

THE WOMAN WARRIOR

LIVING LITERATURE SERIES

MAXINE HONG KINGSTON

A PERMA-BOUND PRODUCTION

TEACHER'S GUIDE

GUIDE WRITTEN BY JOHN CHUA

SYNOPSIS

Divided into five interlinking yet self-contained chapters, *The Woman Warrior* tells the struggles of five women in China and in the United States. All the stories revolve around the question of what is the position of the voiceless woman in society.

The first chapter, "No Name Woman," begins with Maxine's mother, Brave Orchid, telling her daughter about the secret of an aunt, whose name is not to be mentioned in the household. The aunt became pregnant after her husband had left for America. When her pregnancy is discovered, the villagers destroyed the family home as punishment. The author is unsure whether the baby was conceived because of adultery or rape since the aunt refused to name the father. After giving birth in a pigsty, she drowned herself and the baby in the family well.

In "White Tigers," Maxine tells the legend of Fa Mu Lan, a Joan of Arc-like Chinese heroine who fought for her people. As a child, Maxine Hong felt girls were belittled. "White Tigers" is thus her childhood fantasy of overcoming those feelings. She imagines herself being taught and brought up by martial arts teachers from the age of seven. She becomes Fa Mu Lan, a great warrior who eventually returned to her village triumphantly to save her people.

In the third chapter, "Shaman," Maxine Hong Kingston reveals her mother's amazing medical education and career in China. After Brave Orchid's husband left to find work in America, she went to medical school, an unusual choice for a woman in her thirties in patriarchal China. After graduation, she worked as a very successful doctor in her village but eventually gave up her career to join her husband in America. Unable to practice medicine here, she and her husband instead opened a laundry business.

The fourth chapter, "At the Western Palace," tells about Brave Orchid's sister Moon Orchid, who arrived in America thirty years after her husband. During those thirty years, Moon Orchid's husband had become a successful surgeon and even married a new wife. Although he abandoned his first wife in Hong Kong, he nonetheless continued to supply her with money and luxuries. Brave Orchid is determined that Moon Orchid confront her husband. Moon Orchid, a pampered but unloved wife, is afraid to do this. But when she eventually confronted him, he turned her away and scolded her for interrupting his life and career. Moon Orchid then became insane and ended up in a mental asylum.

In the last chapter, "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe," the author describes a seminal childhood episode when she bullied an unpopular Chinese girl at school who is so shy that she appeared mute. (In Chinese culture, girls are not supposed to assert themselves and in American culture, the Chinese were a silent minority—these cultural influences

thus had a doubly strong effect on young Maxine.) She was brutal to the other girl, who would not speak but instead cried. The two of them ended up standing and crying together. Maxine recognizes that the silent girl is a mirror image of her and that she is what Maxine did not want to become. After this, Kingston fell mysteriously ill and spent eighteen months in bed; she believes that this was a punishment for her cruelty.

She ends the chapter by describing Ts'ai Yen, an ancient Chinese poetess who was captured by the Huns. Living among the Huns as a wife to her kidnapper, Ts'ai Yen could not fully assimilate into her new culture. Kingston strongly suggests that she too is an outsider here in America. Her autobiographical novel is therefore exactly like what Ts'ai Yen sings about—something which is incomprehensible to the "barbarian" Huns: "Her words seemed to be Chinese, but the barbarians understood their sadness and anger."

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Maxine Hong Kingston (*nee* Maxine Ting Ting Hong) was born in California in 1940, of parents from Guangzhou, China. Maxine spent her youth in Stockton, California and after excelling in high school there, eventually graduated from University of California, Berkeley. Both of her educated parents (her mother was a physician in China and her father a teacher), could not find work in their chosen professions because of language and cultural barriers as well as racism. Instead they ran a laundry business in Stockton.

After graduating from college in 1962, Maxine married Earl Kingston, an actor. She pursued a career as a high school teacher of English and mathematics in Haywood, California. In 1967, she and her husband, as well as their son Joseph, moved to Hawaii, where she taught high school and college-level English.

The Woman Warrior reveals the discrimination she felt as a woman within her culture and also as a minority within the larger American society. It was the first part of a two-part autobiographical novel (the second volume is *China Men*, published in 1980) and was an immediate and unqualified success when it appeared in 1976. *The Woman Warrior* deals largely with the female members of her family while *China Men*, reveals the ordeals of the male members in Hawaii, New York, Cuba, China, Vietnam, and California. In addition to several articles and *China Men*, she also wrote *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* (1989), a novel. In *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*, Kingston tells the story of Whitman Ah Sing, a Chinese-American in 1960's counter-culture Berkeley, whose adventures reveal an uneasiness about being a minority in America.

