ties into the story's serious tone, showing that it is not as simple as winning a boxing match for the blacks to become liberated. She also uses similes to show how people celebrated saying, "People drank Coca-Colas like ambrosia and ate candy bars like Christmas" (27). These two similes exaggerate the peoples' actions to show that they celebrated luxuriously. The whole paragraph depends on Angelou's description of the scene, "Champion of the world. A Black boy. Some Black mother's son. He was the strongest man in the world."

People drank coca-Colas like ambrosia and ate candy bars like Christmas. Some of the men went behind the Store and poured white lightning in their soft drink bottles, and a few of the bigger boys followed them. Those who were not chased away came back blowing their breath in front of themselves like proud smokers" (27). It presents her style of narration in the story using short, blunt sentences to describe the aftermath of the match. It is as if she is scanning her uncle's store and observing exactly what people are doing while taking in the whole scene in her mind.

Her description also depends on verbs to detail the actions they are taking. Moreover, Angelou builds up suspense in the story by including the radio operator's dialogue. It says, "... Yes, ladies and gentlemen, the referee is signaling but the contender keeps raining the blows on Louis. It's another to the body, and it looks like Louis is going down. ..." (15). She includes his dialogue as an effective way to build suspense since they they did not see the match in person.

It seems like all the people in Angelou's uncle's store are all dependent on that single radio commentator, and knowing that anything is unpredictable at the moment builds suspense. Ultimately, Angelou's use of literary devices contributes to an overall intonation of suspense and cruciality. Amy Tan's "Fish Cheeks" contains more levity than Angelou's story. It differs by taking on different literary devices and tone, yet is similar in the way that Amy's 14-year-old self feels ashamed or inferior to Americans, comparable to how blacks were subjugated to them.

Tan's tone is more naive and whiny, " When I found out that my parents had invited the minister's family over for Christmas Eve dinner, I cried... What terrible disappointment would he feel upon seeing not a roasted turkey and sweet potatoes but Chinese food? " (2). This sounds humorous because a teenage girl is dreading the arrival of her crush during Christmas in worry of what his opinion will be of her family's Chinese ways.

Tan chooses this tone because at the time she was only fourteen and her essay first appeared in *Seventeen*, a magazine for teenage girls. Using this tone allows the young girls to connect to Tan in a situation with their crush

which they may not know how to approach. She also uses description to show how she felt about the food, saying, “ The kitchen was littered with appalling mounds of raw food: A slimy rock cod with bulging eyes that pleaded not to be thrown into a pan of hot oil.

Tofu, which looked like stacked wedges of rubbery white sponges” (3). These descriptions of Chinese food additionally furthers Amy’s whiny character because, if Robert was not coming over, she would take delight in these foods. But since he is, she suddenly feels embarrassed because of it.

Angelou uses more attention-holding literary devices than Tan does. And, since Angelou’s story represents a serious issue in history, while Tan’s story seems more light, Angelou’s “ Champion of the World” is more effective.