

# The joy luck club



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The Joy Luck Club, a New York Times bestseller, had an array of stories all telling the struggles of Chinese-American life. The story starts off with the mention of the actual Joy Luck Club. Jing-Mei Woo, is asked by her father to take the place of her mother, Suyuan Woo, in this club, after her passing.

Because of her passing, Jing-Mei, also known as June, recalls her mothers past experiences unlike the other moms. There are three other moms, each with their own daughter who also voice their life in the story; An-Mei Hsu, mother to Rose Hsu Jordan, Lindo Jong, mother to Waverly Jong, and Ying-ying St. Clair, mother to Lena St. Clair.

The only thing that connects these people, is the Joy Luck Club. A major conflict throughout all of these is the loss of culture when their parents immigrate. Rose looks back words her mom had once said: Back home, I thought about what she said [These] were words I had never thought about in English terms. I suppose the closest in meaning would be 'confused' and 'dark fog.' But really, the words mean much more than that. Maybe they can't be easily translated because they refer to a sensation that only Chinese people have (Tan 210). The only solution for these girls were to start thinking about their parents and background before it was too late: She learned these things How not to show your own thoughts, to put your feelings behind your face so you can take advantage of hidden opportunities Why Chinese thinking is best (Tan 289).

June Woo remembers the very beginning of her childhood when her mother insisted she could be a prodigy, just like her friend's daughter Waverly. She was forced into piano lessons but soon realized her teacher was deaf, and

she need not to practice. She had later embarrassed herself in front of everyone after thinking she could magically play it with no practice, ruining her self-esteem from a young age. Later she tells of how she has a failing career and has been evicted from her own home. Waverly, is eager to point this out at a dinner she looks back on. Her mother supportive though, tells her not to listen to her and that June still has much to accomplish. Years later, she tells of the story of her mother having to leave her home and her twin babies behind because of WW2. After years of searching, the daughters finally get a chance to right back, yet it is too late to meet their mother. Instead, they meet June and her father, finally accomplishing her mothers wish.

Waverly the supposed successful daughter, tells of her times as a prodigy. She says how she loved to play chess and won every match. Her mother loved to show her off and pretend she taught her how to play. This angered Waverly because her mother knew nothing of the sort. She later stopped trying and quit because of this very fact. After many years pass, she introduces her second husband Rich. She believes that her mother poisoned her first marriage, and is fearful she will do the same with Rich. She tries to bring the two together by having him come for dinner, yet he makes many mistakes making Waverly lose hope. She goes to tell her mother this the next day, but sees her mother sleeping so peacefully and begins to cry. Her mother awakes to this assuring her she does not hate Rich. Waverly starts to feel as if she has misunderstood her mother her whole life and now wishes to rejoice.

Lindo's story is a much harder one to read. She had an arranged marriage set up by the time she turned only two. When she was twelve, her family had a flood and she was to move in with her soon-to-be husband. She was married at sixteen after being treated as a servant for the four years she lived there. Her marriage ceremony required a red candle that had each ones' name on either end to burn all night. Even though she tried to blow it out, its ashes were still shown the next day, sealing the marriage. However, Lindo is determined to leave. She tells the mother her ancestors have come and warned her if they stay in the marriage her son will die. After this she was released and she moved to America. After her immigration, she worked in a fortune cookie factory where she met another member of the Joy Luck Club, An-Mei, who also introduced her to her future husband.

An-Mei grew up without her mother for four years. Her mother left the family to be one of the many wives in an old rich man's mansion. Her mother used to be higher up in the ranking of wives, but had since declined by the time An-Mei had come to live with her. While she was treated well, she could tell her mother was always sad, desperate to get back the attention she wanted. She had soon given up on this dream and told An-Mei she was to kill her spirit to give it to her. Her mother committed suicide the next day and left her daughter to live a better life than she. After this she too immigrated to America.

