

Your book motivates me to continue even if life seems tough. I learned that migrant families are about strong work ethic and perseverance in life. There are many struggles to this hard life but survival is paramount to all of them. We both share something in common; we value our family. Our family lived in the sparseness of conditions, with a minimum amount of food to eat and barely enough clothing, yet we are still close and caring. Your book led me to understand why I should value my parents even more. They suffered coming to the United States, uneducated, poor, and scared yet they somehow managed to survive just like you, and this is something I learned to praise. I thank you for your life story for it has changed the way I view life. To triumph in life, one must do every effort regardless of the obstacles.

*Sincerely,*  
**Alejandro Hernandez**

*Life in the shoes of a Hispanic family is not easy, however, this thought never stops me from completing my lifelong dreams. I dream of graduating from a high prestige university and perhaps majoring in the field of communications or business. After, I dream of making a family of my own and continue with all my Hispanic culture so that my children can achieve greater things and have the same traits my own family has taught me throughout my life.*

L E V E L 3



**HONORABLE MENTION, LEVEL 3**

**Jay Lee, Grade 11**  
**Saratoga High School**  
**Saratoga**

*The Joy Luck Club, Amy Tan*

**Dear Ms. Amy Tan,**

Last year in my sophomore English class I read your novel *The Joy Luck Club*. While some of my other male friends loathed the novel (I'm sorry to say), I found myself devouring the words on every page, intrigued by the stories of the girls with their mothers and of the mothers with their mothers. I realized that what distinguished me from my friends were, in fact, my ethnicity and my "FOB" parents. Born in Korea but having lived in the U.S. since I was seven months old, I find myself repeatedly hitting communications barriers with my parents, my mother in particular. Despite her nearly flawless Korean (as opposed to my limited-to-a-few-words knowledge of the language), even my older sister has often conflicted with my mom. For years, I questioned why my sister fought so often with my mom and why I, who observed this conflict and vowed to avoid it, began to foster the same contentious relationship with my mom. But now, after having read your novel, I understand the origins of this conflict and my mother's intentions.

The similarities between the characters' relationships and my relationship with my mom contributed most to my discoveries. I chuckled as I read about familiar conflicts through the eyes of your characters. For instance, Jing-Mei's embarrassment with her mother for vocalizing her discontent about the fish's poor quality at the fish market brought me back to several instances in which my mother would conspicuously criticize, ostensibly to the whole store, how poor the quality of a pair of jeans, or some other victimized product, was. Moments such as these helped me realize that I am not alone in facing the rifts of culture. My mom, like Jing-Mei's mother, Suyuan, grew up in a culture that whole-heartedly accepts what Americans perceive as offensive criticisms but to her are nothing more than observations. To Jing-Mei and me, however, these frank "observations" seem rude to the business owners because we are more accustomed to the American style, which embraces a more circumlocutory method of communicating discontent. By uncovering a world of Asian-Americans who struggle as I do, your novel helped me find comfort with my own struggles that I face as a growing Asian-American.

The mothers' perspectives helped me discover the main sources of my mom and my problems. As demonstrated through all the mothers in this novel, mothers always have the best intent for their children but the way they convey their intentions often leads to disputes due to miscommunication. When reading the mothers' recollections, I felt as if I were reading my mom's journal entries and looking directly into her thoughts despite the differences between her situation and the characters'. As I read about Ying-Ying's past, one idea became very clear: My mom always tries to protect me from the evils that she has experienced. I have often questioned why my mom wastes her time lecturing me about various aspects of life. 'Why not let me experience them on my own?' I wondered, but now I understand that she, too, probably had once asked that very question and as a mother feels obligated to protect me from my curiosity because of the consequences her curiosity brought her. 'Why does she keep repeating words that make no sense?' I asked. However, they do all make sense...in a different language, and this recurring theme of translation throughout the novel emphasized that my mother's intentions rarely are what they seem. As Lindo never meant to cause Waverly harm or to annoy Waverly, my mom, too, simply does not translate her thoughts into English the way she hopes to and creates confusion between us. Indubitably, there is value in all that my mom tells me, and I realize now that in order to benefit from her wisdom I have to identify the meanings beneath the surface of her words.

I have benefitted greatly from reading and studying *The Joy Luck Club*. In this day, with innumerable immigrants in the U.S., miscommunication often creates a rift between parents and children. Cultures differ, and parents simply cannot express themselves the way they can in their native languages which most children fail to understand. Your novel demonstrated that there are meanings beyond the denotations of my mother's words. With this new knowledge, I have been making more of an effort to really understand what my mom tells me. We argue less and laugh much

more because I pick up on her jokes now! Thank you so much for your contribution to improving my relationship with my mother.

*Yours truly,  
Jay Lee*

*Being an Asian American teenager, I am grateful for the numerous opportunities that were not available for Asian Americans just a few decades ago. Since the fourth grade, theater has been a growing passion and without it, my life would have very little direction. I hope to one day act and perform for audiences all around the world and to help young adults discover their own passions and pursue their dreams, despite any barriers they may face.*

L E V E L 3



**Leslie Chae, Grade 10**  
**Individual Entry**  
**San Marino**

*The Two Princesses of Bamarre*, Gail Carson Levine

**Dear Mrs. Gail Carson Levine,**

When I entered elementary school nine long years ago, I constantly read your book *The Two Princesses of Bamarre*. Every word, every sentence drew me in as I began to envision myself in this world of dragons, gryphons and ogres. More than that, I saw myself as the younger, timid Addie and my own older sister, Estelle, as the courageous Meryl. At that age, I didn't know why I cherished your book so much that I couldn't stand to even bend the pages in hopes of keeping it brand new. But recently I found out the most intriguing way.

I am not considered puny. In fact, I am taller than my sister. At 5'8" I tower over my 5'6", slightly bigger built sister. Yet my sister seems taller than me as she holds herself high in the air while I hunch down with my shoulders slightly inward to hide myself. Her stylish clothing stands out next to my usual cute shirt and jeans and her long, silky black hair blows as if by an invisible wind, while my coarse one hangs limp upon my head. I guess I could be being too harsh upon myself, but after 15 years of being overshadowed, I do not know what else to do.

A phrase that I heard throughout my 6th grade career was "Hey, Estelle's sister!" At first, I responded to their comment by yelling back a greeting so maybe I would seem cool like my sister. Even before, I never had the courage to deviate from the standards that my sister had set. I hoped for the same teachers, I hoped for the same awards, I hoped for the same reputation. That year, I began my slightly hunched figure, feeling the weight of her name outweighing mine. Even at home I became to be overshadowed by my sister.