

Purpose of autobiography: To convey a self, a sense of self, a piece of what one really is. Is that possible? Do we really understand who we are? How can one take internal thoughts, external actions, family history, the greatest achievements, the vilest actions, the wildest fantasies, and the most mundane experiences and combine them into a book that portrays a “self.” What is a “self”? Is it constant? Is it a combination of actions and thoughts? Is it a deeper essence? Do facts convey it better than fantasies? Is realism more accurate than distortion? Is the way we sound to ourselves more accurate than the way we sound to others. Think about the way your voice sounds differently inside your own head than it does on a recording, than it does to others: which is truer? Sometimes what affects us the most profoundly is not an important, dramatic event, but just one small moment, one small thought, one little snippet of a dream, one song at one moment, so distorting this small event into something greater can be more accurate.

What is voice? What is the importance of voice in this autobiography? Why are words so important to Kingston? Why is translation so important to Kingston? Why is the final line of the autobiography: “It translated well”?

- Kingston’s inaudible voice
- Kingston’s fantasy of being a woman warrior
- Kingston’s ability to write powerfully
- Kingston’s literary voice

Writing gives her logic, simplicity. Put all the pieces together and force them to make sense. But she does not do this simply—she keeps the complexity through paradox: “I had to leave home in order to see the world logically... I learned to think that mysteries are for explanation. I enjoy simplicity. Concrete pours out of my mouth to cover the forests with freeways and sidewalks” (181). Her words can simplify the world, sort of. If it is written, it is true, even if everything else contradicts it. At least the allusion of simplicity is soothing. Nevertheless, her autobiography is anything but simple. Manipulate words to make them what you want; instead of being *Ho Chi Kuei*, grub ghosts or dustpan and broom ghosts, be *Hao Chi Kuei*, good foundation ghosts. With this empowerment, speaking the list, the words, she can make the “huncher” disappear. Maybe she made him up (205).

When she follows the traditional, idealized legend about the woman warrior with the comment, “My American life has been such a disappointment” (45), she connects these events of the past or of myth with the present and her American reality and produces a new and changing picture. In the beginning of her autobiography, she directly asks: Chinese-Americans, when you try to understand what things in you are Chinese, how do you separate what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, insanities, one family, your mother who marked your growing with stories, from what is Chinese? What is Chinese tradition and what is the movies (5)? This seems to be what Kingston wonders about her self throughout her entire autobiography. She struggles to understand herself and what in her background produced her self. In a sense, she meditates over which parts of her self are from where and over where she as an entity belongs, in order to understand who she is as a whole. Which parts of her self belong to China, or to the United States, or to a combination of the two seems very important to her identity. Jumping around from ancient stories to internal movie fantasies to ghost-world traumas, she does not come up with concrete solutions about why she is the way she is; instead she constructs a confusing, yet solid image that symbolizes part of her self. This self seems to be filled with many different pieces from the East and the West, from her mother and her ancestors, and from her classmates and ghosts, that are connected by small aspects of her own individuality. The sense of her self that the reader perceives seems quite similar not only to the content of her book, but also the structure.

The Woman Warrior seems structured not only by the creation of an autobiographical self, but also by talk-story, which feeds this autobiographical creation. The whole book is a long talk-story and this telling empowers Kingston. In a sense, this book creates revenge on all of those who silenced her: on her mother who cut her tongue, on Chinese culture that does not explain anything and demeans girls, on North American society that made silent an adjective for Chinese girls. From her mother, whose great power is talking-story, she learns the song of the warrior woman, Fa Mu Lan. With this knowledge, she realizes that she will “have to grow up a warrior woman” (20). Despite this goal, as the story progresses and Kingston grows older, she accumulates so much guilt that she cannot contain it and loses the ability to tell the difference between right and wrong. She envies Catholic girls who have the release of a weekly ritualized confession. “I had grown inside me a list of over two hundred things that I had to tell my mother so that she would know the true things about me and to stop the pain in my throat” (197). When she finally gets the courage to tell her mother the first confession on her mental list, her mother ignores her and then

eventually says, “I don’t feel like hearing your craziness” (200). Kingston realizes that she will have no listener, but herself. Instead of resigning herself to holding in her list, she learns from her mother and disguises her confession list in a giant talk-story that millions of people will hear.

Ts’ai Yen and the barbarian reed pipe (206 – 209)

“The beginning is hers, the ending, mine.” Now controls the stories rather than the stories controlling her. An empowerment, but also an acknowledgement of her mother as a powerful talker in a good way, not just as a tyrannical force. She also talk stories.

Ts’ai Yen, female poet born in 175

Captured by the barbarians from the south, but like other captives she fought too, along side the barbarians.

Has two children with the barbarians that cannot speak Chinese.

Ts’ai Yen sings to match the barbarians’ music “a woman’s voice singing, as if to her babies, a song so high and clear, it matched the flutes. Ts’ai Yen sang about China and her family there. Her words seemed to be Chinese, but the barbarians understood their sadness and anger.”

