



Voices from the Gaps

Amy Tan

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A man who watched me play in the park suggested that my mother allow me to play in local chess tournaments. My mother smiled graciously, an answer that meant nothing. I desperately wanted to go, but I bit back my tongue. I knew she would not let me play among strangers. So as we walked home I said in a small voice that I didn't want to play in the local tournament. They would have American rules. If I lost, I would bring shame on my family.

— The Joy Luck Club

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Biography

Amy Tan was born on February 19, 1952 in California. She grew up surrounded by influences from both Chinese and American cultures. She has written about trying to assimilate into the mainstream, American world as a child, often at the expense of her Chinese heritage. Tan's father and brother died of brain tumors when she was fourteen years old. At this time, she also learned that her mother had been married to a different man in China and had three daughters from this marriage, a situation not unlike June's in *The Joy Luck Club*, her first novel.

Quick Facts

- * Born in 1952
- * Chinese-American novelist
- * Author of *The Joy Luck Club* (1989)

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Amy Tan

Biography continued

Tan attended high school in Switzerland and went to eight different colleges, ultimately receiving a master's degree in Linguistics from San Jose State University. Tan became a published author at the age of eight when she wrote an essay on the public library that was published in a local paper. Before *The Joy Luck Club* (for which she won the L.A. Book Award and The National Book Award) was published in 1989, Tan had a wide variety of jobs, everything from a bartender to a counselor for developmentally disabled children. She now lives in San Francisco with her husband Lou DeMattei, whom she married in 1975.

Amy Tan is part of a movement of Asian-American writers that includes Maxine Hong Kingston (*The Woman Warrior*) and Wakako Yamauchi (*Songs My Mother Taught Me*). A large part of Tan's contribution to the modern Asian-American literary boom is her widespread popularity. *The Joy Luck Club*, aside from winning numerous awards, was a fixture on the best seller list and was made into a feature film, for which Tan helped to write the screen play. Tan's popularity helped expose an entire genre of literature to a broad cross section of society.

Tan's writing relies heavily on flashbacks, storytelling, and mysticism. In *The Joy Luck Club*, Tan starts each chapter with a short parable that is in some way a parallel with the woman whose story is being told in the chapter. This connection of the past and the present is typical of Tan's style.

Tan has said that her intention in writing is not to provide historical information, but rather to create a work of art. Her work is generally received in this manner. Critics have said that her works are not necessarily "Chinese" in nature, but are instead stories with universal themes (generational conflicts, war of the sexes, etc.) that have an added dimension of being told through narrators that are constantly searching for a balance between their Chinese heritage and American lifestyles.



Amy Tan

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