

The All-American Slurp

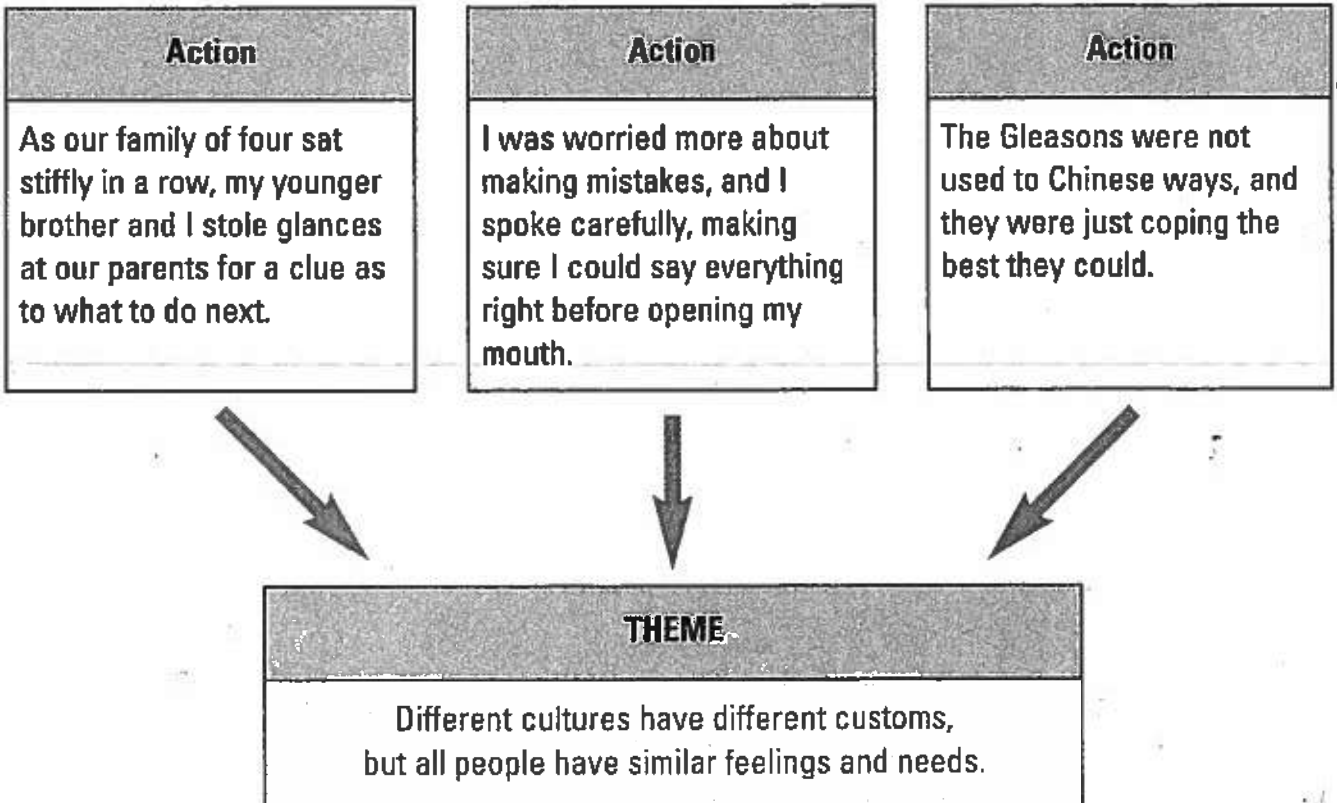
Lensey Namioka



Summary

“The All-American Slurp” recalls the Lin family’s first few months in the United States. The Lins are a Chinese immigrant family. They want to fit into American society. The daughter befriends an American classmate who introduces her to American customs. The daughter worries about making mistakes. Doing things the Chinese way, like slurping soup, draws attention that she finds embarrassing. Over time, the Lins change many of their habits. They change their clothing style, their speech, and their way of eating. One day they feel comfortable enough to invite their American neighbors for dinner. The daughter is surprised to learn that even Americans slurp.

Visual Summary



PREPARE TO READ

LITERARY ANALYSIS

Theme

A theme is a message about life that an author wants to give to readers. Often, you can figure out the theme of a story by paying attention to the characters' actions. For example, the characters' actions in the following passage tell you that the theme of "The All-American Slurp" has something to do with the challenges of adjusting to a different culture.

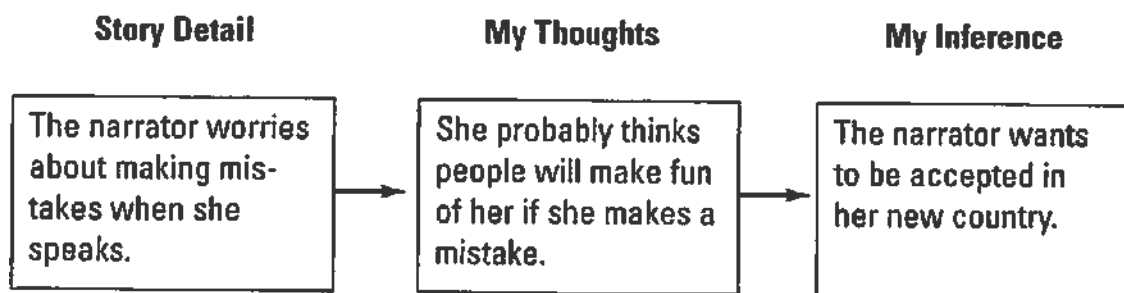
"She frowned and shook her head slightly, and I understood the message: the Gleasons were not used to Chinese ways, and they were just coping the best they could."