“She brought her songs back from the savage lands, and one of the three that has been passed down to us is . . . a song that Chinese sing to their own instruments. It translated well.”

How is this story an **allegory** for the whole book? What does Kingston want to do with this book? How is Kingston like Ts’ai Yen, a poet that brings the two cultures together? Who is admired by both? Whose words translate well between the two cultures? Who is a hero to the Chinese despite being a woman raised with the barbarians?

Kingston writes in English, marries an American, but wants to find a sane relationship with her Chinese roots. Through the written word she forges that path, and through that path she portrays a self that is both Chinese, American, individual, ordinary, and extraordinary.

For Socratic Seminar (SS) – Complete two (2) of the following questions as assigned. Type with in-text citations, literary analysis, and works cited. Gloss and be prepared for Socratic Seminar on:

TBA. MAY WANT TO ANNOTATE TEST (FLAG TEXT = TO NUMBER).

However, you should thoroughly reflect on each of the following questions to be prepared for the test: TBA

1. What is the symbolism behind the back carving scene in “White Tigers?”
2. Describe the structure of *The Woman Warrior*. How does this structure contribute to the meaning of the novel?
3. Describe the tone of *The Woman Warrior*. How does this tone contribute to the meaning of the novel?
4. Describe Kingston’s writing style. How does this style contribute to the meaning of the book?
5. How have the two cultures (Chinese and American) impacted Maxine’s life? What has Kingston gained by coming from two cultures?
6. Why do you think Kingston begins her autobiography with the story of “No Name Woman” and the line, “You must not tell anyone?”
7. What is talk-story? How has it affected Kingston’s life?
8. Why do you think Kingston uses so many of the stories of her mother and of her aunts in order to show her self?
9. Why do you think Kingston includes the legend of Fa Mu Lan in her autobiography?
10. Why does Kingston say her mother cut her tongue? How has this affected her life?
11. Explain the symbolism of Kingston’s black paintings? What does this show about her personality?
12. Describe Kingston’s mother’s character.
13. List 8 main differences between *Brave Orchid* and *Moon Orchid*.
14. Why does Maxine hate the quiet girl so much? Why does Maxine torture her? Why doesn’t she stop?
15. What is Kingston’s mysterious illness and why is it “just” that she becomes sick? What does this show about her character?
16. Analyze Maxine’s (and Kingston’s) issues of voice.
17. Why was Kingston so worried about the retarded man? Why did her parents ignore his bad traits and let him sit in front of their laundry?

18. What is the importance of Kingston's "list of over two hundred things that [she] had to tell [her] mother" (p. 197)? What is this list?
19. What does Maxine's final list outburst (p. 201) show you about her personality, her worries, and her hopes? What do you think about her mother's response to the outburst ("Can't you take a joke," ". . . they were here for your sister," "We like to say the opposite") pp. 202-203?
20. Why do you think Kingston ends her novel with the story about Ts'ai Yen, a Chinese poetess that lived with barbarians?
21. What does Kingston mean when she ends her autobiography with, "It translated well"?
22. Why do you think Kingston wrote this autobiography?
23. Analyze Kingston's use of paradox in her book.
24. Analyze Kingston's use of juxtaposition in her book.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR TIMED WRITING. CHOOSE ONE (1) OF THE FOLLOWING TO COMPLETE A TIMED WRITING. DATE: TBA

1. What is the symbolism behind Maxine's black paintings?

2. Reflect on the scene where Maxine taunts/tortures the silent Chinese girl in the bathroom. Why does she do this? What bothers her so much about the girl? How does it impact Maxine? What does she learn from the incident?

3. Discuss Maxine's issues of voice. Use specific quotations to focus your writing like when Kingston describes her voice as "a crippled animal running on broken legs . . ." (169) or when she explains, "we American-Chinese girls had to whisper to make ourselves American feminine" (172).

4. Reflect on the scene where Maxine tries to tell her mother her list of 200 things. Pull out at least 2 quotations and reflect on them. What does this reveal about Maxine and her mother? Why does she want to confess all these things? Pay particular attention to the final outburst.

5. Reflect on the ending of Kingston's autobiography. What does the story of Ts'ai Yen and the barbarian reed pipe have to do with the rest of the book? Why do you think Kingston ends with this story? Think about the final sentence of the book.

Design and create a visual representation that interprets the concept of paradox in *The Woman Warrior*. Be sure to offer an interpretation of the book through individual symbols, overall design and arrangement, and through the words and quotations you select. You will be graded on neatness, the quality of thought behind your design, and on fulfilling the requirements. DATE DUE: _____
 Minimum Requirements: Rubric:

1. Title & author & theme

2. 3 quotations

3. 8 symbols

4. Overall arrangement that interprets the concept of paradox

5. You may do this assignment on the computer or by hand.