Kingston often uses articles, interviews, and speeches to defend her famous works; she feels some critics, even those

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who praise her, have misunderstood her. She now lives in California and continues her work as an author and frequent commentator and speaker at academic conferences and cultural events.

CRITIC'S CORNER

From the beginning, critics have praised *The Woman Warrior* as a literary accomplishment of the highest order. *The Woman Warrior* won the National Book Critics' Circle Award in 1976 for general non-fiction (*China Men* won the American Book Award in 1980).

Critics praise Kingston's language, her poetic form, description, and narrative. Linda Ching said, "for sheer literary talent, originality of style, and comprehensiveness of vision, Kingston is a major American writer and the most formidable Asian-American writer in this nation's history." Reviewing *The Woman Warrior* in *The New York Times*, William McPerson describes it as "a remarkable book... one of the best I've read in years... dizzying, elemental, a poem turned into a sword."

However, the earlier praises were not without critical commentary as well. One earlier debate (now deemed irrelevant) was the question of under which genre the work fits in. *The Woman Warrior* is not a work of fiction, nor strictly speaking, an autobiography. Simultaneously a historical, fictional, biographical, and imaginative work, Kingston's work was considered revolutionary precisely because it transcended genres.

Other critics fault her for tampering with Chinese mythologies, modifying them to suit an American audience. Kingston replies that she is writing foremost, an American story, not a Chinese one. In an interview with Paulina Rabinowitz, Kingston states: "I directly continue William Carlos Williams' *In the American Grain*. When I was writing "No Name Woman," I was thinking about Nathaniel Hawthorne and *The Scarlet Letter* as a discussion of the Puritan part of America, and of China, and a woman's place. I am trying to write an American language that has Chinese accents. I was claiming the English language and the literature to tell our story as Americans."

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the arrival of Chinese immigrants in America in the nineteenth century
2. To discuss voice as a metaphor and theme
3. To define discrimination and victimization
4. To contrast twentieth century America and China
5. To list the difficulties of growing up as a minority
6. To discuss the author coming to terms with herself
7. To discuss societal expectations of gender roles
8. To explore the problems of geographical, economical, linguistic, and psychological isolation from mainstream America.
9. (For advanced students) To discuss *The Woman Warrior* as an example of a post-modern work which defines categorization and genre identity

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To describe how Brave Orchid describes No Name Woman to Maxine

2. To describe how Maxine imagines the story of the No Name Woman
3. To note how young Maxine identifies with Fa Mu Lan
4. To describe Brave Orchid's trials and tribulations in her quest to become a doctor
5. To understand why Brave Orchid appears to treat her daughter harshly
6. To understand why the Hong family maintains their distance from mainstream white America and this effect on their psyche
7. To note the importance of young Maxine's confrontation with the "mute" girl in the last chapter
8. To describe Moon Orchid's descent into madness
9. To note how the adult Maxine identifies with Ts'ai Yen

MEANING STUDY

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have a particular meaning in this work. Explain the meaning of each. (Chapter and page numbers pinpoint the context in which the item appears.)

1. "You must not tell anyone," my mother said, "what I am about to tell you. In China your father had a sister who killed herself. She jumped into the family well. We say that your father has all brothers because it is as if she had never been born." (Chapter 1, page 1)
(*The beginning of "No Name Woman" sets a tone for the chapter. The aunt is doubly punished not only during her lifetime for her "transgression" but also after her death. By never mentioning her name again, her family is in effect continuing the punishment, particularly since in Chinese culture, ancestors are expected to be revered.*)
2. My aunt still haunts me—her ghost drawn to me because now, after fifty years of neglect, I alone devote pages of paper to her. (Chapter 1, page 16)
(*Kingston thus speaks the unspeakable to exorcise the ghost of her aunt. A nameless woman is someone without a story nor a voice. Kingston, by hypothesizing how her aunt became pregnant and also by the act of putting her story in writing, returns a voice to her.*)
3. When we Chinese girls listened to adults talk-story, we learned that we failed if we grew up to be but wives or slaves. (Chapter 2, page 19)
(*Thus began Kingston's recollection of her childhood fantasy of becoming a swordswoman. In Chinese culture, girls are not expected to amount to a great role in society; however adults tell stories of extraordinary and legendary women of courage and heroism. To young Maxine, women either become slaves/wives or through some extraordinary or rare feat, become heroines. Maxine therefore had to aspire to the impossible, become a heroine.*)
4. "There's no profit in raising girls. Better to raise geese than to raise girls." (Chapter 2, p. 46)
(*Kingston translates a saying in Chinese which reveals gender discrimination in that culture. Because women are considered to have left their family when they marry, it is seen as more profitable to raise animals than girls.*)

