

## LITERARY NARRATIVE Literacy Narrative

AMY TAN

## From “Mother Tongue”

I later decided I should envision a reader for the stories I would write. And the reader I decided upon was my mother, because these were stories about mothers. So with this reader in mind—and in fact she did read my early drafts—I began to write stories using all the Englishes I grew up with: the English I spoke to my mother, which for lack of a better term might be described as “simple”; the English she used with me, which for lack of a better term might be described as “broken”; my translation of her Chinese, which could certainly be described as “watered down”; and what I imagined to be her translation of her Chinese if she could speak in perfect English, her internal language, and for that I sought to preserve the essence, but neither an English nor a Chinese structure. I wanted to capture what language ability tests can never reveal: her intent, her passion, her imagery, the rhythms of her speech and the nature of her thoughts.

## Use lists.

Though we might think that lists should only be included in genres like reports or proposals, lists in narrative essays can be very powerful. Lists allow writers to create a sense of rhythm and momentum; they allow us to acknowledge many possibilities within a story, even if we can't explore all of them; they can mirror the stream of our thoughts. In the passage above, Amy Tan concludes her essay with two lists, one divided by semicolons, one divided by commas. Importantly, because this is a literacy narrative about “Englishes,” the lists allow her to catalog and honor the diversity of the language as she knows it. By ending the essay with these lists, she offers more than one conclusion or lesson.