

English 9
Summer Assignment

Throughout the English 9 course, we will learn to “read like a writer” and develop our own voices in our writing. During the year, we will read a variety of mentor texts that will help us practice and develop analysis skills, as well as understand and emulate examples of effective writing. As we begin the year by reading narrative essays and working to develop our own narrative writing style, we will read a selection of essays that will help us to identify specific writing skills and techniques.

- “Fish Cheeks” by Amy Tan
- “Hi. I’m Nic” by Nic Stone
- “Only Daughter” by Sandra Cisneros

As you read each of the works, pay attention to the following questions. There is no formal writing assignment due upon arrival in August, but we will use your notes and answers to these questions as the basis for a writing assignment shortly after you return to school:

1. Notice how the writer uses descriptive language in each of the essays. In what ways does the author utilize sensory imagery (details that relate to the five senses—taste, touch, smell, sight, sound)?
2. Consider the author’s purpose. What is the author trying to communicate to the reader through this piece of writing? What is the moral of the author’s story and/or what life lessons can be learned by reading?

Name: _____ Class: _____

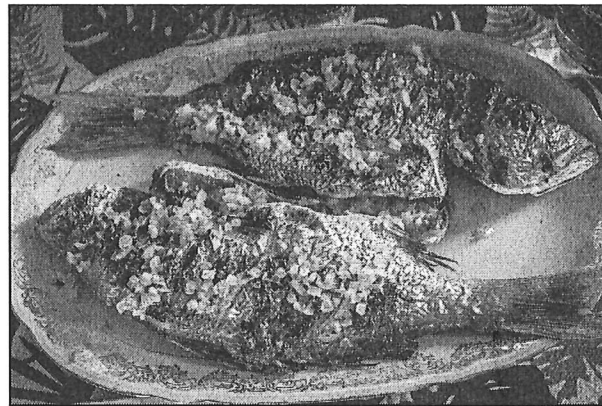
Fish Cheeks

By Amy Tan
1987

*Amy Tan is an American writer whose work often provides insight into the experiences of Chinese Americans and family relationships. While her parents emigrated from China, Tan herself was born in Oakland, California. **Skill Focus:** In this lesson, you'll practice analyzing how an author develops a narrator's point of view. This means determining what the narrator thinks or believes and examining how the author uses actions, dialogue, and thoughts to develop this point of view. As you read, take notes on the narrator's point of view of her culture.*

[1] 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.¹ 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?



"Untitled" by Jametlene Reskp is licensed under CC0.

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.² The kitchen was littered with appalling³ mounds of raw food: A slimy rock cod with bulging 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 rumples Christmas packages. Robert grunted hello, and I pretended he was not worthy of existence.

[5] 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.

1. reference to Jesus's mother, often depicted as white in Europe and North America
 2. a common name for shrimp, used particularly in the United Kingdom and Ireland
 3. **Appalling** (*adjective*) causing shock, disgust, or alarm

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.

"Fish Cheeks" by Amy Tan from Seventeen Magazine. Copyright © 1987 by Amy Tan and the Sandra Dijkstra Literary Agency. Reprinted with permission, all rights reserved.

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Name: _____

Class: _____

Hi. I'm Nic

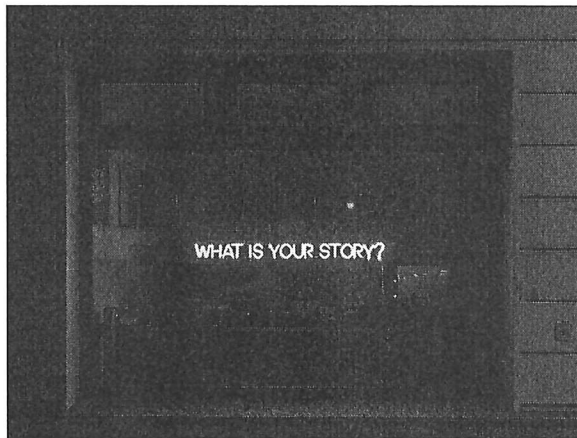
By Nic Stone
2017

Nic Stone is an American young adult fiction writer and author of Dear Martin, a New York Times Bestseller. Prior to her writing career, Stone spent several years living in Israel. Israel and Palestine have been at the center of an international issue known as the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. Both Israelis and Palestinians lay claim to the same area, and the conflict has resulted in violence between them that has spanned many years. As you read, take notes on how the author's perspective on stories changes over the course of the text.

