

Academy of the Holy Names
Freshman Summer Reading Assignment 2021-2022
English I Honors



Required: *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan (students must have a hard-copy version of the novel; audiobooks may be used as a supplement**)
Recommended edition: ISBN: 978-0143038092

The expectation of summer reading is that you have finished reading the novel by the start of school on August 17th. The lessons and assessments that we do during the first three weeks will all be related to this text and there will not be class time given to complete the reading. The following guide provides key themes, figurative language, and literary devices that you should focus on throughout your reading, in addition to assignments to be completed before school starts.

BACKGROUND

The Japan-China War is the catalyst for many events in *The Joy Luck Club*. Tensions between the two countries had been building since 1931 when the Japanese took over Manchuria but the war officially started in July 1937 when Chinese troops fired on the Japanese near Beijing. The Japanese then launched an invasion of China. By the end of 1937, all major cities in China were under Japanese control. When the war ended in 1945, China had 4 million casualties and 60 million homeless people. The rise of the communist government in China prompted the emigration of many Chinese. The mothers in *The Joy Luck Club* came to California during this time.

As you read *The Joy Luck Club*, keep the following literary elements in mind:

- **Historical and cultural context** of a work is the background of events, laws, beliefs, and customs of the particular time and place in which a work is set or in which it was written. Consider how the time period and the setting of war-torn China set story events in motion and shape the lives and personalities of the characters.
- **Conflict** is a struggle between opposing forces in a narrative. Notice the external conflicts between the Chinese mothers and their American-born

daughters. Then, consider how these relationships in turn cause the characters to experience internal conflicts over their opposing ideas, feelings, and choices.

- **Comparing and contrasting characters** involves examining their similarities and differences in terms of appearance, background, personality, and actions. Compare and contrast the lives and personalities of the mothers with their daughters as you read their stories.
- A **symbol** is a person, place, or thing that stands for something else. Notice the symbolism of everyday things in the lives of the Chinese women, as well as the interpretation of symbols they find in their dreams.
- **Narrative structure** is the way in which story events are organized and revealed. *The Joy Luck Club* consists of interrelated stories that, while separate, share common elements. Consider the connecting ideas of cultural and historical context and the commonality of characters that are woven into each story. Also, look for the frame stories that reveal a story within the larger narrative. Consider how this complex story structure relates to the content of the work.

Honors Assignments: To be completed for the first day of school. Students should also be prepared for a summative assessment on the novel within the first week of school.

Part 1. Annotations and Evidence collecting. To be successful in Honors English, you must be an active reader. In other words, you are not passively reading to be entertained - you are actively reading to seek out what you can learn from the text/ what the novel teaches you. [Here's a brief, yet comprehensive, explanation of how to annotate.](#)

As you read, please annotate (take notes in the margins, highlight, mark pages with sticky notes, etc)-- in other words, actively read. Then, gather evidence to support your active reading. Collect ten quotes (sentences from the text) that you think may be "evidence" for the Part 2 topics --see below! You can write out your quotes or reference by page number (and highlight in the book itself) but be sure to collect page numbers for all evidence. You will use this evidence to write your paragraph.

Part 2. In a well-structured, eloquent paragraph of about 250 words, choose **one** of the following topics to explore within your novel. Write an argument about what this topic teaches you about the novel. Your paragraph should contain a title, a claim,

evidence, and analysis of your evidence. Be sure to cite your evidence with the novel's page numbers. (Not sure? Check out [Purdue Owl on MLA](#).) You have already built up evidence for each topic as you were reading (see Part 1). Remember, you only choose one of the following topics to write about for your paragraph.

Topics

- ★ Relationship (friendship, family, marriage, etc.)
- ★ Conflict (internal and external)
- ★ Historical or Cultural context (not only time and place, but world events)
- ★ Symbolism (choose one symbol in the novel)

(Please see the last page of this document for sample paragraphs on other texts, to help you with structure.)

Part 3. Extension: *The Joy Luck Club* brings up many deeper questions on identity and culture: how do we define home? What are traditional American values? How are they different from traditional values in other countries or cultures? How do we form our identity as individuals part of a bigger group - like our nationality? How do we blend more than one nationality/ culture/ identity into one person?

