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TeachingWithComics.com and I can be found on social media @historycomics - Tim Smyth



American Born Chinese

Gene Luen Yang

Discussion Questions:

1. What does it mean to be "All-American"?
2. After reading the book, go back and discuss how the story of the Monkey King paralleled that of Jin Wang. (For example, on p20, the Monkey King now recognizes his own smell. Why? Later, compare this to Jin's transformation into and out of Danny on p. 214).
3. Why do you think so many people want to immigrate to the United States? How does this tie into the idea of the American Dream? Why is FOB an insult?

4. Ethnic stereotypes play a large role in this book - discuss their impact on both the characters and you as a reader.
5. Pp. 55-85 Tze-Yo-Tzuh - what is his message to the Monkey King? What is the message to the reader?

Brief Teaching Recommendations for Educators and Readers

1. As you read through the book, keep a journal detailing the parallels between the Monkey King and Jin Wang's lives.
2. P. 102 - idioms. Define the term and come up with as many examples as possible. Choose one to draw in a literal interpretation. See if a classmate can guess the idiom.
3. P. 133-160 Morality story. What is the moral of this story? Create your own morality story in a short comic.
4. This story is a memoir; therefore, identity of self is a large part of this story. Write a short memoir about a time in your life when you felt like an outsider or questioned who you are/want to be. Make an illustration of this moment to summarize your feelings.
5. Rewrite one of the moments in the book that you wish you could change. How would this change alter the message in the story?

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[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4](#) Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful

* [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5](#) Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

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A Wrinkle In Time

Madeleine L'Engle/Hope Larson

Discussion Questions

1. Ever have a day/week like Meg does in the beginning of the story? How do you cope?
2. Visual Evidence - throughout the story, some panels are shaded differently than others. What meaning do you think the artist, Hope Larson, was trying to illustrate through this contrast?
3. Why did Meg and Charles Wallace pretend to be dumb? Why do we sometimes put on a false facade to fit in?
4. Mrs. Who gives quotes throughout the book - which is your favorite? Why? How do these quotes support the themes expressed at those moments in the story?
5. P. 140 describes a fifth dimension and time travel - do you think this theory or similar ones are possible?
6. What do you think about IT's perfect world? Would you want to live in that type of world? Why or why not? Why do you think some people would want this type of governance? Is equality being exactly the same? What should equality look like?

Brief Teaching Recommendations for Educators and Readers (Note - this book presents exciting opportunities to have cross-curricular lessons between Language Arts, social studies, and Science).

1. Conduct a text to text comparison between a scene in the prose book and one in the graphic novel. What are the advantages and limitations of each format? (Two possible examples from the graphic novel can be found on pages 121-134 - when Mrs. Whatsit transforms, or p. 104 when they tesseract.)
2. On pp. 157-158 - several well-known historical persons are discussed as being fighters for earth against IT. What other individual from history would you choose to fight against the darkness? Why? Draw your choice as a superhero. What would their powers be?
3. Pp. 356-357 - In what ways is life like a sonnet? Write a sonnet about your life (real or imagined).

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Real Friends/Best Friends

Shannon Hale and LeUyen Pham

Discussion Questions

1. What is a memoir? What are the advantages to telling a personal story in graphic novel form?
2. Throughout the stories there is a repetition of, "Everyone needs a friend." What is a real friend? A best friend? What characteristics are needed? How does having a friend cause Shannon to be different? Does she feel braver? More imaginative? Confident? Strong?
3. How is Shannon different when she does not feel like she has a friend? Compare this to how her older sister, Jenny, or Vance act when excluded. Explore the various ways people may react when not feeling like they fit in: with anxiety, with anger, by lying or hiding, with repetitive behaviors.
4. The Group. Discuss cliques/social hierarchy at school and home. Why do the girls follow along with Jen and the group rules? What is the danger in walking away?
5. What do Zara and Veronica teach Shannon about being cool and being a friend? Does their popularity come from exclusion? How does this change Shannon? Change the playground atmosphere? Change Jen? How does Shannon carry this influence into her next year of school?
6. What is the significance of Shannon choosing the classes that she wants, instead of the classes the group chose together? Why is she hopeful rather than afraid? What has Shannon learned about friendship?
7. What is the significance of Shannon's imaginative world? Should real friends support and value this talent? How do her daydreams and stories parallel her experiences in real life?

Brief Teaching Recommendations for Educators and Readers

1. Write a short memoir of a time in your life about you and your friends. Turn it into a comic.
2. Is Shannon a good friend? If you were Shannon's friend, choose a place in the book to give her advice about dealing with the group, or being a friend to others. Redraw the page(s) that you decided to change.
3. Sometimes navigating social expectations is confusing to Shannon. She repeatedly references "the rules" and gets frustrated by them constantly changing. Choose a rule that you have also struggled with or one that you have successfully navigated and write down a piece of advice for others. As a class, combine your rules as a guide to positive relationships.
4. Write your own guide to being a friend. What qualities do you think are needed in order to be a good friend to others? Include qualities you look for in others or that you feel you show to others.

This memoir explores friendship dynamics in the middle grades, so the most relevant core standards for that age group is listed here:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1](#) Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.2](#) Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.3](#) Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.4](#) Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.5](#) Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.6](#) Explain how an author develops the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text.

Speak

Laurie Halse Anderson and Emily Carroll

FOR A MORE INDEPTH TEACHER GUIDE, SEE

<https://www.mackidsschoolandlibrary.com/teachers-guide-speak-the-graphic-novel/>

Discussion Questions

1. Ask the students to create a list of the top ten lies people have told them about high school. Allow students to share their ideas with the class. Compare to those given in the graphic novel.
2. Choose a favorite part of the graphic novel and compare it to the prose book - example... p. 103 in the graphic novel and the sculpture.... The rape by IT.... the janitor's closet....
3. On page 275, how does Mr. Freeman's advice to Melinda about the tree convey the theme of the story? Can you connect this to other examples in the book?
4. From pp. 297-300, Melinda struggles with the question, "Was I raped?" What are the myths about rape that are revealed here? What is the significance of her internal conflict?
5. On PP. 347-363 - how does this section revisit the images and symbols used throughout the book? How does Melinda regain her voice and her power?

