American Born Chinese

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF GENE LUEN YANG

Yang's parents, like Jin's in the novel, emigrated to the United States as college students and met in the San Jose State University library during their time in graduate school (though Yang draws on details like this from his own family history, *American Born Chinese* isn't autobiographical). His parents encouraged him to get a college degree in something practical, despite Yang's intense love of comics and his desire to be an animator for Disney. He received a degree in computer science from the University of California, Berkeley. Though Yang worked as a computer engineer for several years, he ultimately decided that teaching was his calling and began teaching computer science to high school students. In the mid-1990s, he began self-publishing his own comics, all of which were well-received. Though *American Born Chinese* is his most famous work, he also wrote the series *Avatar: The Last Airbender* for Dark Horse Comics, as well as a Chinese character featured in DC Comics' *New Superman*. Yang is vocal about the educational value of comics and graphic novels. During his master's degree, he created an online comic to teach students math. *American Born Chinese* is also influenced greatly by Yang's Christian beliefs, which manifest as the very Christian God-like figure of Tze-Yo-Tzuh.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

American Born Chinese draws from the long history of racism and discrimination against Chinese immigrants in the United States. The first major influx of Chinese immigrants occurred during the California Gold Rush beginning in 1848. As the U.S. entered an economic recession in the years after, racial animosity increased. After several massacres of Chinese miners, which were incited in part by the perception that Chinese immigrants had jobs when white Americans didn't, the U.S. passed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which banned Chinese immigration almost entirely. Feeding this was the rise of "Yellow Peril," or the fear of white westerners that Asian people were an existential threat to Western culture. The imagery of political cartoons from this time period is the basis for the character Chin-Kee in *American Born Chinese*—many 19th-century anti-Asian cartoons featured Chinese characters in traditional Chinese dress, with exaggerated features and a long queue like Chin-Kee's. This racist image persists today, especially in American popular culture. Yang cites several more recent pop culture happenings as inspiration for Chin-Kee, including a 2001 political cartoon by cartoonist Pat Oliphant in which Uncle Sam receives "crispy fried cat gizzards with noodles" from a Chin-Kee-esque Chinese man, as well as William Hung's 2004 audition on *American Idol*. He sang Ricky Martin's "She Bangs," just like Chin-Kee does in the novel, and commentators and analysts insist that the cult following he amassed afterwards was mostly due to the fact that Hung and his performance embodied negative stereotypes against Asian people.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The literary figure of the Monkey King, or Sun Wukong, has his roots in the legends of the Chinese Chu Kingdom, which existed from 700-223 B.C.E. He's best known, however, for his role in the 16th-century classic Chinese novel *Journey to the West* by Wu Cheng'en. Yang elaborates on the Monkey King's story for *American Born Chinese*, but the basics remain the same: the Monkey King is born from a stone; learns the arts of combat, transformation, and immortality; and crowns himself "Great Sage Equal to Heaven." The Buddha traps him under a mountain when he rebels against Heaven and, 500 years later, the Monkey King helps the novel's main character, Tang Sanzang, journey west to retrieve sūtras (Buddhist sacred texts) from Central Asia and India. Yang has written a number of other graphic novels that explore similar themes or topics to *American Born Chinese*, such as *The Eternal Smile* with Derek Kirk Kim and *Boxers* and *Saints*, a two-volume work that tells the story of the anti-imperialist Boxer Rebellion in China. Other novels that deal with the Chinese immigrant experience include *Girl in Translation* by Jean Kwok and Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*. Graphic novels that deal with similar issues of identity, fitting in, and stereotypes include *El Deafo* by Cece Bell, *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi, and George Takei's graphic memoir *They Called us Enemy*, which tells of his experience as a child in a Japanese internment camp.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** American Born Chinese
- **When Written:** 2001-2006
- **Where Written:** California
- **When Published:** 2006 as a print book (it began as a webcomic)
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Graphic Novel; Young Adult Novel
- **Setting:** The mythical Heaven and Flower-Fruit Mountain; the California suburbs
- **Climax:** The Monkey King reveals that he's actually Chin-Kee.
- **Antagonist:** Timmy, Peter Garbinsky, and Greg; Broadly,

racism, prejudice, and self-hatred

- **Point of View:** Third Person in Danny and the Monkey King's chapters; First Person in Jin's chapters

EXTRA CREDIT

Beyond Superheroes. As graphic novels have grown in popularity and become a "respectable" medium, educators have realized their capacity to engage reluctant or struggling readers. Because of this, in addition to graphic novels like *American Born Chinese* that were originally published in the medium, it's possible to find graphic novel adaptations of classic works like *Beowulf*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

