

## Book Rationale

**School:** Arrowhead

**Teacher:** Freeburg, Johansen, Judd, Vacek

**Title:** *American Born Chinese* (ISBN-10 1596431520)

**Author:** Gene Luen Yang

**Course:** Modern Literature

**Approximate date(s) book will be used:**

**Semester 2**

- ❑ **The entire class will study this book, but students may choose an alternative.**
- ❑ **Some other appropriate books an individual student might read in place of this book:**  
Alternate books may include Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* and Laurence Yep's *Dragonwings*.
- ❑ **Ways in which the book is especially appropriate for students in Modern Literature:**  
American Born Chinese deals with the concepts of assimilation, friendship, and the struggle to be proud of, and accept, who you are in the face of the pressures of a typical American high school. It also deals with racism, prejudice, and stereotypes.
- ❑ **Way in which the book is especially pertinent to the objectives of this course or unit:**  
The book is a graphic novel, and thus represents a genre the course has not included until now. The theme of assimilation is one all students can relate to, and the text is very contemporary (2006).
- ❑ **Special problems that might arise in relation to the book and some planned activities that handle these problems:**  
One of the character's relatives is a collection of Asian stereotypes. The character fully shows the vile nature of stereotyping, but is based on real-life examples of late 19th/early 20th century imagery that accompanied the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the World War II Japanese-American internment camps.

Classroom discussion will help students deal with these topics.

### ❑ **Summary of the book:**

Graphic novels that focus on nonwhite characters are exceedingly rare in American comics. Enter *American Born Chinese*, a well-crafted work that aptly explores issues of self-image, cultural identity, transformation, and self-acceptance. In a series of three linked tales, the central characters are introduced: Jin Wang, a teen who meets with ridicule and social isolation when his family moves from San Francisco's Chinatown to an exclusively white suburb; Danny, a popular blond, blue-eyed high school jock whose social status is jeopardized when his goofy, embarrassing Chinese cousin, Chin-Kee, enrolls at his high school; and the Monkey King who, unsatisfied with his current sovereign, desperately longs to be elevated to the status of a god. Their stories converge into a satisfying coming-of-age novel that aptly blends traditional Chinese fables and legends with bathroom humor, action figures, and playground politics. Yang's crisp line drawings, linear panel arrangement, and muted colors provide a strong visual complement to the textual narrative. Like Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Laurence Yep's *Dragonwings*, this novel explores the impact of the American dream on those outside the dominant culture in a finely wrought story that is an effective combination of humor and drama.

□ **Awards/ Reviews for this book:**

Michael Printz Award Winner, *Best in Young Adult Fiction*

National Book Award Finalist

American Library Association *Best Book for Young Adults*

Publisher's Weekly *Best Book of the Year*

School Library Journal *Best Book of the Year*

Booklist *Editors' Choice Book*

San Francisco Chronicle *Best Book of the Year*

Amazon.com *Best Graphic Novel of the Year*