[1] It didn't occur to me that I could be a writer until the summer I turned twenty-three. By then, I was a two-time college dropout who'd hopped a plane to Israel with all of forty dollars in my pocket, hoping to find a remedy for an eleven-year identity crisis among the ruins of the Bible's holiest city.¹ I'd tried on a variety of metaphorical shoes at that point — undergraduate psychology major, retail store manager, personal assistant, youth group leader, fitness trainer, model, teen mentor, aspiring singer, seminary² student — and had yet to find a pair that really fit.

I had the same nose-perpetually-buried-in-a-book childhood as most aspiring writers, but once I hit adolescence, reading lost its savor for me. In fifth grade, I tested into the gifted program and became the only Black girl in my school's microcosm³ of academic high achievers. This wasn't really a big deal until a couple of years later when peer acceptance became the Holy Grail and I discovered that my African-American peers were suspicious of me because I spent the majority of my time in school with white kids.

Around this same time, the books assigned to us in Gifted Language Arts became more literary in nature. Gone were the days of *Mrs. Piggle Wiggle*, *Encyclopedia Brown*,⁴ and anything and everything written by Roald Dahl and Judy Blume. *The Giver* and *Animal Farm*, *The Odyssey*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Lord of the Flies*, and *Fahrenheit 451*⁵ were the books we were to read and dissect⁶ for theme and symbolism.



"»What is your story?«" by Etienne Girardet is licensed under CC0.

1. likely Jerusalem, an ancient city important to Christianity, Islam, and Judaism
2. education needed in order to become a priest, minister, or rabbi
3. Microcosm (noun) : a small community
4. examples of chapter book series for children
5. common texts that are taught in English Language Arts classes in the United States
6. Dissect (verb) : to break down something in order to examine and interpret what it means

Frankly, back then I didn't really connect with any of the books we were required to read, and as a result, they added to my sense of isolation. While I could appreciate the beauty of the English language and the way the authors laced words together, I struggled to engage in the actual stories because I could never seem to identify with the characters. As a matter of fact, studying books like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Of Mice and Men* — books whose only characters of color were either escaped slaves or intellectual incompetents⁷ — while sitting in a classroom where I was the sole African American made for a very uncomfortable experience. I didn't see myself in the books we were assigned, so no one else saw me either. Reading, which at one point had been this epic foray⁸ into magic and mystery and faraway places, became nothing more than another piece of drudgery to check off my homework list.

- [5] It wasn't until the summer I turned twenty-three and hopped on that plane to Israel that I began to get a real grasp on the role of Story in the human experience. I spent that summer stepping into other people's shoes. There were the shoes of a Palestinian Christian girl living in the West Bank who wasn't allowed into Israel proper without a permit, but faced insane amounts of harassment⁹ in her neighborhood because of her family's chosen faith. There were the shoes of the Israeli soldier who'd been trained to view all Arabs as potential threats, but was so sickened by it he couldn't wait to get out of the army¹⁰ so he could leave the country. There were the small shoes of the children in the Palestinian refugee camps training to be martyrs for Allah¹¹ because they felt it was their call in life. There were the shoes of the Orthodox Jewish¹² man whose entire family had been murdered in his home by Palestinian militants¹³ while they slept.

As I listened to these stories and made an attempt at empathy — putting myself in their proverbial¹⁴ shoe — my perspectives shifted. Life became less about right and wrong, good and bad, black and white, and more about complexity and nuance,¹⁵ the power of the human being to bring either calm or chaos into the lives of others and the world around them. Storytelling revealed itself as a means of getting people to listen without interrupting. Done well, it engages listeners/readers to the point where they're completely oblivious¹⁶ to the shifts in worldview taking place as a result of stepping into a different perspective.