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5. (E)veryone bowed three times towards the picture of Doctor Sun Yat-sen, who was a western surgeon before he became a revolutionary. (Chapter 3, p. 63).
(At the medical school Brave Orchid attended, Sun Yat-sen is revered not only for helping overthrow the monarchy and establishing a republic in 1911, but also for introducing western scientific and social reform to China. This medical school intermingles Chinese social and medical traditions with western science.)
6. My mother ..arrived in New York Harbor in January, 1940...On Ellis Island the officials asked her, "What year did your husband cut off his pigtail?" (Chapter 3, p. 96)
(Ellis Island, the place where many immigrants first set shore in America, was a terrifying place for them. It was a place where many were rejected by the immigration authorities and returned to their country of origin. Here, Brave Orchid suspects that the officials were testing her political position. The Manchu dynasty [1644-1911] forced all Chinese men to wear pigtails. Cutting it off became a political statement.)
7. "Good night, Little Dog." "Good night, Mother."
(Chapter 3, p. 109).
(In Chinese culture, it is common to use depreciating names for one's child in the superstitious belief that doing so would fool the gods into thinking that one does not value the child. The gods would thus not take something not valued away. These depreciating terms therefore take on an endearing quality, as it shows that the parent cares. This is an important moment in Kingston's narrative because for the first time in a long while, she felt a bond with her mother.)
8. Brave Orchid's daughters decided fiercely that they would never let men be unfaithful to them. All her children made up their minds to major in science or mathematics. (Chapter 4, p. 160)
(After the episode in which Moon Orchid was betrayed and shunned by her husband, Brave Orchid becomes insecure. The daughters decide they have to major in something useful so as to have well-paying careers and never have to be dependent on their husbands.)
9. Long ago in China...tied string into buttons and frogs... There was one knot so complicated that it blinded the knot maker. Finally an emperor outlawed this cruel knot, and the nobles could not order it any more. If I had lived in China, I would have been an outlaw knot-maker. (Chapter 5, p. 163)
(The knot this outlaw made is like the fabrication of details described in the fourth chapter, relating especially to her aunt's encounter with her husband in Los Angeles. She confesses that her version of events is often only her interpretation of what she heard. She thus stresses her subjectivity and that the real version of events may never be known. Her narrative is thus so complicated that it appears like a knot. This realization of the subjectivity of the narrator gives the work a post-modern character.)
10. Her words seemed Chinese, but the barbarians understood their sadness and anger. (Chapter 5, p. 209)
(Kingston identifies with Ts'ai Yen's life among "barbarians." Here Kingston implies that Americans may never

completely understand her position but can certainly feel her emotions. In addition, she transforms the original story to focus on the reconciliation and recognition of the barbarians' soul and culture rather than to dwell on Ts'ai Yen's sadness about her exile. To focus on the separation would have elevated the Chinese identity over the American. By focusing instead on the recognition and reconciliation, Kingston is suggesting an ability to live harmoniously in the both cultures, American and Chinese.)

COMPREHENSION STUDY

Answer these questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages from the work.

Questions 1-5 Literal Level

1. In what way does Brave Orchid tell Maxine about the "No Name Woman" aunt?
(Brave Orchid approaches the story of "No Name Woman" in a secretive and fearful tone: secretly because it is was an event of great pain for the family and also because Chinese families almost never discuss sex openly, and fearfully because the story was meant as a warning to Maxine: "Now that you have started to menstruate, what happened to her could happen to you. Don't humiliate us" [p. 5]. Brave Orchid also appears to not want Maxine to ever mention her aunt again: "Don't tell anyone you had an aunt. Your father does not want to hear her name. She has never been born" [p. 15]. Not only does the family continue to feel the shame and pain of what happened to the aunt some fifty years after her death, but clearly Brave Orchid wants to use the story to scare and warn Maxine. Maxine is obviously unsettled by this horrible "talk-story.")
2. Why does Maxine tell the story of Fa Mu Lan?
(Fan Mu Lan, the legendary Chinese heroine who saves her people, was a part of Maxine's childhood consciousness. This legend told by her mother, provided a hope and fantasy for young Maxine that she would not have to grow up to be a wife or slave but rather as a woman warrior. [Note: Brave Orchid told her daughter also of slavery in China. It was thus something fearful for young Maxine.] It was a fantasy which helped her bear the drudgery of her real life which was one filled with episodes of disappointments and victimization.)
3. How did Brave Orchid decide to go to medical college?
*(After her husband left for America, Brave Orchid's two children died. Although he continued to send her money, she saved it and finally decided to use the money to educate herself. In her mid-thirties, she decided to go to a medical school.
She completed training and received a diploma, which should not be compared with a western medical degree. She worked as a doctor in her home village, and became a very successful healer. However, she eventually gave up her career to join her husband in the United States. Since she could not practice medicine in America, she and her husband opened a laundry business in California.)*