As you read, look for other clues to the theme by paying attention to the characters' actions.

READING STRATEGY

Drawing Inferences

When you draw inferences, you reach a conclusion, or an understanding, about the meaning of what you are reading. You base your conclusion on evidence from the story. Evidence may be the characters' words, actions, and reactions, as well as on your own thoughts. Drawing inferences can help you figure out the theme of a story. The chart below shows how you can draw an inference from details in "The All-American Slurp."



The All-American Slurp

Lensey Namioka

"As any respectable Chinese knows, the correct way to eat your soup is to slurp."

The first time our family was invited out to dinner in America, we disgraced ourselves while eating celery. We had emigrated to this country from China, and during our early days here we had a hard time with American table manners.

♦ ♦ ♦

The Lins had never eaten raw vegetables in China. They had always cleaned their vegetables in boiling water. Seeing raw celery on a relish tray surprises them.

The Lins are invited to dinner at the home of their neighbors, the Gleasons. When the Lins arrive, the friends shake hands and the Lin family sits on the sofa.

♦ ♦ ♦

As our family of four sat stiffly in a row, my younger brother and I stole glances at our parents for a clue as to what to do next.

♦ ♦ ♦

When Mrs. Gleason offers them the relish tray, the Lins each take a piece of celery. They are surprised by how good it tastes. However, the celery strings get caught in the narrator's teeth, so she pulls them out of the celery. Her brother and her parents do the same.

♦ ♦ ♦

Suddenly I realized that there was dead silence. . . . Looking up, I saw that the eyes of everyone in the room were on our family. Mr. and Mrs. Gleason, their daughter Meg, who was my friend, and their neighbors the

◆ Reading Check

Why had the Lins never eaten raw vegetables before?

◆ Reading Strategy

What can you infer based on the Lins' reaction to the raw celery? Choose the most logical inference.

- ☐ They did not like the celery.
- ☐ They liked the celery.
- ☐ They thought celery was silly.

Vocabulary Development

slurp (SLERP) v. sip loudly

emigrated (em i GRAYT id) v. left one country to settle in another

Badels—they were all staring at us as we busily pulled the strings of our celery. . . .



When the narrator sees her friend Meg the next day, she doesn't know if they will still be friends. But Meg acts the same as usual, and the narrator begins to relax. Meg was the narrator's first friend in America and is still her only real friend.



My brother didn't have any problems making friends. He spent all his time with some boys who were teaching him baseball, and in no time he could speak English much faster than I could—not better, but faster.

I worried more about making mistakes, and I spoke carefully, making sure I could say everything right before opening my mouth.



The narrator also worries about her appearance. She wants to wear blue jeans to school, but her mother insists she wear skirts.



By the time she saw that Meg and the other girls were wearing jeans, it was too late. My school clothes were bought already, and we didn't have money left to buy new outfits for me. We had too many other things to buy first, like furniture, pots, and pans. . . .



At the end of the month, the narrator's mother buys her some blue jeans. Other family members make important changes as well. Her brother makes his school baseball team, her father begins driving lessons, and her mother discovers rummage sales.



Vocabulary Development

rummage sale (RUM ij SAYL) v. a sale of used household items

◆ Literary Analysis

Underline the sentence that suggests that the narrator needs to feel accepted.



◆ Reading Strategy

Choose the answer that best explains why it is important for the narrator to have blue jeans?

- (a) She likes the style of blue jeans.
- (b) She does not like skirts.
- (c) She wants to fit in with the other American students.

◆ Literary Analysis

Underline the sentence that describes the action Mrs. Lin took to help her daughter feel accepted at school.



◆ Reading Check

The bracketed sentence describes the Lakeview restaurant. Break down the long sentence by completing the shorter sentences below.

The restaurant was an expensive restaurant.

The headwaiter was dressed

He conducted (guided)

The only light came from

◆ Reading Check

Why do the Lins slurp their soup? Choose the two correct answers.

- ☐ They like to make noise.
- ☐ Slurping cools the soup.
- ☐ Slurping shows that they like the soup.
- ☐ Slurping shows that they are rich.

We soon got all the furniture we needed, plus a dart board and a 1,000-piece jigsaw puzzle. . . . There was hope that the Lins might become a normal American family after all.

Then came our dinner at the Lakeview restaurant.

The Lakeview was an expensive restaurant, one of those places where a headwaiter dressed in tails conducted you to your seat, and the only light came from candles and flaming desserts. In one corner of the room a lady harpist played tinkling melodies.

The Lins have trouble reading their menus, which are written in French. They decide to order their meals at random. When the soup arrives in a plate, they are unsure how to eat it.

