

When viewing *Telling Stories: Gene Yang* and participating in this guide's suggested activities, the following language arts standards sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association will be addressed: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11.

Telling Stories: Gene Yang

Thursday, March 27, 2008

11 a.m. – 12 p.m. ET

Grades 6-9

Background Information

American-Born Comics Artist

He's a teacher, a database manager, a husband, and a father. He's also a comic book artist whose novel, *American Born Chinese*, has been a critical and popular success. It was a National Book Award finalist, winner of the prestigious Printz Award, won a Cybil Award (the children's and young adult bloggers literary award), as well as the Eisner Award for Best Graphic Album–New (which has been described as the Academy Awards® of the comic industry).

Yang has been interested in drawing and comics since he was a child. In fact, in fifth grade, he created Spade Hunter, described as a Robin Hood-like character in a Ninja mask. While in college, Yang majored in computer science with a minor in creative writing.

It was then that he discovered Japanese manga and again took up creating comics, a medium which Yang describes as "the most intimate medium. Every stroke you see on the page can come out of a single person's brush. It's almost like reading a handwritten letter." Yang's first graphic novel written as an adult, *Gordon Yamamoto and the King of the Geeks*, won a Xeric Award.

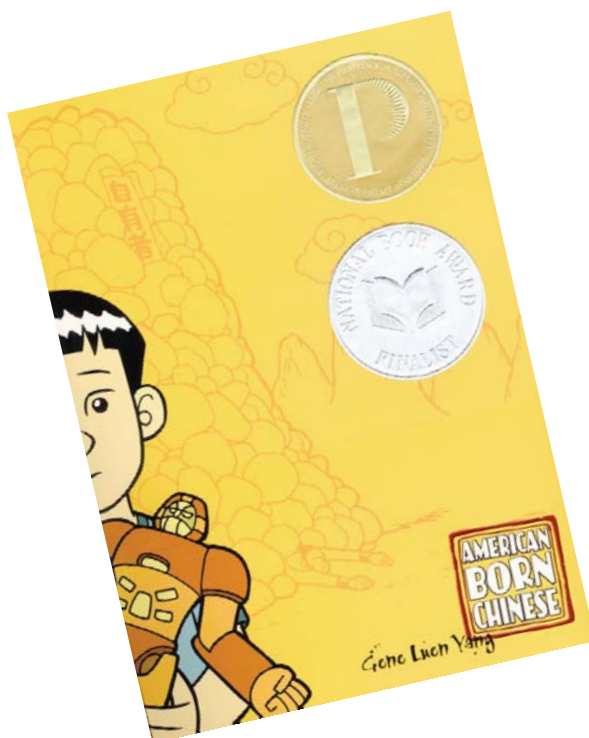
Gene Yang had to convince his wife, Theresa, that drawing comics went beyond an activity for third graders. He knew he had hooked her when she admitted staying up late to read a graphic novel he'd sent. Yang and his family live in the San Francisco Bay Area. He has no plans to leave his day job working at a Catholic high school while continuing to write and draw after his young children go to bed.

With his busy schedule, it seems unlikely that Yang has time for success to go to his head!

Comics Come of Age

Comics have been popular among young readers since their inception in the 1930s and 1940s, but fell out of favor by the 1950s. Though they would resurge in popularity in the 1970s, comics seemed to remain on the fringe. That changed when *American Born Chinese* (ABC) was published by a new publisher, First Second, in 2006.

Not only was ABC a National Book Award finalist, it was the first graphic novel to be awarded the Printz Award, given to the young adult book that best exemplifies literary excellence by the Young Adult Library Services Association, a division of the American Library Association.





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In *ABC*, three seemingly unrelated stories unfold: one of Jin Wang, the son of Chinese immigrants; his Taiwanese cousin named Chin-Kee; and a legend of a Chinese folk hero, the Monkey King. Difficult themes such as being an outsider and finding one's identity are handled with humor, empathy, and verve, demonstrating that comics—graphic novels—can powerfully relate prodigious stories.

About the Program

Gene Yang will talk about his work in a discussion moderated by Maria Salvadore, a professor of children's literature. In addition to discussing the critically acclaimed *American Born Chinese*, Yang will talk about the use of comics in education, the process used in their creation, his recent work, and how he approaches his work.

Instructional Activities

Reading

Read *American Born Chinese*. Discuss how one "reads" the pictures. How are the images used to create *character*? Chin-Kee is purposefully stereotypically in both appearance and behavior. How did the author/artist achieve this? Why?

How does the layout and format of the cartoon art move the plot forward? Does the style help denote the *subplots*?

Research/History

Comics have not always been within the domain of young people. When did comics begin? How does the history of comics relate to newspapers? Find out which graphic novel (or comic book) was awarded a Pulitzer Prize.

Writing/Art

Write an autobiographical outline or talk to a family member and create a short biographical essay. Create a storyboard—a series of sketches that outline the sequence of activities—of the story. Add text as appropriate to make the memoir understandable. Build tension, create tone, and add drama with words and typeface as well as with illustration.

Resources

Internet

For more information, connect to:

Gene Yang's Web site includes a strong rationale for the use of comics in education. humblecomics.com/

The National Association of Comics Art Educators provides lesson plans and related links for educators. teachingcomics.org/

Additional information about the Monkey King and Chinese studies einaudi.cornell.edu/curriculum/monkey/
kennedy-center.org/pwttv

Books by Gene Yang

American Born Chinese (First Second, 2006).

Gordon Yamamoto & the King of the Geeks (SLG Publishing, 2004).

Loyola Chin & the San Peligran Order (SLG Publishing, 2004).

Rosary Comic Book: Includes the Luminous Mysteries (Pauline Books & Media, 2003).

Three Angels (with Thien Pham) (First Second, FORTHCOMING Spring 2008).