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4. How does Moon Orchid succumb to insanity?

(Moon Orchid, prodded on by her sister Brave Orchid, decides to come to America to meet her husband who had left her in Hong Kong thirty years ago. In the meantime, this husband had become a successful doctor and even remarried. Because he had never divorced his first wife, he had in effect committed bigamy. Thus he is very upset at the sudden appearance of Moon Orchid. He scolded a silent Moon Orchid: telling her "[you'll]" "never fit into an American household. I have important American guests who come into my house and eat... You can't talk to them. You can barely talk to me" [p. 153]. Dejected after thirty years of waiting, Moon Orchid became a paranoid schizophrenic, increasingly afraid of all the elements around her. She ended up in an insane asylum, but in all her madness she appeared happy. Brave Orchid is frightened by this turn of events and made her daughters promise that they would never let their father take another wife. However, Maxine's father replied that at his advanced age, he has no interest in taking another wife.)

5. How did Brave Orchid and Maxine react when the Rexall drugstore delivered medicine to the Hong family by mistake?

(Brave Orchid was terribly upset at the delivery person's mistake for she held the superstitious belief that the delivery of medicine was a curse to cause illness in her family. Using the Chinese expletive "That dead ghost," she cursed the delivery person. Maxine was afraid that her mother would do something to embarrass her. Indeed, when Brave Orchid ordered her to go to the drugstore to make them "rectify their crime" [p. 170] with free candy, she felt miserable. In Chinese culture, sweetness removes bitterness. Indeed Chinese doctors routinely provide sweet preserved prunes with their medicine [not raisins as mentioned by Maxine]. Maxine felt negotiating two cultures to be an impossible task. Instead she pretended to be "cute and small" [p.170] and demanded candy from a puzzled pharmacist who ended up giving her candy all year round. Brave Orchid thought she had taught the druggist good manners.)

Questions 6-7 Interpretative Level

6. Why does Maxine tell the story of the "mute girl" in the last chapter?

(The "mute girl" was obviously an important episode in Maxine's life for she saw in that unpopular girl all the characteristics undesirable in mainstream American culture. She was shy to the point of appearing mute, and was slow as well as unathletic. While young Maxine hated her, she was unconscious of why she really hated her—because the "mute girl" was a reflection of herself. The two of them cried together in the bathroom. Maxine eventually recognized the silent girl as another person trying to deal with fears similar to hers—fears which dominated her life of growing up as a minority in America.)

7. What are the various meanings of "ghost" for Kingston? (Kingston uses various meanings for the term "ghost" in *The Woman Warrior*. In the most straight forward sense it means a departed spirit who haunts us. In Chinese

culture, these spirits can be of human or animal origin and can also reside in inanimate objects, hence the fox and broom ghosts. The Chinese also sometimes use "ghost" as a somewhat derogatory term for non-Chinese. A Chinese who has adopted non-Chinese ways can also be called ghost-like [or "ho chi kwei"]. Finally, Kingston uses "ghosts" as a metaphor for the many memories that still haunt her such as the story of the "No Name Woman." Her act of documenting these pains is thus an act of exorcism.)

Questions 8 and 9 Critical Level

8. What image of women does Kingston portray in *The Woman Warrior*?

*(The various women Kingston describes in *The Woman Warrior* have been victims at various time in their lives because of a patriarchal system. Yet, Kingston demonstrates that these women can victimize other females. Maxine bullies the "Silent Girl" because she does not want to become what the "Silent Girl" represents in mainstream America. Brave Orchid is a difficult mother who has expectations Maxine cannot fulfill. "No Name Woman" kills her baby girl because she does not want the baby to live in her patriarchal society. [Note: Kingston speculates only that the baby was a girl since "there is some hope of forgiveness for boys" (p. 15).]*

Yet Kingston is not without hope for women. In writing about the pains of these women, she is in fact performing a cathartic act of purging the pains. She is thus making peace with herself, her family, and her society. Women thus can take charge of their lives and break the cycle of alternating between being a victim and victimizer of other women.)

