

Fish Cheeks
by Amy Tan

I fell in love with the minister's son the winter I turned fourteen. He was not Chinese, but as white as Mary in the manger. For Christmas I prayed for this blond-haired boy, Robert, and a slim new American nose.

When I found out that my parents had invited the minister's family over for Christmas Eve dinner, I cried. What would Robert think of our shabby *Chinese* Christmas? What would he think of our noisy *Chinese* relatives who lacked proper American manners? What terrible disappointment would he feel upon seeing not a roasted turkey and sweet potatoes but *Chinese* food?

On Christmas Eve I saw that my mother had outdone herself in creating a strange menu. She was pulling black veins out of the backs of fleshy prawns. The kitchen was littered with appalling mounds of raw food: a slimy rock cod with bulging fish eyes that pleaded not to be thrown into a pan of hot oil. Tofu, which looked like stacked wedges of rubbery white sponges. A bowl soaking dried fungus back to life. A plate of squid, their backs crisscrossed with knife markings so they resembled bicycle tires.

And then they arrived—the minister's family and all my relatives in a clamor of doorbells and rumpled Christmas packages. Robert grunted hello, and I pretended he was not worthy of existence.

Dinner threw me deeper into despair. My relatives licked the ends of their chopsticks and reached across the table, dipping them into the dozen or so plates of food. Robert and his family waited patiently for platters to be passed to them.

My relatives murmured with pleasure when my mother brought out the whole steamed fish. Robert grimaced. Then my father poked his chopsticks just below the fish eye and plucked out the soft meat. "Amy, your favorite," he said, offering me the tender fish cheek. I wanted to disappear.

At the end of the meal my father leaned back and belched loudly, thanking my mother for her fine cooking. "It's a polite Chinese custom to show you are satisfied," explained my father to our astonished guests. Robert was looking down at his plate with a reddened face. The minister managed to muster up a quiet burp. I was stunned into silence for the rest of the night.

After everyone had gone, my mother said to me, "You want to be the same as American girls on the outside." She handed me an early gift. It was a miniskirt in beige tweed. "But inside you must always be Chinese. You must be proud you are different. Your only shame is to have shame."

And even though I didn't agree with her then, I knew that she understood how much I had suffered during the evening's dinner. It wasn't until many years later—long after I had gotten over my crush on Robert—that I was able to fully appreciate her lesson and the true purpose behind our particular menu. For Christmas Eve that year, she had chosen all my favorite foods.

Character Traits / Summary

Name _____

_____ is the main character. He/She is

_____. A character trait that describes him/her is _____.

Evidence to support this can be found on page _____ where it says, "_____."

On page _____, it says, "_____." I think this shows _____ is also _____.

One of the minor characters is _____. He/She is _____

_____. I think a character trait that applies to him/her is _____.

Evidence to support this can be found on page _____, where it says, "_____."

The interaction between these two characters helps make the story _____.
(*interesting, believable, entertaining, realistic, enjoyable, move along*)

“Fish Cheeks” One-Pager

Your One-Pager must include:

- A picture of an event from the story
- A quotation from the story to go along with the event
- In at least five sentences, tell what the event might have been like from the point of view of one of the other characters, (use first person point of view).
- A self-to-text connection
- The theme
- Your review of the story: Did you like it? Why or why not? Who would you recommend it to?

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Writing Assignment:

Response to Literature – Grade 7

Due Date: _____

Feb. 12th

Directions:

- Use lined paper.
- Please provide an original title
- Write clearly. If you need to change anything you write, erase or put a line through it.

Writing Prompt:

In “Fish Cheeks”, an autobiographical narrative by Amy Tan, fourteen-year-old Amy is thrown into a humiliating dinner with her Chinese family and the American boy on whom she has a crush. Years later, Amy reflects back on this embarrassing meal and realizes something about her parents and her heritage. How do Amy’s feelings change during the course of the story? What important lesson does she learn from this incident?

Prewriting:

You will use your copy of “Fish Cheeks” and your chart on Amy’s changes from beginning, middle, and end to help you plan your essay.

Writing Checklist:

Make sure you –

- Read the writing prompt carefully.
- State the thesis in your first paragraph
- Organize your ideas with a clear beginning, middle, and end.
- Use textual evidence from the story to fully support your claims and explanations.
- Use a consistent tone/point of view/tense throughout the essay.
- Vary sentence beginnings and paragraph beginnings
- Vary your sentence structure (simple, compound, complex) to make your writing easier to read.
- Check for mistakes in grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and sentence writing.

Fish Cheeks Amy Tan**COMPREHENSION** (40 points; 4 points each)

On the line provided, write the letter of the *best* answer to each of the following items.