Brief Teaching Recommendations for Educators and Readers

1.A Call to Action Melinda finds herself unable to speak because she fears how others might view her following the rape. Sadly, the victims of sexual assault often feel powerless a second time in trying to deal with the aftermath of their attack. With the #MeToo movement, many are calling for more attention to the issue, more support for the victims, and more accountability for the assailants. Ask students to research the issue of sexual assault and the movement by reading credible print and digital sources. Students should then draft a speech proposing initiatives in schools, the community, or in the nation that are intended to educate people on sexual assault, or they can write a speech asking the school board, the town council, or the government to implement preventative measures, provide resources for victims, pass legislation, etc. Using the visual medium, students can also create awareness posters, videos, etc.

2. Socratic Seminar - the story begins with Melinda saying, "I am an outcast," which sets the tone of isolation in the story. Consider how the graphic novel depicts this isolation. Assign students the task of recording specific examples of this isolation throughout the graphic novel. (These examples can be both verbal and nonverbal, such as Melinda being hunched over, facial expression, etc.). Create a Socratic Seminar class and tell students to come prepared with their textual and visual evidence. What is the impact of each of these pieces of evidence on Melinda, both positive and negative?

3. Research allusions - throughout the story, there are references to famous fictional and real-life figures that are meant to parallel Melinda's experiences and emotions. Give students a list of these references: Dracula, Maya Angelou, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Hester Prynne, Ariel, Gregor Mendel, Pablo Picasso, and the Suffragettes. In pairs, or individually, have students research one of these references and present their findings to the class. How do the depictions of these figures connect to Melinda's journey?

4. What happens next? Speak ends with Melinda stating, "I'm not going to let it kill me, I can grow." Ask students to brainstorm the next chapter of the book - perhaps the very next day or years in the future. Have them create a comic of this chapter or illustrate one particular scene.

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Olympians

George O'Connor

Discussion Questions

1. Why do we assign human traits to the gods? What are those traits?
2. It's been said that modern superheroes are the new gods - they have taken the place of the Greek gods. Do you agree? What modern superheroes have their roots in Greek mythology?
3. What morals/lessons from these stories can still apply to today? Why do you think that Greek Mythology has such a large impact on our current world?
4. Which god would you want to be? Why?

Brief Teaching Recommendations for Educators and Readers

1. Create a new god for the world of today, complete with an origin story. What obstacle(s) would they have to overcome? Draw this new god. What powers would they have? Where would they live? What would their outfit look like? (Or even create yourself as this new god. What would your quest be?)
2. Research the story of the god depicted in one of the myths in this series. What would you have added to the comic you read? Draw this additional scene. Possible research sources - <https://www.theoi.com/greek-mythology/greek-gods.html> , <https://www.greekmythology.com/> https://www.ducksters.com/history/ancient_greek_mythology.php <https://pantheon.org/mythology/greek/>
3. The myths convey lessons to the readers, but not all of the messages are necessarily positive. Explore the stories more deeply- pull evidence from the story and explain the lessons, cultural beliefs, or values that you feel is being taught or criticized through the story.
4. Create a Greek Mythology family tree as a class, or as an individual. For each, include their name, a symbol, a succinct summary, and a picture of how you feel they should be depicted. This can be done in a video format, or a traditional bulletin board form.
5. Research to see if there are similar gods in different cultures to the ones you read about in the Greek Mythology series. What do these parallels reveal about people and what we value or question in our world? Be sure to consider symbols, obstacles, and their explanations of natural phenomenon.

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Be Prepared

Vera Brosgol

Discussion Questions

1. React to the title, “Be Prepared.” The camp uses this saying as a motto, but what does it mean? What should Vera be prepared for? Does camp actually succeed in preparing her, and the other campers, for different experiences in life? Explain.
2. In what ways can our cultural identity isolate us from others? When has this happened in your life? What are some of the current cultural norms associated with being an average “American”? (For Vera it is Pizza Hut, Carvel ice cream cakes, and summer camp).
3. Vera very much feels like an outsider, but she is not alone in feeling this way. What can you infer from Gregor or Kira’s facial expressions? Did you feel sorry for them? Angry at Vera for not reaching out to them?
4. P. 168 - how did her nighttime walk help Vera to realize what was important and therefore change her perspective? What is significant about the moose? How does this experience allow her final week of camp to be enjoyable?
5. Predict what will happen when the family moves to London. How might her experiences at camp help her adjust to her new home?

Brief Teaching Recommendations for Educators and Readers

1. This story is a memoir. Create a memoir based on a time in your life that taught you a meaningful lesson or when you felt left out. Draw a scene from your memoir.
2. Draw two images of yourself - one of how you see yourself and another depicting how you think others view you. Give specifics in your drawing - clothes, body language, accessories, background, etc. What makes you, you?
3. Language is a social construct. Research the significance of language. Why is it so important that the campers speak Russian while there? Do you speak a second language? Do your classmates? Do languages have the ability to bring people together? To marginalize them? Look at Vera’s reaction to the speak Russian rule- why does she have difficulty following that rule at times?
4. The novel celebrates and explores the Russian Orthodox culture. While it may seem different to outsiders, it is a source of pride for Vera. Research one of the Russian symbols or stories depicted and discuss how these tales of struggle give strength to Vera and the rest of the campers.

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