Her daughter, Rose, speaks on how her mother had once been religious. But after a tragic event, one of her sons getting washed away at the beach once, she now used her bible to keep her coffee table stable. While each family member blamed themselves for the death of the son, Rose felt most at fault

because she had seen him climbing the rocks and had done nothing, just watched. This story is related back to her current failing marriage. Ted had once made all the decisions, which Rose loved. Yet after he had a work problem, he made her start thinking about things and when she could not make all the choices he wanted, he called for divorce. After getting the divorce papers sent to her, Rose tells Ted that she refuses to sign those papers until she gets the house. She finally feels in charge and feels bad at not listening to her mothers' advice to stand up for herself.

Another daughter that falls to a failed marriage is the last one, Lena. Her childhood consisted of her being the translator between her mother and father. They lived in an apartment with noisy neighbors and a steep hill on the way there. Her mother had a way of sensing things before they came. When her mother became pregnant again, she had seen that the baby boy would soon die, and he did. This alluded to the present of when her mother comes to visit. She sees a list that Lena and her husband left on the table, a list of all expenses. They keep track of everything and are to split everything equally, even though her husband is making seven times more than her. Her mother disapproves of this but doesn't make a fuss. Later that night her mother had accidentally knocked a vase over. When Lena went to clean it she tells her mother not to worry, that she expected it to happen. To which her mother questions, why she did nothing to prevent it, just as she had done nothing to prevent her failing marriage.

Ying-ying the last of the mothers, also had a tragic childhood story. While she was only six, she had fallen off a boat and her family had not known. Some fisherman on a boat behind her family's had accidentally picked her

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up, and left her on shore in hopes her family would come back for her. At the age of sixteen she is set up for an arranged marriage, but luckily feels love for him. However, he did not. After she had already started carrying his son he had left her, and she hated him so much she aborted this son. She became depressed and working at a very easy job. There she met her now husband, and they had gotten married four years after meeting. Although she feels she has let down her own daughter, for having such a weak spirit like her. Trying to change her ways Ying-ying can already see the signs of her daughters failing marriage that her daughter cannot.

An important theme throughout all these ladies is the importance of your cultural heritage. Every mother in the novel worries about their daughters losing the important part of themselves. And every daughter believes that the part of themselves the mothers want to keep, isn't worth it. 'What will I say? What can I tell them about my mother? I don't know anything' The aunties are looking at me as if I had become crazy right before their eyes. And then it occurs to me. They are frightened. In me, they see their own daughters, just as ignorant. They see daughters who grow impatient when their mothers talk in Chinese . . . who will bear grandchildren born without any connecting hope passed from generation to generation (Tan 31). After they all come to a realization at some point in their lives, they realize not only should they keep this part of them, but that it is the most important part of them.

Another theme in this novel is the power of storytelling. Each four sections of the book begin with a parable that have to do with a theme in the upcoming four stories. Even within those four stories almost every one includes a

Chinese myth or superstition that is meant to teach something valuable in their life. In the story Magpie An-Mei tells of a story her mother had told her. Her mother asked her, ' An-Mei have you seen the little turtle that lives in the pond?' Her mother tells her how she has always known that turtle as well, and had once come to the pond to cry to him. The turtle told her ' I have eaten your tears, and this is why I know your misery' for which the turtle warns her if she always cries her life will always be sad. Birds then drank from the water and flew in her face for the turtle to reply ' Your tears do not wash away your sorrows. They feed someone else's joy' (Tan 244).

This story was to teach her daughter that she must swallow her tears in order to not feel sorry for herself all the time. For which her daughter abided to most of her life, as the story was intended for.

This story could be connected through the characters of the mothers, to the main character of the story, A Lesson Before Dying. In, A Lesson Before Dying, the main character Grant, goes through some hardships. He grew up black in a southern town in the 1920's and faced discrimination. Not only that but he was told to go help a man on death row feel human again. He did all he could to get this man everything he could to have a good rest of his life and tell him stories of the townspeople. This reminds me somewhat of the mothers in The Joy Luck Club, considering all of them raised their daughters to have a better life than them. They told them stories of their past lives, as Grant did with the townspeople, to try to help their daughters learn things. They also did everything they could to get them the education and proper things they need to continue in the American life.