

## Story Grammar: *The Joy Luck Club*

**Plot:** After the death of her mother, Jing-mei Woo begins to learn the stories of the lives of her mother and her mother's friends, who all immigrated from China to America. In a series of 16 stories, the lives and complex relationships of four Chinese mothers and their four Chinese-American daughters are revealed.

**Themes:** Culture conflict, Death, Sexism, Communication, Mother-Daughter Relationships, Identity

**Setting:** China, first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; America, 50's and 60's; America, present

**Characters:** Jing-mei Woo (inciting character of the story), Suyuan Woo (Jing-mei's mother, recently deceased), An-mei Hsu, Rose Hsu Jordan, Lindo Jong, Waverly Jong, Ying-ying St. Clair, Lena St. Clair



### Synopsis of Each Character's Stories:

**Jing-mei Woo:** We are introduced to Jing-mei at the beginning of the novel, when she takes her mother's place at the mah jong table. She learns that she has two half-sisters, whom she has never met, that are in China. She begins to learn her mother's background so she can take those stories and the essence of her mother to them. Jing-mei describes how she always felt ordinary, despite her mother's hopes that she would be a prodigy. Later, she comes to realize that she is her mother's "cherished wish," despite the ways she felt a lack of connection with her mother. After she has learned the stories that formed her mother's Chinese-American background, she travels to China and meets her sisters.

**Suyuan Woo:** We learn most of Suyuan's story through the narration of Jing-mei, and stories that Jing-mei's father recalls. Suyuan was once the wife of an officer in China. She gave birth to twins, and then was forced to flee her city when the Japanese invaded. She was forced to abandon the twins, and then spent years searching for them. She moved to America and remarried, and never learned that her daughters were still alive.

**An-mei Hsu:** An-mei was abandoned by her mother in her early years. When her mother finally returned, she took An-mei away from the rest of the family and moved to a house where her mother was a concubine to a horrible man. Her mother committed suicide, and An-mei learned to speak up and not accept fate.

**Rose Hsu Jordan:** In Rose's childhood, her younger brother Bing drowned, and Rose felt responsible for his death. Later, we find her going through a divorce from her husband, Ted. She is indecisive and listens to other people, "without wood", as the Chinese saying goes. After much grieving over the divorce, she begins to take a stronger position.

**Lindo Jong:** In Lindo's early life, she is betrothed to a young man from a wealthy family. She moves in with the family and is treated like a servant. After her marriage, she begins to construct stories and tales that, according to Chinese tradition, indicate bad luck. The family lets her leave, and she eventually meets an American man and immigrates to America, with the hopes of giving her children Chinese character with American circumstances.

**Waverly Jong:** Waverly is a child chess prodigy, who becomes the national chess champion. After a power struggle with her mother, she begins to lose, and communication with her mother tenses. In her adult life, Waverly becomes a powerful lawyer. She elopes when she is 18, and has a daughter, Shoshanna. She quickly divorces after she realizes her husband's flaws due to the observations of her mother. She later meets another attorney, Rich, and is concerned that her mother will ruin Rich in her eyes as well.

**Ying-ying St. Clair:** Ying-ying is born into a very wealthy Chinese family. She marries a dishonest man, who leaves her early on for other women. She survives the loss (claiming that it was because she was born in the year of the Tiger that she was strong enough), and moves to the city, where she met the American man that became her husband after four years of courting.

**Lena St. Clair:** Lena grew up translating what her mother said for her father. She learns many of the Chinese myths and traditions, without fully understanding them. She eventually marries a man with whom she has essentially a business-like relationship. They don't share any material possessions, and he gives her inferior status in the business partnership that they've created jointly.