- _____ 1. Why does Amy ignore Robert when he first comes to her house?
- A She is too shy to look at him.
 - B She really doesn't like him.
 - C She is ashamed of her family's poor home.
 - D She has been taught to act that way.
- _____ 2. For Christmas, Amy prays for —
- F Robert and a tweed miniskirt
 - G Robert and a slim, American nose
 - H Robert and an American-style turkey
 - J Robert and a family like Robert's
- _____ 3. The *best* example of the difference between Chinese and American culture is shown when —
- A Amy's family wrapped their gifts in rumpled paper
 - B Amy wears a miniskirt
 - C the two families gather
 - D Amy's father belches to show his appreciation of the food
- _____ 4. Most descriptions of food in "Fish Cheeks" produce mental images that are —
- F delightful
 - G ordinary
 - H unusual
 - J confusing
- _____ 5. The phrase that does not describe the Chinese dinner in the essay is —
- A "white sponges" of tofu
 - B "roasted turkey"
 - C "slimy rock cod"
 - D "soaking dried fungus"
- _____ 6. The author's statement that her family arrives "in a clamor of doorbells and rumpled Christmas packages" appeals to the senses of —
- F sight and taste
 - G taste and smell
 - H sight and hearing
 - J touch and smell

- _____ 7. Which of the following *best* describes a mental image of how Amy probably looked at the end of the dinner?
- A Pale, with downcast eyes
 - B Flushed, with a big smile
 - C Exhausted, with black circles under her eyes
 - D Energetic, with a lively expression on her face
- _____ 8. Though the dinner seems painful to Amy at the time, how does she view it later?
- F She views it as even more unpleasant.
 - G She has forgotten the incident.
 - H She has blown it all out of proportion.
 - J She is impressed that her mother prepared her favorite foods.
- _____ 9. The title "Fish Cheeks" indicates all of the following *except* —
- A the difference between Chinese and American customs
 - B Amy's embarrassment over her family's customs
 - C Amy's name for herself after the Christmas feast
 - D Amy's favorite part of the fish
- _____ 10. Which of the following new titles *best* fits "Fish Cheeks"?
- F Culture Clash
 - G My Favorite Memory
 - H A Good Time
 - J A Very Special Christmas

LITERARY FOCUS (20 points; 5 points each)

- **Literary Response and Analysis Standard 3.1** Articulate the expressed purposes and characteristics of different forms of prose (for example, short story, novel, novella, essay).

On the line provided, write the letter of the *best* answer to each of the following items.

- _____ 11. The author creates humor by —
- A making fun of Robert
 - B making fun of herself and her parents
 - C comparing and contrasting Chinese and American customs
 - D explaining the true meaning of family holidays
- _____ 12. This selection is —
- F fiction
 - G nonfiction
 - H not true to life
 - J a novella

_____ 13. All of the following characteristics fit "Fish Cheeks" *except* —

- A formal tone
- B brief
- C humorous
- D concerned with one subject

_____ 14. "Fish Cheeks" is *best* classified as —

- F poetry
- G prose
- H a short story
- J an essay

VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT (20 points; 4 points each)

On the line provided, write the Vocabulary word that is *closest* in meaning to the word or phrase in italics.

appalling **clamor** **muster**
wedges **rumpled**

_____ 15. A *loud noise* fills the room as everyone greets one another.

_____ 16. She hopes that her outfit does not look *wrinkled*.

_____ 17. She tries to *call forth* the courage to face him at dinner.

_____ 18. She knows that it will taste good, but the food looks *horrifying*.

_____ 19. The *chunks* that are thick at one end and narrow at the other are cheese.

WRITTEN RESPONSE TO THE STANDARD (20 points)

► **Literary Response and Analysis Standard 3.1** Articulate the expressed purposes and characteristics of different forms of prose (for example, short story, novel, novella, essay).

20. "Fish Cheeks" is a humorous essay. First, describe the humorous elements you find in the essay. Then, tell how the author achieves her more serious purpose. On a separate sheet of paper, write a paragraph that explains your answer. Support your ideas with details from the story.

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Response To Literature Essay

Introduction Paragraph

~Hook

~Introduce TAG (title, author, genre)

~Brief summary of what story is about (1-2 sentence)

~Thesis- Character's transformation from the beginning –middle-end of the story and how through this change, the theme was identified.

Body Paragraph 1

~Topic sentence that describes what the character is like at the beginning of the story. This can be a summary sentence and then introduce the character trait.

In the beginning of the story,

~Comment on the character's behavior/attitude. This may be supported with the use of textual evidence.

For example

~How this contributes to the story or the character's behavior/attitude.

As a result,

Body Paragraph 2

~Topic sentence that describes what the character is like in the middle of the story. This can be a summary sentence and then introduce the character trait.

In the middle of the story,

As the story progresses,

~Comment on the character's behavior/attitude. This may be supported with the use of textual evidence.

For example,

Therefore it is evident that

~How this contributes to the story or the character's behavior/attitude and the progression of the story.

Due to the character's actions,

Body Paragraph 3

~Topic sentence that describes what the character is like at the end of the story. This can be a summary sentence and then introduce the character trait.

As the story ends,

At the end of the story

~Comment on the character's behavior/attitude. This may be supported with the use of textual evidence.

For example

~How this contributes to the story or the character's behavior/attitude.

~Connect the character's change to the theme.

Conclusion Paragraph

~Restate main idea of story

In conclusion, "title" of story is about

When the story begins _____ and eventually _____.

Through the character's experiences, he/she learns that (theme).

Tie the last few sentences to the theme or an overall message to the reader or society as a whole.

