

WRITING THROUGH THE RHETORICAL MODES

SECTION 1: A RHETORICAL MODES READER

Chapter Two: The Expository Mode

Division, Classification, and Definition: Reading 3

Amy Tan, “Mother Tongue”

Amy Tan is an American writer whose novels and essays deal mainly with Chinese-American experience and mother-daughter relationships. Her 1989 novel, The Joy Luck Club, is probably her best known, and was adapted into a film in 1993 by the same name.

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Questions for Reading and Discussion

- 1) How does Tan feel about people referring to her mother’s English as “broken” or “fractured”? Why does she feel this way?
- 2) How is Tan’s mother treated by native English speakers? Why does she receive this type of treatment?
- 3) What does Tan mean when she says there are many “Englishes”? Do you speak more than one English? Why might it be important to acknowledge the existence of multiple “Englishes”?

Questions for Writing and Research

- 1) Tan presents a story told by her mother in her mother’s own words as an example of her mother’s speech. Tan explains that, while some people say they can understand almost everything her mother says, others claim they can barely make sense of it. What about you? Try to translate that section of the text (the 6th paragraph) into Standard Written English. How much of it can you understand? What parts are difficult, and why?
- 2) Do you speak to your family the same way you speak to your friends? Do you speak to your friends the same way you speak to your professors? Think of something that you need to tell all three groups of people (family, friends, professors), and then write it three ways—one for each group. What changes from group to group? Why?

3) In a brief essay, reflect on a time when you may have acted in a biased manner against or in favor of someone based on the way that he or she talked. What were the consequences for both you and that person? What are the potential consequences of bias against her mother that Tan identifies in her essay?



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