9. How would you classify *The Woman Warrior*? As a novel? Autobiography? Non-fiction? Fiction? Justify your response.

*(Simultaneously autobiographical and fictional, *The Woman Warrior* defies categorization. Because of the fantasies and mythologies incorporated into *The Woman Warrior*, it is not strictly speaking an autobiography because we expect autobiographies to be truthful. Kingston is keenly aware that her work is not "factual" because she cautions that she does not have the "correct" version of events such as Moon Orchid's visit to Los Angeles. She recognizes that she has to imagine these scenes.*

*In addition, *The Woman Warrior* does not have a strict linear plot. The content also seems different from traditional memoirs. While many American autobiographical works, such as *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, tell the struggles of how a protagonist achieves a goal, Kingston works differently. There is little information about her post-college adult life nor about her successful career as a teacher. Absent from *The Woman Warrior* is a clearly defined episode of reaching a successful financial, religious, or other goal typically seen in many American autobiographies. Because of these differences, *The Woman Warrior* defies easy categorization.)*

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Questions 10 and 11 Creative Level

10. Create a role for a social worker who visits young Maxine at her home. Suggest activities that would help her cope with the pressures from her family, poverty, and mainstream America. In particular, suggest ways such as role playing games and chores which would help her develop self-confidence.
11. Write a skit that would dramatize the pains of growing up as a minority in mainstream American culture. What kind of experiences would a member of a minority undergo in everyday life? What kind of societal expectations would there be for this minority? How would he or she cope with them?

LITERARY TERMS AND LANGUAGE

Students should be aware of the historical background, language used, and theme in *The Woman Warrior*. The notes below may help them better understand the work.

Historic milieu is the setting of events within a time period. An important background event was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which banned immigration from China for ten years. (Congress also passed other anti-Chinese immigration laws in 1888, 1892, and 1924). In the 1870's and 1880's, many Americans viewed the Chinese immigrants as a source of cheap labor and thus an economic threat. Many Chinese therefore, who came to the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, did so illegally and the lives of these immigrants and their descendants were shaped by the experiences of being an illegal alien.

Language, such as the meaning of "ghost" in *The Woman Warrior*. Kingston uses the term "ghost" or "kuei" in many ways since the Chinese have different meanings for this one word. It can refer to departed spirits. She also uses "ghost" to refer to animistic spirits or spirits living in objects. For example, there were the Fox Spirits or the spirits that live in the wall (Wall Ghost).

The same word is also a slang used to refer to non-Chinese people. For immigrants who do not speak English, calling the "ghosts" by their work is an easy reference. For example, an immigration worker is called "Immigration Ghost."

"Ghost" is also used to distinguish members of the Chinese society in America who have become "non-Chinese." For example, Kingston's mother called her "Ho Chi Kuei," meaning "like a ghost." However, it can carry a positive or negative meaning, depending on context. A Chinese who succeeds in American society can be a "Ho Chi Kuei" but so can Moon Orchid, who after losing her husband and her sanity, becomes "ghost-like." Finally, Kingston also uses "ghost" as a metaphor for haunting memories. For example "No Name Woman" still haunts her as does the silent girl she bullied.

Theme is the subject or topic of a discourse or text. There are several themes in *The Woman Warrior*. The main theme is that of the voiceless woman. Central to the work is the theme of finding one's voice in society which Kingston presents as both a metaphorical, political, and physical struggle. The "No Name Woman" has no voice. Her name is not to be mentioned and she does

not name her rapist or lover either. Maxine whispers her protest of her employer's racism: "I had to say in my bad, small-person's voice that makes no impact." Moon Orchid, when confronting her husband is also voiceless. Brave Orchid, a doctor who does not speak English, becomes a menial laborer. *The Woman Warrior's* purpose is thus to give back a voice to these women.

ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Art

1. Draw Kingston's family tree, illustrating the various family members as you imagine them to be. Depict your own family tree and compare it with Kingston's.
2. Create a mural showing the different experiences of Brave Orchid's life, from the destruction of her family compound in China and her entrance into medical school to her arrival at Ellis Island and her job as a laundry worker.

Geography

1. Locate the places mentioned in the work (e.g., Canton, New York, Stockton, Cuba, Vietnam, and Hawaii) and indicate which family members traveled to these places.
2. List the areas in America most populated by Asian immigrants in the nineteenth century and today. Why do Asians settle in these locations?

