

The Joy Luck Club in Context

Overview

The Joy Luck Club is a novel that was written by Amy Tan in the 1980s. The book explores themes related to the immigrant experience, family relationships, and the quest for self-identity. The novel takes place in China and in California from the 1920s to the 1980s.

Before we begin reading, you will select a topic to research that will enhance your reading experience and provide a wealth of information for the class. You will have 2 lab days to complete the research for this assignment. You will be responsible for presenting your individual portion of the group assignment on a specified date. Each presentation must include a visual component.

Research Preparation & Presentation Guidelines

1. As a group, you must decide who will be responsible for researching what.
2. Each group member's contribution must be equal—**each group member will have 4 minutes to present.**
3. Each member must contribute his or her OWN visual component. As a group, determine how you will achieve this.
4. You must use at least 2 **credible sources** for research. Sources should be located using the Cobb Digital Library or the Internet. Internet sources must pass the "[Credibility Factor](#)" test.
5. Each student must submit a properly formatted works cited page for this assignment. If you are using presentation software (e.g., PowerPoint or Prezi), you should also copy and paste your works cited information onto a slide at the end of your portion of the presentation. **Your works cited page must be printed and submitted to Mrs. Buckert for assessment on or before your assigned presentation date.**
6. Topics are listed below.

People & Places

Take us on a tour of the senses as you help us explore the flavors, sights, and sounds of the places we will see in Tan's novel. Some topics to research include

- Major characters (pronunciation key)
- Currency, architecture, industry (past & present)
- City vs. rural life (past & present)
- Places*: Kweilin, Chungking, Shanghai, Wushi, Beijing, Hong Kong, Tientsin, Hangchow, Tai Lake, Kunming, Wuchang, Ningpo, Fen River, and Taiyuan

**Remember spellings may vary across sources*

Getting started:

<http://www.neabigread.org/books/joyluckclub/readers-guide/>

<http://www.neabigread.org/books/joyluckclub/readers-guide/historical-context/>

Historical Context

According to The Big Read, "The Joy Luck Club is set in two places: China in the 1930s and 1940s and San Francisco's Chinatown from the 1960s through the 1980s. The turn of the twentieth century hailed massive upheavals for China, with the end of the Imperial dynastic system and the opening of China to global influences." Your group's task is to present the book's Chinese historical context. The following is a list of historical references Tan makes in her novel.

Historical context for part 1:

- Fall of Imperialism
- Nationalists (Kuomintang)
- Chiang Kai-shek
- Communists
- Mao Tse-tung
- The Long March

- The Red Army
- Japanese Invasion
- First & second Sino-Japanese War
- World War II

Historical figures mentioned in part 3:

- Sun Yat-sen
- Genghis Khan

Getting started:

<http://www.neabigread.org/books/joyluckclub/readers-guide/historical-context/>

Philosophy & Religion

An understanding of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism can be helpful in understanding characters, events, and conflicts in Tan's novel. Your group's task is to present a general overview of core precepts or beliefs.

- Confucianism
- Daoism (or Taoism)
- Buddhism
- The 5 Elements

Family & Relationships (Past & Present)

While Tan's novel illustrates the immigrant experience, it is also a story about family roles and responsibilities, marriage, gender conflict, and self-discovery. Your group's task is to present information about the following topics to help the class better understand Tan's themes regarding family and relationships in the book.

- Gender roles
- Marriage
- Family life
- Filial piety

History of Chinese Immigration in America

Tan's novel follows the lives of four women in their quest to begin life anew—to live the American dream. Yet, according to PBS.org, "[i]n the saga of American immigration, the Chinese experience is relatively unknown." Your group's task is to help the class better understand the Chinese immigration experience in America, from the Civil War to the 1960s.

- Gold Rush
- Westward Expansion
- Chinese Exclusion Act
- Angel Island
- San Francisco Chinatown (1960s-1980s)

Getting started:

["From China to Gold Mountain"](#)

<http://www.pbs.org/becomingamerican/>

Culture & Tradition

According to The Big Read, "The Joy Luck Club can be read as a primer on Chinese culture. The narrative is full of references to ghosts, feng shui, dumplings, tea, and luck. The very idea of the Joy Luck Club melds Chinese and American ideas—the characters are ruled by luck, but they may also invent their own luck." Your group's task is to enrich your classmates' knowledge of Chinese culture and tradition. Below is a list of references that Tan makes throughout her novel.

- The Moon Festival
- The Legend of the Moon Lady
- Mah Jong
- Jade
- Colors (symbolic meanings)
- Yin-yang
- Chinese Zodiac
- Feng Shui

Sources:

"The Joy Luck Club by Amy Tan." *The Big Read*. National Endowment for the Arts, n.d. Web. 28 August 2014.

"Becoming American: The Chinese Experience." PBS.org. Public Affairs Television, 2003. Web. 28 August 2014.