Using the novel as inspiration, find an artifact to bring into class the first day. Your artifact may be an existing material from another writer that you can print and bring, like an article, a poem, a song or art that you connect in some way to the novel. Or your artifact may be created by you - a visual representation of some aspect of the novel or a short, reflective response you write. Or, an explanation of a movie or other piece of art (that you can't just print off) that you can connect to the deeper questions in the novel. Be creative, authentic. Be ready to bring something physical to class (your artifact) and be ready to explain it.

Model Paragraphs:

In the novel *The Memory Keeper's Daughter* by Kim Edwards, the topic of internal conflict is one of the main themes carried throughout the story. One of the main characters, David Henry, faces the internal conflict of guilt his entire life after he gives away his daughter with down's syndrome when she is born. Throughout the novel we see his guilt slowly destroy his relationship with his wife, Norah and son, Paul. The topic of guilt teaches us that internal conflict can affect a relationship negatively over time. When Norah Henry gives birth to one of her twins, David quickly notices the signs of Down's Syndrome in the baby girl (17), and he makes the decision to give her away to a nurse, Caroline Gill to bring to a facility (18). David believed that giving away their daughter would "spare [them] all a terrible grief" (19). Thirteen years later, Norah has an affair while on vacation in Aruba (186). Instead of feeling angry, David realizes that he had "expected this moment for years" because the "guilt" that "he had given

their daughter away”, had “shaped their lives together” (193). It was like “a rock wall grown up between them” (193). After thirteen years of this secret between them and David’s own guilt, it had forced them farther and farther apart to the point of Norah becoming unfaithful. Later in the book, David regrets that his relationship with his son during his childhood was so “sparse” because his “guilt” of giving away Paul’s twin sister “kept [David] distant” (310). This displays David’s guilt also being a barrier between him and his son because he was keeping Paul from knowing the truth about his own sister. The theme of guilt is apparent throughout the relationships between Paul and his family, and it demonstrates how long lived guilt can destroy even the most strong and profound relationships .

Romantic relationships in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* suggest that the book is a warning that romantic relationships based solely on either sense or passion cannot last. One example of a solely passionate relationship is Rochester and Jane while he is still married. When Rochester is telling Jane about his mistresses, and that they are just bad memories for him, Jane realizes that if she continues this relationship against her values he would one day think of her that way too (Brontë 359). If Jane stays with Rochester in a simply passionate relationship with a married man, the relationship would not last because it would go against her beliefs, and he would stop respecting her. Another example is St. John offering marriage to Jane based on convenience. Jane realizes here that “every endearment he bestows is a sacrifice made on principle”(Brontë 467). In other words, St. John does not love Jane so any affection from him would be a sacrifice. As Jane realizes above, a relationship that is only based on sense, is also one that will not last because a strong relationship needs to be based on love, and uphold each person’s values. A final example of this is when Rochester and Jane reunite at the end of the book. Because Rochester is no longer married, Jane by staying with him would no longer be going against her values. This relationship will last because it is now based on both passion and sense, so there is nothing holding either back from loving the other completely.

In sharing the Chinese immigrant experience in America with her novel *The Joy Luck Club*, Amy Tan reveals the importance of looking forward with hope, despite past or current tragedies. The novel is set against the backdrop of World War II and the upheaval of immigration to America. The mother characters have all suffered greatly. From losing husbands or babies in the chaos of war, to losing their homelands, language and sense of identity, each mother must start anew in America under the shadow of devastating loss. Yet the novel obviously celebrates hope for the future in this new country. The clearest example is found in the novel’s title and first chapter, the “joy-luck club” Suyuen first starts in Kwelin and continues in America. As she explains to her daughter, Jin-mei, “You can’t stay in the dark for too long. Something inside you starts to fade, and you become like a starving person, crazy-hungry for light” (Tan 45). Facing tragedy with hope, their club represents the underlying wish

shared by any immigrant, the hope for a better life: "We feasted, we laughed, we played games, lost and won, we told the best stories. And each week we could hope to be lucky. That hope was our only joy" (Tan 22). Throughout the novel, the importance of maintaining optimism is seen repeatedly.