Science and Mental Health

1. Research the different categories of schizophrenia. What was Moon Orchid suffering from? Do you think she became unstable through stress, cultural expectations, biological make-up, or some other factors?
2. Research Chinese medicine. How does it differ from modern Western medicine? For example, what does Brave Orchid mean when she says to Maxine: "You must be eating too much yin" (p. 100). Describe the medical training Brave Orchid received in China. How does it differ from American medical school?
3. Why does Kingston tell us about Crazy Mary and the mentally retarded boy? How is mental incapacity regarded in her culture?

Social Studies and Law

1. Document the main goals of the various immigration laws beginning in the mid-nineteenth century until now. Describe some of their effect on Asian immigrants. How did these laws restrict the work Asians could perform and the people they could marry? Why did the various Chinese Exclusion Acts forbid Chinese women from coming here and prevent Chinese immigrants from becoming citizens?
2. Why do Chinese immigrants say: "Don't report crimes; tell them we have no crimes and no poverty" (p. 184). What kind of effect does this mentality have on the Chinese immigrant sub-culture?

Language Arts

1. Create a list of Chinese words and phrases translated into English by Kingston. How well do they work in the context of the narrative? Kingston does not always explain the translation. Why does she not do that? (The class may wish to form smaller groups, with each group assigned a separate chapter for this listing.)

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- Investigate some of the Chinese mythologies and legends used in *The Woman Warrior* (e.g., Fa Mu Lan and Ts'ai Yen). How were the original stories adapted for use by Kingston? Why did Kingston modify them? (Note: this is a fairly complex assignment. The teacher may wish to consult VanSpanckeren's "The Asian Literary Background of The Woman Warrior" which appeared in *Approaches to Teaching Kingston's The Woman Warrior*. See bibliography.)
- Compose a definition of family in Chinese culture. Why does Kingston say that everyone in a Chinese village is related?

History and Current Events

- Discuss the history of China in the nineteenth and twentieth century. How do the problems in China affect the different waves of immigrants arriving in the United States from China?
- Write a report on differing political opinions regarding immigration. How have attitudes changed or not changed since the nineteenth century? Do these attitudes change when the immigrant's country of origin is taken into consideration?

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

- Using a skit, recreate the confrontation between Maxine and her mother in which Maxine poured out her frustrations at her mother (pp. 202-203). Does this skit depict a sad or comical event (or both)?
- Join a discussion group to discuss some of the emotional traumas Kingston experienced. Play the role of a social worker or psychologist in counseling young Maxine.
- Write a report about why Brave Orchid told Maxine her "talk-stories." What is the intended effect of these stories? How do they actually affect Maxine?
- Maxine was not at the scene where Moon Orchid finally confronts her husband. The story was related to Maxine by her sister who heard it from the brother. The brother had taken Moon Orchid and Brave Orchid to the husband but had kept his distance. Discuss what this confrontation might actually have been like. Why does Kingston caution us that the narrative is unreliable and that the story had been retold by various people? Discuss what effect this has on Maxine's credibility as a narrator.
- Draw a timeline depicting the major events in Kingston's life mentioned in *The Woman Warrior*. Discuss the manner in which Kingston presents the chronology of events. Kingston presents these events somewhat out of order. What effect does this non-chronological narrative have on the entire work?
- Explain in a short speech the symbolic meaning of terms and names such as Moon Orchid, Brave Orchid, Taxi Ghosts, and Ho Chi Kuei ("Like a Ghost").
- Watch a movie depicting the Chinese immigrant experience in America (e.g., *The Great Wall*, *Eat a Bowl of Tea*, and *The Joy Luck Club*). In a written report, compare and contrast the experiences depicted in these movies with Kingston's narrative.

- Write an obituary for the "No Name Woman." How do you picture her life?

ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

- List examples of how Maxine sacrifices her own happiness for the benefit of her mother or her family.
- Compose a scene in which Brave Orchid hears about how she has been depicted in *The Woman Warrior*.
- Make a list of all the female characters who have been victimized in *The Woman Warrior*. How has each character contributed to the strengthening of Maxine?