Fortunately my parents had studied books on western etiquette before they came to America. "Tilt your plate," whispered my mother. "It's easier to spoon the soup up that way."

She was right. Tilting the plate did the trick. But the etiquette book didn't say anything about what you did after the soup reached your lips. As any respectable Chinese knows, the correct way to eat your soup is to slurp. This helps to cool the liquid and prevent you from burning your lips. It also shows your appreciation.

Vocabulary Development

tails (TAYLZ) *n.* a man's formal evening suit
etiquette (ET i ket) *n.* acceptable social manners

We showed our appreciation. *Shloop*, went my father. *Shloop* went my mother. *Shloop, shloop*, went my brother, who was the hungriest.

The lady harpist stopped playing to take a rest. And in the silence, our family's consumption of soup suddenly seemed unnaturally loud.

◆ ◆ ◆

At the sound of the slurping, the waiter freezes, and so does the nearby diners. Humiliated, the narrator jumps up and runs to the bathroom. She stays there for the rest of the meal.

◆ ◆ ◆

But by the time we had been in this country for three months, our family was definitely making progress toward becoming Americanized. . . .

The day came when my parents announced that they wanted to give a dinner party. We had invited Chinese friends to eat with us before, but this dinner was going to be different. In addition to a Chinese-American family, we were going to invite the Gleasons.

◆ ◆ ◆

Normally, the Lins eat from platters set in the middle of the table. They use chopsticks to bring food from the platters to their rice bowls. This time, they set their table with large American dinner plates. During dinner the narrator is shocked when her friend Meg mixes all the different foods on her plate. It is a Chinese tradition to finish eating food taken from one dish before taking food from another.

◆ ◆ ◆

Vocabulary Development

consumption (kuhn SUMP shuhn) *n.* eating; drinking; using up

◆ Reading Strategy

How does the waiter react to the slurping?

What can you **infer** about him from his reaction?

◆ Literary Analysis

Underline the passage that shows how important it is to the Lins to fit in to their new country.



◆ Reading Strategy

The Gleasons do not eat Chinese food the same way the Lins did. List something that each person does that surprises the narrator.

Meg:

Mr. Gleason:

Why do you think it helps the narrator to see people eating in a way that does not fit Chinese tradition?

◆ Literary Analysis

Why does the narrator think of celery sticks when she watches the Gleasons at her family's dinner party?

How do you think the narrator feels when her friend slurps the milkshake?

What do you think these experiences teach her?

I couldn't bear to look any longer, and I turned to Mr. Gleason. He was chasing a pea around his plate. Several times he got it to the edge, but when he tried to pick it up with his chopsticks, it rolled back toward the center of the plate again. Finally he put down his chopsticks and picked up the pea with his fingers. He really did! A grown man!

◆ ◆ ◆

The narrator wants to laugh as she and the Chinese guests watch the Gleasons eat. But a look from her mother makes her realize that the Gleasons are not used to Chinese ways. It makes the narrator think of celery strings.

After dinner, Meg decides she wants a big chocolate milkshake. She convinces her friend, the narrator, to walk with her to the ice cream shop.

Meg gets a large milkshake and is finishing it when the narrator is only half done with her small one.

◆ ◆ ◆

Toward the end she pulled hard on her straws and went *shloop, shloop*.

"Do you always slurp when you eat a milkshake?" I asked, before I could stop myself. Meg grinned. "Sure. All Americans slurp."

REVIEW AND ASSESS

1. Why is the narrator embarrassed when her family has dinner with the Gleasons? Circle the letter of your answer.
- (a) She does not dress properly.
 - (b) Everyone stares at them when they remove the strings from their celery.
 - (c) They all sat on the sofa.
 - (d) She drops her plate on the floor.

2. List two things that happen when the Lins go to the Lakeview restaurant?
-
-

3. **Literary Analysis:** What is the theme of "The All-American Slurp"?
-
-

4. **Literary Analysis:** Put a checkmark in front of each item that supports the theme.

___ The narrator and her brother watched their parents carefully to see how to behave at the party.

___ The narrator wants to wear blue jeans.

___ The Lins have to buy furniture.

___ The narrator tries to speak very carefully and not make mistakes.

___ Mr. Lin is an engineer.

(Continued)

5. **Reading Strategy:** Complete this chart to draw inferences about the Gleasons' behavior when they go to the Lins for dinner.

Details From Text	My Thoughts	My Inferences
Mr. Gleason picks up a pea with his fingers.		
Meg puts many different kinds of food on her plate at once.		

Writing

Story Plot

One theme can be revealed in many different ways. Come up with an idea for a story of your own that demonstrates the theme of "The All-American Slurp." Then, write a plot outline for your story. The plot outline will show how your story events unfold. To write your outline, complete the chart below by answering the questions on the left.

What is the theme of your story? Briefly summarize the theme in your own words.

Theme

Who is your main character? What other characters will help develop your story?

Characters

What problem does your main character face? Is there something he or she wants?

Problem

What happens? How does your main character attempt to solve the problem?

Events

How is the problem finally resolved?

Resolution