The stories I heard over that summer, like my own, were the ones I hadn't encountered in my Language Arts classes. And they shook me. They changed the way I approach people with beliefs that differ from my own. They changed the way I voice my opinions. In a way, they cleaned the lens through which I view the world.

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7. a person who is ignorant through lack of education or disability
 8. Foray (noun) : an initial and often cautious attempt to do something in a new or different field or area of activity
 9. Harassment (noun) : to create an unpleasant or hostile situation, especially through uninvited and unwelcome behavior
 10. Israel requires all citizens over the age of eighteen to serve in the military, with some exceptions. As of 2015, women must serve two years, men two years and eight months.
 11. A person who is killed because of their religious beliefs. In Islam, who is considered a martyr can extend beyond this definition to include others depending on context.
 12. Orthodox Judaism is a broad term for more traditional branches of modern Judaism. Generally, Orthodox Jews strictly observe the teachings of the Torah and Talmud and apply it to their daily lives.
 13. a person engaged in warfare or combat
 14. of or relating to a common saying
 15. Nuance (noun) : small distinctions and differences between things
 16. Oblivious (adjective) : lacking awareness or knowledge of something happening

I discovered that once I put on all those different pairs of shoes, I wanted to share those shoes and their impact with others. I wanted to tell the stories that weren't being told, the ones featuring diverse characters in non-stereotypical roles, the ones that blurred the line between "right" and "wrong", the ones that reveal the humanity in those who are underrepresented or misunderstood. Since that summer I turned 23, I've reread most of the books that I was unable to connect with as a teen, and I'm happy to report that I quite enjoy them now that I've found the shoes for myself. The answer to my identity crisis was simple: I am a storyteller.

Now get those shoes off so I can give you a different pair to try on.

"Hi, I'm Nic" by Nic Stone, #1 New York Times Bestselling Author of Dear Martin. Text copyright © 2017 by Nic Stone. Reprinted with permission of the author.

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Only Daughter

Sandra Cisneros

from *Latina: Women's Voices From the Borderlands*. Edited by Lillian Castillo-Speed. New York: Touchstone/Simon & Schuster, 1995.

Once, several years ago, when I was just starting out my writing career, I was asked to write my own contributor's note for an anthology¹ I was part of. I wrote: "I am the only daughter in a family of six sons. *That* explains everything."

Well, I've thought about that ever since, and yes, it explains a lot to me, but for the reader's sake I should have written: "I am the only daughter in a *Mexican* family of six sons." Or even: "I am the only daughter of a Mexican father and a Mexican-American mother." Or: "I am the only daughter of a working-class family of nine." All of these had everything to do with who I am today.

I was/am the only daughter and *only* a daughter. Being an only daughter in a family of six sons forced me by circumstance to spend a lot of time by myself because my brothers felt it beneath them to play with a *girl* in public. But that aloneness, that loneliness, was good for a would-be writer—it allowed me time to think and think, to imagine, to read and prepare myself.

Being only a daughter for my father meant my destiny would lead me to become someone's wife. That's what he believed. But when I was in the fifth grade and shared my plans for college with him, I was sure he understood. I remember my father saying, "*Que bueno, mi'ha*, that's good." That meant a lot to me, especially since my brothers thought the idea hilarious. What I didn't realize was that my father thought college was good for girls—good for finding a husband. After four years in college and two more in graduate school, and still no husband, my father shakes his head even now and says I wasted all that education.

In retrospect², I'm lucky my father believed daughters were meant for husbands.

¹ **anthology**: collection of stories and other literature in a book.

² **retrospect**: thinking about things in the past

It meant it didn't matter if I majored in something silly like English. After all, I'd find a nice professional eventually, right? This allowed me the liberty to putter about embroidering³ my little poems and stories without my father interrupting with so much as a "What's that you're writing?"

But the truth is, I wanted him to interrupt. I wanted my father to understand what it was I was scribbling, to introduce me as "My only daughter, the writer." Not as "This is only my daughter. She teaches." *Es maestra*—teacher. Not even *profesora*.