KINGSTON'S OTHER WORKS

- "Duck Boy." *New York Times Magazine*. 12 June 1977: 55+.
- "Reservations About China." *Ms*. Oct. 1978: 67-68.
- "The Making of More Americans." *New Yorker*. 11 Feb. 1980: 34+
- China Men*. New York. Knopf, 1980.
- "Cultural Misreadings by American Reviewers," *Asian and Western Writers in Dialogue: New Cultural Identities*. Ed. Guy Amirthanayagam. (1982)
- "A Writer's Notebook from the Far East." *Ms*. Jan. 1983: 85-86.
- Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*. (1989)

RELATED READING

- Gus Lee, *China Boy and Honor and Duty*
- Ding Ling, *Miss Sophie's Diary and Other Stories*. Trans. W.J.F. Jenner.
- Shen Congwen, *The Border Town and Other Stories*. Trans. Gladys Yang.
- Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*
- Laurence Yep, *Dragonwings*

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- Sledge, Linda Ching. "Maxine Hong Kingston's China Men: The Family Historian as Epic Poet." *MELUS* 7.4 (1980) 3-22.
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VOCABULARY TEST

Using the terms that follow, complete each sentence below with one or more details from *The Woman Warrior*.

felicitous	paradoxes	marrow	transmigration
I Ching	abstract	self-immolation	gravel
adultery	hexagrams	longevity	gizzard
bilingual	thorazine	pansanus	fronds
ideographs	engender	prodigal	dialects

1. _____, perhaps only a mistake during good times, became a crime when the village needed food.
2. I learned to make my mind large, as the universe is large, so that there is room for _____. Pearls are bone _____; pearls come from oysters.
3. "And, of course, there are the _____ that are the _____, and there is the Big Six, which is China."
4. With an American pencil, she wrote a word, a _____ word such as "_____" or "double joy," which is symmetrical.
5. On the tube are gold circles crossed with seven red lines each- "joy" _____ in _____.
6. I had met a rabbit who taught me about _____ and how to speed up _____: one does not have to become worms first but can change directly into a human being.
7. Could people who hatch their own chicks and eat the embryos and the head for delicacies and boil the feet in vinegar for party food, leaving only the _____, eating even the _____ lining—could such people _____ a _____ aunt?
8. I've stopped checking "_____" on job applications. I could not understand any of the _____ the interviewer at China Airlines tried on me, and he didn't understand me either.
9. She threw out the _____ and vitamin B that a doctor in Los Angeles had prescribed.
10. Between helpings the women sat back, waving fans made out of silk, paper, sandalwood, and _____.

THE WOMAN WARRIOR

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (30 points)

Match the following descriptions with characters. Choose your answers from the list of characters below. You may use some of the answers more than once and some not at all.

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| _____ 1. Legendary Chinese heroine who saves her people | A. Maxine |
| _____ 2. A successful brain surgeon | B. Brave Orchid |
| _____ 3. Neighbor who was placed in a mental asylum | C. Moon Orchid |
| _____ 4. Maxine's aunt who was placed in a mental asylum | D. Maxine's brother |
| _____ 5. Maxine's aunt who killed herself and her baby | E. Fa Mu Lan |
| _____ 6. Family member who loved going to the theater | F. Ts'ai Yen |
| _____ 7. Family member who went to Vietnam | G. "The Silent Girl" |
| _____ 8. Person Maxine bullied in school | H. Moon Orchid's husband |
| _____ 9. Heroine Maxine fantasized about as a child | I. "No Name Woman" |
| _____ 10. Famous poetess kidnapped by the Southern Hsiung-nu (Huns) | J. Crazy Mary |
| _____ 11. Attended medical college in China | K. Mentally retarded boy |
| _____ 12. Asked the druggist for candy | L. Grandmother |
| _____ 13. Sister of Maxine's father | |
| _____ 14. Met her husband after 30 years | |
| _____ 15. Persuaded her sister to come to America | |

Part II: Cause and Effect (20 Points)

Justify each of these statements

1. Brave Orchid tells her daughter the story of the "No Name Aunt" because _____

2. Maxine imagines herself as Fa Mu Lan because _____

3. Brave Orchid fights the "ghost" while at the medical college because _____

4. Brave Orchid comes to America because _____

5. Brave Orchid persuades Moon Orchid to come to California because _____

6. Maxine bullies the "silent girl" in school because _____

7. Kingston tells the story of Ts'ai Yen because _____

8. Maxine is afraid of the retarded boy because _____

9. Moon Orchid returns to Stockton from Los Angeles because _____

10. Brave Orchid tells Maxine the legend of Fa Mu Lan because _____

THE WOMAN WARRIOR

Part III: Short Answer (10 Points)

Explain the significance of **five** of the following.

