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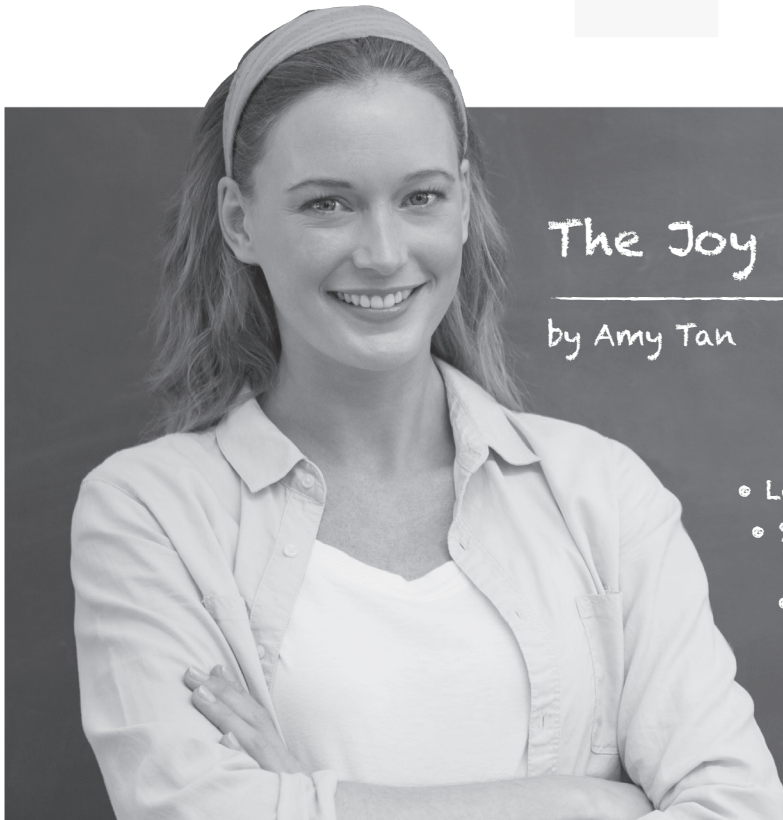
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# Literature Teaching Unit

*Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide*



## The Joy Luck Club

by Amy Tan

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms

 **Prestwick House**

P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938  
[www.prestwickhouse.com](http://www.prestwickhouse.com)  
800.932.4593

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## Notes

*The Joy Luck Club* explores the lives of several Chinese women, who have immigrated to the United States, and their relationships with their Americanized daughters. The novel teaches the reader about Chinese culture and heritage, but the experiences between the mothers and daughters also have a universal quality which can be shared by people of any culture. The book is divided into four parts, composed of sixteen vignettes. The themes of the novel are woven into these events through parables, and recurring images.

All references are from the Penguin Books edition of *The Joy Luck Club*, copyright 1989.

## Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. discuss the following themes from the novel:
  - It is important for a woman to develop her individual identity so she has the strength to survive hard times.
  - Because they operate from different perspectives, it is frequently difficult for Americanized daughters to communicate with their Chinese mothers, though they share a great bond.
  - The way things appear to be is often different from the way they really are.
  - As they grow older, the daughters appreciate their mothers and begin to see how similar they are to their mothers.
2. point out the significance of titles including: the title of the novel, the titles of the four parts of the novel, and the titles of each of the sixteen vignettes.
3. discuss Chinese beliefs and culture presented in the story including:
  - the importance of elements like wood, water, and fire to define character traits
  - types of food the Chinese families enjoy
  - proper dinner time etiquette
  - importance of birth year to predict personality traits (e.g., horse, tiger).
4. define the following Chinese words and phrases:  
chaswei - sweet barbecued pork;  
hulihudu, heimongmong - confused, dark fog;  
chunvang chilhan - If the lips are gone the teeth will be cold. Or - One thing is always the result of another;  
no shou - no respect for ancestors.
5. comment on the following recurring images which appear throughout the novel
  - wind as an image of strength and power
  - “ghosts” as images of invisibility or disgrace
6. discuss what each of the following items might represent in the story: gold bracelets, a crooked nose, shadow, red candle, Moon Lady, Twenty-six Malignant Gates, swan’s feather, mah jong table, Bible, weeds in the garden, jade pendant, pearl necklace, black vase.
7. define a myth and discuss whether or not the story of the Moon Lady is a myth.

### Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. What lessons do each of the four introductory parables teach?
2. Assume you are attending a Chinese dinner party. List the rules of proper etiquette you need to follow. Briefly describe some of the dishes that might be served.
3. Discuss the ways the mah jong table relates to the overall structure of the novel.
4. Research the twelve animals represented in the Chinese zodiac. Briefly list the personality characteristics that a person born in each of those years might possess.
5. Identify two stories in this novel which feature the wind as an image of personal strength and identity.
6. How do the gold bracelets, swan's feather, weeds in the garden, and jade pendant all help to illustrate the following theme: "It is important for a woman to develop her individual identity so she has the strength to survive hard times."
7. For what reasons might the story *Moon Lady* be labeled a myth? In what ways does this story help to illustrate the theme that appearances often differ from reality.
8. Why is An-mei's mother considered to be a ghost? What additional story in the book refers to a character as a ghost?
9. What does it mean to have no *shou*? Which of the four parts of this novel illustrates the Chinese belief that it is important for children to avoid disgracing their family?
10. For what reasons does An-mei keep the white Bible under the table leg?
11. In what ways do the titles *Without Wood* and *Double Face* help to illustrate one of the main themes in the novel? Select two more titles and discuss which theme they help to illustrate.
12. Lena is fascinated by the story of the Chinese man who is sentenced to be tortured to death. What is the "greatest torture of all" for Lena St. Clair in her life?
13. Name the story from the novel that illustrates the following generalization about life: "Life's rules must be discovered for oneself; they can not be taught."
14. How does Waverly exhibit "invisible strength" when she is playing chess? Compare Waverly with her mother. Who do you think best understands the art of invisible strength? Cite incidents from the novel to support your answer.

# The Joy Luck Club

## PART I: FEATHERS FROM A THOUSAND LI AWAY

1. A parable is a tale which illustrates a lesson or moral. What lesson does the story of the swan teach?

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2. In what ways does the parable at the beginning of this chapter help to support the following theme?

It is important for a woman to develop her individual identity so she has the strength to survive hard times.

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3. Some critics believe the swan feather stands for something larger than itself. What do you think the swan feather might represent in this story?

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**The Moon Lady: Ying-Ying St. Clair (Mother) Lena St. Clair (Daughter)**

VOCABULARY

**acrid** – bitter

**apparition** – a ghostly figure

**brigands** – robbers or bandits

**chafing** – rubbing

**lament** – an audible grievance; a wail

**listlessness** – lacking emotion or interest

**presumptuous** – excessively forward; going beyond what is considered proper

**pungent** – a sharp, strong, penetrating smell

**remorse** – bitter regret

**unfurled** – spread or opened out

**wantonness** – wildness; unrestraint; a surrender of inhibitions

1. Why do you think Amah makes up the story of the five evils when Ying-Ying asks about the stink from the burning incense?

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2. What is the definition of a secret wish? Why is the Moon Lady special?

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3. Why does Ying-Ying love her shadow? What do you think the shadow might represent in this story?

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## Half and Half: Rose Hsu Jordan (Daughter) An-mei Hsu (Mother)

### VOCABULARY

**celestial** – relating to the sky or heavens  
**chagrined** – felt uneasy; disappointed  
**orbs** – spherical objects  
**ousted** – forced out  
**verbatim** – word for word

1. What does the white Bible under the table leg in An-mei's home represent in this story?

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2. What is the main reason Ted wants to divorce Rose?

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3. Briefly describe the importance the book *The Twenty-Six Malignant Gates* has for An-mei.

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4. How does the following excerpt from the story relate both to Bing's death and to Rose's impending divorce? What generalization about life does it teach?

“I think about Bing, how I knew he was in danger, how I let it happen. I think about my marriage, how I had seen the signs, really I had. But I just let it happen. And I think now that fate is shaped half by expectation, half by inattention. But somehow, when you lose something you love, faith takes over. You have to pay attention to what you lost. You have to undo the expectation.”

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5. Why is it significant that Bing's name is written in the Bible in erasable pencil?

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