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Students, Struggles, and Sympathy

Although the stories of each character sport varying degrees of complexity in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, an American student will find greater sympathy in certain characters more than others. The mothers of the book generally contain stories of how they managed to end up in the United States in search of better lives as adults. This limits reliability to adults, which leaves the daughters of these mothers who have had childhoods in America as the more relatable characters by elimination. One of these daughters, Jing-Mei "June" Woo, has had certain struggles that a student may connect with. Through her high childhood expectations, a deep rivalry, and a struggle with finding her cultural identity, June becomes a character deserving of sympathy.

I. "My mother (June's mother) believed you could be anything you wanted to be in America. You could open a restaurant. You could work for the government and get good retirement..."Of course you can be a prodigy too," my mother told me when I was nine. "You can be best be anything..." In all my imaginings, I was filled with a sense that I would soon become perfect," (132).

"And after seeing my mother's (June's mother) disappointed face once again, something inside of me began to die. I hated the tests, the raised hopes and failed expectations," (134).

Analysis:   
From the very start, June's mother had high expectations for her. At one point in the lives of a student, the parents have high expectations for their children. Eventually, the student believes he can achieve those high expectations as June did. However, June feels crestfallen, going as far as to describe the disappointment as something dying inside of her. Students raised on high expectations are doomed to fail at some point. The grave disappointment that stems from failing rockslides into the dislike of academics.

II. "June—I can't," Waverly said with cool finality. "It's just not... sophisticated..." Then she laughed in a lighthearted way. "I mean really June." And then she started speaking in a deep television-announcer voice: "Three benefits, three needs, three reasons to buy..." To make matters worse, I heard my mother saying to Waverly: "True, cannot teach style. June not sophisticate like you. Must be born this way," (206).

Analysis:  
Much like many students, June has a deep rivalry with Waverly. Waverly insults June for her poor writing abilities, and June's mom is only adding salt to the wound by agreeing with Waverly. This agreement to the insult is particularly painful due to the fact that it references June's inability to be a prodigy in her childhood. Students may have deep rivalries with their peers that last until adulthood. However, parents that have knowledge of this rivalry tend to use this rivalry to promote their children to do better. Parents occasionally go overboard by bringing in a sensitive topic, even in adulthood.

III."And then it occurs to me (June). They (the remaining members of the Joy Luck Club) are frightened. In me, the see their own daughters, just as ignorant, just as unmindful of all the truths and hopes they have brought to America...They see daughters who will bear grandchildren without any connecting hope passed from generation to generation," (40-41).

"My sisters look at me proudly..." "Little Sister has grown up." I look at their faces... I see no trace of my mother in them. Yet they still look so familiar. And I now I also see what part of me is Chinese... It is my family" (287-288).

Analysis: In the beginning of the book, it was established that June would go to China to meet her half sisters in place of her late mother. This journey is a symbolic representation of a reconnection to culture that all of the American raised children in the book lack. June personally experiences the reconnection when she visits her half sisters. She establishes her own definition of her culture as family. While other students may read about their own culture, how they integrate their culture into their identity is up to them. For example, someone could say that since they are Greek, they are hard workers. The same could also be said for someone who identifies as Chinese.