In a sense, everything I have ever written has been for him, to win his approval even though I know my father can't read English words, even though my father's only reading includes the brown-ink *Esto* sports magazines from Mexico City and the bloody *¡Alarma!* magazines that feature yet another sighting of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* on a tortilla or a wife's revenge on her philandering husband by bashing his skull in with a *molcajete* (a kitchen mortar⁴ made of volcanic rock). Or the *fotonovelas*, the little picture paperbacks with tragedy and trauma erupting from the characters' mouths in bubbles.

My father represents, then, the public majority. A public who is disinterested in reading, and yet one whom I am writing about and for, and privately trying to woo⁵.

When we were growing up in Chicago, we moved a lot because of my father. He suffered bouts of nostalgia⁶. Then we'd have to let go of our flat⁷, store the furniture with mother's relatives, load the station wagon with baggage and bologna sandwiches and head south. To Mexico City.

³ **embroidering**: adding details to

⁴ **mortar**: a very hard bowl in which things are ground into a fine powder

⁵ **woo**: attract, interest

⁶ **bouts of nostalgia**: short periods of time with homesickness

⁷ **flat**: apartment

We came back, of course. To yet another Chicago flat, another Chicago neighborhood, another Catholic school. Each time, my father would seek out the parish priest in order to get a tuition break⁸, and complain or boast: "I have seven sons."

He meant *siete hijos*, seven children, but he translated it as "sons." "I have seven sons." To anyone who would listen. The Sears Roebuck employee who sold us the washing machine. The short-order cook where my father ate his ham-and-eggs breakfasts. "I have seven sons." As if he deserved a medal from the state.

My papa. He didn't mean anything by that mistranslation, I'm sure. But somehow I could feel myself being erased. I'd tug my father's sleeve and whisper: "Not seven sons. Six! and *one daughter*."

When my oldest brother graduated from medical school, he fulfilled my father's dream that we study hard and use this—our heads, instead of this—our hands. Even now my father's hands are thick and yellow, stubbed by a history of hammer and nails and twine and coils⁹ and springs. "Use this," my father said, tapping his head, "and not this," showing us those hands. He always looked tired when he said it.

Wasn't college an investment? And hadn't I spent all those years in college? And if I didn't marry, what was it all for? Why would anyone go to college and then choose to be poor? Especially someone who had always been poor.

Last year, after ten years of writing professionally, the financial rewards¹⁰ started to trickle in. My second National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship. A guest professorship at the University of California, Berkeley. My book, which sold to a major New York publishing house.

At Christmas, I flew home to Chicago. The house was throbbing¹¹, same as always: hot tamales and sweet tamales hissing in my mother's pressure cooker, and everybody—my mother, six brothers, wives, babies, aunts,

⁸ **tuition break:** a decrease in the cost of going to a private school

⁹ **twines and coils:** strings and loops

¹⁰ **financial rewards:** money

¹¹ **throbbing:** beating

cousins—talking too loud and at the same time. Like in a Fellini¹² film, because that's just how we are.

I went upstairs to my father's room. One of my stories had just been translated into Spanish and published in an anthology of Chicano¹³ writing and I wanted to show it to him. Ever since he recovered from a stroke two years ago, my father likes to spend his leisure hours horizontally¹⁴. And that's how I found him, watching a Pedro Infante movie on Galavisión and eating rice pudding.

There was a glass filled with milk on the bedside table. There were several vials of pills and balled Kleenex. And on the floor, one black sock and a plastic urinal that I didn't want to look at but looked at anyway. Pedro Infante was about to burst into song, and my father was laughing.

I'm not sure if it was because my story was translated into Spanish, or because it was published in Mexico, or perhaps because the story dealt with Tepeyac, the *colonia* my father was raised in and the house he grew up in, but at any rate, my father punched the mute button on his remote control and read my story.

I sat on the bed next to my father and waited. He read it very slowly. As if he were reading each line over and over. He laughed at all the right places and read lines he liked out loud. He pointed and asked questions: "Is this So-and-so?" "Yes," I said. He kept reading.

When he was finally finished, after what seemed like hours, my father looked up and asked: "Where can we get more copies of this for the relatives?"

Of all the wonderful things that happened to me last year, that was the most wonderful.

¹² **Fellini:** an Italian movie director

¹³ **Chicano:** Mexican-American

¹⁴ **horizontally:** laying down