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Two Kinds

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MEET THE WRITER

Amy Tan

Many Englishes

Amy Tan (1952–) says that she grew up with several Englishes. The Englishes were primarily American English and Chinese English. Tan was born in Oakland, California, two and a half years after her parents fled China’s Communist revolution and settled in the United States. Although Tan’s parents had wanted her to become a surgeon, with piano as a hobby, she got a master’s degree in linguistics instead. Her first short story, written at a writers’ workshop in 1985, was eventually published in *Seventeen*.

At the request of a literary agent, Tan next drafted a proposal for a novel based on the lives of four Chinese mothers and their American daughters. Then Tan left on a trip to China with her own mother, who had just recovered from a serious illness.

When she returned, Tan was amazed to find that her agent had obtained a sizable advance for a book she hadn’t even written yet. She immediately devoted herself full time to writing *The Joy Luck Club*—a collection of related stories told from the points of view of four mothers and four daughters.

“When I wrote these stories, it was as much a discovery to me as to any



[More About the Writer](#)

reader reading them for the first time," Tan has said. "Things would surprise me. I would sit there laughing and I would say, 'Oh you're kidding!' It was like people telling me the stories, and I would write them down as fast as I could." Published in 1989 to rave reviews, *The Joy Luck Club* became an instant bestseller.

Afraid of failing after the huge success of *The Joy Luck Club*, Tan agonized over her second novel, *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991). In writing that book, she says, she "had to fight for every single character, every image, every word." She needn't have worried. The novel, the story of a woman's harrowing life in pre-Communist China, was another blockbuster. Tan followed her first two successes with two more: *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995) and *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001).

Here is what Tan says about being a writer who knows two cultures:

"I am a writer. I am fascinated by language in daily life. I spend a great deal of my time thinking about the power of language—the way it can evoke an emotion, a visual image, a complex idea, or a simple truth. Language is the tool of my trade. And I use them all—all the Englishes I grew up with."

For Independent Reading

If you enjoyed "Two Kinds," you might want to read *The Joy Luck Club* (mentioned above), from which "Two Kinds" is taken.

From "Mother's Tongue" by Amy Tan. Copyright ©