
American Family at a Christmas Eve Dinner in Amy Tan's Fish Cheeks

Amy's Fish Cheek

A young teenage girl goes through a rough Christmas Eve dinner with her Chinese family and an American family as their guests in "Fish Cheeks" by Amy Tan. The main character, Amy, has fallen in love with the son in the American family. The point of view and the imagery in the short story work together to show the reader the embarrassment, want of change, and lesson that Amy went through that night.

Within the story of "Fish Cheeks" by Amy Tan, Amy is the main character and goes through a bit of a rough Christmas Eve dinner. She "falls in love with the minister's son" and it turns out that her mother invites him and his family over for Christmas Eve dinner at their house (1). Amy wants to impress this young man and the reader is shown this when the point of view and imagery in the story work together. The point of view gives the reader insights to what Amy is thinking. Throughout a majority of the story, Amy is embarrassed once she finds out of her mother's plan and questions the way her family celebrates Christmas. She wonders what Robert "would think of her noisy Chinese relatives who lack proper American manners" (1).

The point of view in the story helps to show Amy's embarrassment, but through the imagery that is portrayed. She sees the food her mother prepares for the Christmas meal and the thoughts that go through her head include: "the kitchen is littered with appalling mounds of raw food: A slimy rock cod with bulging eyes that plead not to be thrown into a pan of hot oil" (1). The way Amy describes all of the uncooked meat lying there on the counter tops of her mother's kitchen tells the reader of her disgust and embarrassment.

The imagery in the story shows that Amy wants to impress Robert, so she tries to change herself. She sees the American culture as a way to fit in so Robert will notice her and maybe even start to like her. So she changes her clothes, her mother even "hands her a miniskirt in beige tweed" (1). She is ashamed of her family. The imagery that shows this is in the fifth paragraph of the story, "My relatives licked the ends of their chopsticks and reached across the table, dipping them into a dozen or so plates of food. Robert and his family waited patiently for the platters to be passed to them" (1).

Though the imagery consists of strong evidence that Amy wanted to change herself for Robert, her point of view also helps the reader understand Amy a bit more. Her mother confronts Amy about the change she wants to make in her life. She tells her, "You want to be the same as American girls on the outside...But inside you must always be Chinese. You must be proud you are different. Your only shame is to have shame" (1). Amy realizes that her mother knows how much embarrassment she went through during that dinner and that her mother was just trying to help. Her mother is telling Amy not to change when all she wants to do is exactly that.

Through the imagery in the story, the reader knows Amy's mother realizes that Amy has a crush on Robert, so she tries to help by making all of Amy's favorite foods and showing Robert who Amy really is. Amy does not see it that way though, she is just embarrassed. It is not till

years later that Amy realizes “for Christmas Eve that year, her mother had chosen all of [her] favorite foods” (1). That night at dinner, Amy did not realize that they were her favorite foods. Even when her father “poked his chopsticks just below the fish eye and plucked out the soft meat and said, ‘Amy, your favorite’” (1). This imagery of her father is a bit gruesome in the American culture, but is an honor in the Chinese culture.

The point of view that helps the reader to realize this honor is when Amy realizes at the end of the story that her mother and father had committed a great deed for Amy. They showed Robert who Amy really was. Amy of course “got over [her] crush with Robert” and was “able to fully appreciate her [mother’s] lesson and the true purpose behind their particular menu” (1) that night.

In the short story called Fish Cheeks by Amy Tan, Amy describes her feeling and encounter with an American family at a Christmas Eve dinner. The point of view and the imagery in the short story work together to show the reader the embarrassment, want of change, and lesson that Amy went through that night. Amy was an average teenager who wanted to change herself for a guy and was embarrassed when her family did not change with her, but was in the end grateful for her mother’s lesson that night.