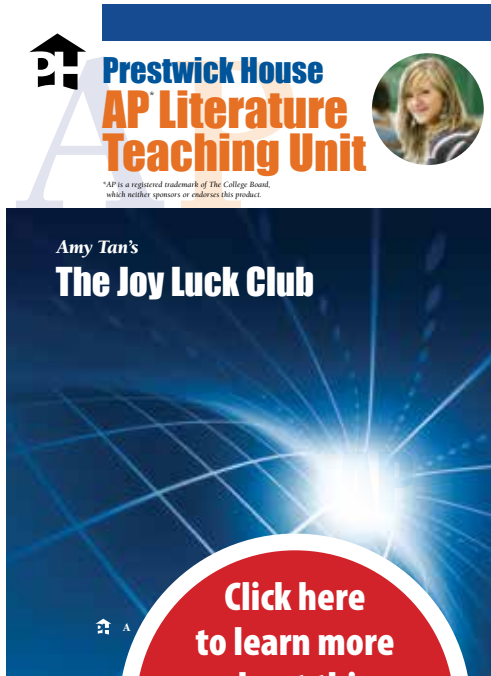




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Teaching Unit

The Joy Luck Club

by Amy Tan

written by Rhonda Carwell



Prestwick House

Item No. 304201

The Joy Luck Club

Objectives

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

1. analyze the use of storytelling techniques in the novel.
2. trace the development of various motifs in the novel:
 - control over one's destiny;
 - sacrifices for love;
 - resistance to expectations;
 - cultural obstacles.
3. analyze the development of cultural identity in relation to character development throughout the novel.
4. analyze the importance of perspective in relation to story development.
5. analyze the title of the novel in relation to the themes.
6. respond to multiple choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Exam.
7. respond to free response items similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Exam.
8. offer a close reading of *The Joy Luck Club* and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text, from authoritative critical knowledge of the genre, or from authoritative criticism of the novel.

Introductory Lecture

AUTHOR NOTES

Amy Tan is the American-born daughter of Chinese immigrants whose life and storytelling techniques were greatly affected by the history of her family, particularly her mother. Throughout her life, she struggled with her own identity and the clashing of two distinctly different cultures: American and Chinese. Through her writing, Tan has worked to bring balance to the conflicting strictness of her Chinese heritage and the more relaxed notions of her American upbringing. Her writing has worked to bring a greater understanding of her mother and her history and the impact each had on her throughout her life.

Tan's mother had a strong desire to raise her children with "American circumstances and Chinese culture," a notion that is mirrored in the character of Lindo Jong. Tan stated in an interview, "My parents told me I would become a doctor and then in my spare time I would become a concert pianist." The expectations for her life were set by her parents at an early age, and Tan did not easily accept their notions for what she should be since she had been raised surrounded by the American idea that mediocrity was perfectly acceptable. As a result, Tan often felt that her own sense of worth was strongly based on what others thought of her. She viewed her mother as having been raised in fear, and this was a tactic that was employed in rearing her own children.

As she grew older, Tan explored and stressed the importance of an individual's being able to have her own ideas and self-worth. Some of these beliefs may be instilled, but, in order for one to fully embrace them, she must understand the background circumstances that served to form those beliefs and ideas. Thus, Tan worked to understand her mother better to develop a better sense of her heritage.

Tan has expressed that, to her, the American Dream is really, "...the freedom to create your own identity." She feels that, "...In no other country do you have that opportunity. It's not to say that everything will happen fairly and the way you want...this is a country where that opportunity... to be as wild as you want, as generous as you want, as crazy as you want, as artistic as you want, that all of that, the whole range exists...it is that self-determination of your identity, to define what it means to be an American and that nobody defines that for you."

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CHINA IN RELATION TO *THE JOY LUCK CLUB*

The history of China's government is a long and complicated one. Controlled by dynasties beginning in the 2400th century B.C.E., each dynasty is marked with great historical contributions and political and/or religious discord. China's history is punctuated with periods of rebellion and war.

Before the 1800s the western powers of North America and Europe had little effect on China. Trade was very limited and restricted to one main port. Western merchant interaction with local Chinese was very limited and controlled. However, resourceful merchants desired to increase trade and achieved that end by supplying opium to China. Eventually the Chinese government

The Joy Luck Club

“Feathers From a Thousand Li Away”

1. The novel opens in which type of mood?

2. What is the purpose of this short opening to the novel?

“The Twenty-Six Malignant Gates”

1. What is the purpose of the short opening to this section of the novel?

“American Translation”

1. What difference between American and Chinese culture does this vignette illustrate?

“Queen Mother of the Western Skies”

1. What is the purpose of the opening passage for the section “Queen Mother of the Western Skies”?
