***The Joy Luck Club* Tracking Sheet**

***Directions:*** *June’s first story introduces not only the Woo stories but all the stories of the novel, and sets up major themes and motifs. All the mothers and daughters are introduced, directly or indirectly. After reading the first story in the novel, complete the following questions.*

What did you learn about the mother’s past?

What did you learn about the daughter’s past?

What is the mother’s “unspeakable tragedy”?

What inexpressible hopes are named or suggested?

What mother-daughter conflicts are shown?

What Chinese-American conflicts are shown?

What examples of a lack of understanding of each other and/or a search for understanding do you find between mother and daughter?

Using a phrase that occurs later, where do you find a woman “swallowing tears”?

What examples of balancing the elements (or any other balance) do you find?

What examples of submissive or strong women do you find?

What do you learn about mothers and daughters *not* in the family?

Who’s Woo?

***Directions:*** *Fill in the following chart. Be descriptive in your identifications; do not merely put family relationships. Under “Traits,” for the starred names, give as many traits as possible. For the others, give the predominant trait if there is one, but also tell the character’s purpose in the book.*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **People** | **Identification** | **Traits or Purpose** |
| \*\*\*Suyuan |  |  |
| \*\*\*Jing-mei (June) |  |  |
| Channing Woo (Syan Yen) |  |  |
| Aiyi |  |  |
| Lili |  |  |
| Mr. Chong |  |  |
| Mei Ching |  |  |
| Chwun Yu and Chwun Hwa Wang |  |  |
| **Places** | **Who lived here?** | |
| Shanghai |  | |
| Kweilin |  | |

**Suyuan**

***Directions:*** *Complete the following.*

**Part A: In China**

She describes the famous peaks of Kweilin (now Guilin) as looking like “ giant fried fish heads trying to jump out of a vat of oil.” What does this image suggest about her?

Why does Kweilin lose its beauty for her?

Why does she form the club? Why the name? What kinds of stories do they tell? Why?

Bit by bit she abandons her belongings until she finally leaves her children. Was this cruel? What does it show about her?

In the hospital she says she had lost everything but hope and clothes. But she laughs as she shows what she is now losing. What is it, and what does her reaction reveal?

What is the end result of her Chinese family’s extreme closeness?

When does she give up searching for her lost children?

**Part B: In America**

Why does she start the new Joy Luck Club?

What is symbolic about her always having the East seat at mah-jong?

Why does she push June to become a prodigy? How does she much later revise this?

At what point in June’s childhood does her mother apparently abandon “best quality”?

After the talent show, June is devastated by her mother’s “quiet, blank look that said she had lost everything.” What does this mean?

About her unpleasant tenants Suyuan says, “Even you don’t want them, you stuck.” What can this mean in relation to a family?

Why is she bothered by the crab with a missing leg? How does she know only June will choose it?

How is the cat on the sill like Suyuan?

**Jing-mei (June) Woo**

***Directions:*** *Complete the following.*

**Part A: As a child**

Why does her mother think she can become a prodigy?

The prodigy part of her warns that if she doesn’t let it out soon, “Then you’ll always be nothing.” In what sense does this “prediction” come true?

When she rebels and feels angry and powerful, she says, “I had new thoughts, willful thoughts, or rather thoughts filled with lots of won’ts.” Explain the wordplay. Is her promise to remain unchanged (“I won’t be what I’m not” admirable? Why or why not?

When she starts piano lessons, how does she deceive both her mother and Mr. Chong?

What does her determination not to try say about her?

After her embarrassing performance at the talent show, a mother says, “Well, she certainly tried.” Why is this ironic? What had her mother told her earlier about trying?

How does this connect with the title of the third story? What does her mother say about quality in this story? Is this a reproof or a compliment?

In what way is June a “Pleading Child” (the title of her recital piece)? As an adult she discovers the next piece, a song entitled “Perfectly Contented.” Symbolically what is meant by there being two halves of the same song?

**Part B: As an adult**

Why was June so pleased when her mother gave her the piano?

What does she realize she knows about her mother?

Of what does she realize the aunties are frightened?

When her mother gives her the pendant, saying, “This is your life’s importance,” June doesn’t want to accept it but she feels as if she has already swallowed it. Explain the mother’s phrase and June’s reaction and choice of word.

Why does she start wearing the jade pendant?

What does her reaction to the boiling of the crabs suggest?

How does she react to Waverly?

Is she able to recognize her own feelings? Give proof.

Why does she fear the twins will think her responsible for her mother’s death?

What events lead to her “becoming” Chinese?

What part of her is Chinese?

In what way are both June and her sisters her mother’s “long-cherished wish”?

What may be the reason for the use of Polaroid shots in China?

**Marriages**

***Directions:*** *Most of the mothers in the novel have had two marriages, one in China and one primarily in America. Tan reveals a great deal about the two cultures through her descriptions of the marriages.*

*We know very little about Suyuan’s marriages, but we can list a few facts and draw a few conclusions. Complete the following as you think about Suyuan and her marriages.*

First husband’s occupation:

His fate:

Happiness of China marriage:

How and where she met “American” husband:

What he says about the cause of her death:

Happiness of second marriage:

Flaws of two husbands:

June is the only never-married daughter in the novel. What is the advantage (in terms of the story) of her never marrying?

**“Your Mother Is in Your Bones!”**

***Directions:*** *All of the family stories show two types of conflicts: mother versus daughter and Chinese traditions versus American practices. Think about the two conflicts in the Woo section. When and where do clashes occur? What causes them?*

Mother versus daughter:

China (East) versus America (West):

Are the conflicts in this mother-daughter relationship resolved? Explain.

What do the twins illustrate in terms of mothers and daughters?