1. American-feminine speaking personality
2. "There is no profit in raising girls"
3. filial piety
4. ancestral worship
5. Rexall drugstore
6. California state mental asylum
7. sliced the frenum

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences

1. Explain why Maxine had a list of grievances to tell her mother.
2. Discuss Maxine's reaction to her mother's telling of the "No Name Woman" story.
3. Discuss the significance of the subtitle, "A Memoir Among Ghosts"
4. Summarize the process which led Moon Orchid to an insane asylum.

THE WOMAN WARRIOR

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Setting Identification (20 points)

Identify the settings that fit the following descriptions. Select your answers from the list that follows.

- | | |
|--|---------------------|
| A. Ellis Island | F. Stockton |
| B. Berkeley | G. Rexall drugstore |
| C. San Francisco International Airport | H. School bathroom |
| D. family well | I. Canton, China |
| E. Hong Kong | K. Los Angeles |

- _____ 1. where "No Name Aunt" killed herself and her baby
- _____ 2. where the Hong family lived
- _____ 3. where Brave Orchid first arrived in America
- _____ 4. place where Moon Orchid was living before coming to California
- _____ 5. location of Hackett Medical College, where Brave Orchid studied
- _____ 6. location where Maxine bullied the "silent girl"
- _____ 7. city where Moon Orchid confronted her husband after 30 years
- _____ 8. where Maxine attended college
- _____ 9. place where Maxine demanded candy
- _____ 10. where Brave Orchid waits for the arrival of Moon Orchid

Part II: Fill-in (20 points)

Write the correct answers in the blanks provided.

- 1. After 30 years of separation, _____ wants Moon Orchid to join her husband in _____.
- 2. _____ threw out the Thorazine and Vitamin B the doctor had prescribed for _____.
- 3. In China, Maxine's _____ loved going to the _____.
- 4. After attending medical school and working in her _____, Brave Orchid came to _____.
- 5. Maxine fantasizes about being _____ and saving her _____.

THE WOMAN WARRIOR

Part III: Character Identification (20 points)

Place an X by statements that refer to Maxine in *The The Woman Warrior*.

- 1. attended University of California at Berkeley
- 2. became a brain surgeon
- 3. became upset when asked to go demand "reparation candy"
- 4. went to Los Angeles with Moon Orchid
- 5. spent time in a mental asylum
- 6. worked in a laundry
- 7. got straight A's
- 8. angry about her employer's racism
- 9. went to Vietnam
- 10. kidnapped by the Southern Hsiung-nu people

Part IV: Essay (40 Points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Contrast the personalities of Moon Orchid and Brave Orchid.
2. Explain the significance of Kingston's question : "What is Chinese tradition and what is the movies?" (p. 6)
3. Discuss the possible reasons why "No Name Aunt" kept the name of the man who got her pregnant a secret.
4. Discuss "voice" as a metaphor in this work.

THE WOMAN WARRIOR

ANSWER KEY

VOCABULARY TEST

1. Adultery (p. 13)
2. paradoxes, marrow (p. 29)
3. hexagrams, I Ching (p. 78)
4. felicitous, longevity (p. 80)
5. ideographs, abstract (p. 57)
6. self-immolation, transmigration (p. 28)
7. gravel, gizzard, engender, prodigal (p. 6)
8. bilingual, dialects (p. 205)
9. Thorazin, (p. 157)
10. pandanus fronds (p. 139)

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (30 points)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. E | 6. L | 11. B |
| 2. H | 7. D | 12. A |
| 3. J | 8. G | 13. I |
| 4. C | 9. E | 14. C |
| 5. I | 10. F | 15. B |

Part II: Cause and Effect (20 points)

Answers will vary.

Part III: Short Answer (20 points)

Answers will vary.

Part IV: Essay (30 Points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Setting Identification (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. D | 6. J |
| 2. H | 7. L |
| 3. A | 8. B |
| 4. E | 9. I |
| 5. K | 10. C |

Part II: Fill-in (20 points)

1. Brave Orchid / America (specifically Los Angeles)
2. Brave Orchid / Moon Orchid
3. grandmother / theater
4. village / America
5. Fa Mu Lan / people

Part III: Character Identification (20 points)

- | | |
|------|------|
| 1. X | 6. X |
| 2. | 7. X |
| 3. X | 8. X |
| 4. | 9. |
| 5. | 10. |

Part IV: Essay (40 Points)

Answers will vary.



Vandalia Road • Jacksonville, Illinois 62650
Toll free 1-800-637-6581 • Fax 1-800-551-1169
PERMA-BOUND CANADA • Box 517, Station A • Willowdale, Ontario M2N 5T1
Toll free 1-800-461-1999 • Fax 1-705-876-9703