PLOT SUMMARY

The novel begins with the story of the Monkey King, a deity who reigns over monkeys on Flower-Fruit Mountain. One night, smells from a party in Heaven waft down to Flower-Fruit Mountain, and since the Monkey King loves parties, he decides to go. When he gets to the door of the party, the guard denies him entrance since he's a monkey and isn't wearing **shoes**. The Monkey King is embarrassed, so he beats up the other deities at the party. Back home, he's suddenly aware of his fur's smell. The next day, he declares that all monkeys in his kingdom must wear shoes, and locks himself in his chambers. After 80 days studying kung-fu in solitude, he achieves the four major disciplines of invulnerability and the four major disciplines of bodily form, which means he can't die and can shape-shift. The other monkeys are ecstatic when the Monkey King emerges, but they're puzzled by his appearance: he looks somehow human. One monkey offers his king a scroll from Heaven, which reads that the Monkey King has been sentenced to death for trespassing upon Heaven. The Monkey King says this is a mistake: he's no longer the Monkey King and is now The Great Sage, Equal to Heaven.

The Monkey King storms off to announce his new name. Ao-Kuang, Dragon King of the Eastern Sea, laughs at the Monkey King's pronouncement and tries to proceed with the execution, but when the Monkey King stomps on him, he accepts the name. The Monkey King goes all around Heaven, brutally forcing everyone to accept his new name. Finally, the gods, goddesses, demons, and spirits go to the emissaries of Tze-Yo-Tzuh (the creator of the world) to report the Monkey King as a menace. A few days later, Tze-Yo-Tzuh interrupts the Monkey King. He explains that he created the Monkey King. Incensed, the Monkey King speeds away through the universe. When he reaches five golden pillars at the end of all that is, he carves his name on one and urinates on it. After he returns to Tze-Yo-Tzuh, Tze-Yo-Tzuh offers the Monkey King his hand: one finger bears the Monkey King's name and a spot of urine: his *fingers* were the five pillars. Tze-Yo-Tzuh insists that the Monkey King cannot escape him and is supposed to be a monkey. When the Monkey King insults Tze-Yo-Tzuh again, Tze-Yo-Tzuh collapses a mountain on the Monkey King and traps him inside so he can't practice kung-fu.

500 years later, Tze-Yo-Tzuh chooses a monk named Wong Lai-Tsao to carry three parcels to the west and explains that the Monkey King will be Wong Lai-Tsao's first disciple. Wong Lai-Tsao journeys to the Monkey King's mountain and tries to convince the Monkey King to help him, but the Monkey King is derisive. The Monkey King only begins to reconsider when two demons start to roast Wong Lai-Tsao on a fire—and Wong Lai-Tsao points out that the Monkey King can free himself if he releases kung-fu and returns to his true form. With a sigh, the Monkey King turns back into a monkey and beats up the demons. He agrees to accompany Wong Lai-Tsao and leaves his shoes behind.

At the same time, a young boy named Jin Wang tells his story. Jin's mother and father immigrated to the U.S. from China and met at school in San Francisco. They lived in Chinatown and Jin was born there. Now, Jin spends his time blissfully playing **Transformers** with other Chinese boys in the apartment complex. Jin's mother goes to an herbalist once per week and takes Jin with her. One day, the herbalist's wife asks Jin what he wants to be when he grows up. Jin says he wants to be a Transformer, but according to his mom, that's impossible. The herbalist's wife says it actually *is* possible—if Jin is willing to forfeit his soul. Not long after this, Jin's parents move to the suburbs and Jin starts third grade. His teacher, Mrs. Greeder, says his name incorrectly, says he came from China, and tells a concerned classmate named Timmy that Jin stopped eating dogs as soon as he arrived in America. The only other Asian student is a Japanese girl named Suzy Nakamura, and many students believe that Jin and Suzy are related or that they'll be married when Suzy turns 13. School is lonely for Jin. Boys continue to tease Jin about eating dogs, though one boy, Greg, sometimes stands up for Jin. A bully named Peter becomes Jin's friend, but their friendship consists mostly of games that hurt or humiliate Jin. Peter moves away when Jin is in fifth grade, and a few weeks later, a boy named Wei-Chen from Taiwan joins Jin's class. For some reason, Jin wants to beat Wei-Chen up. When Wei-Chen approaches Jin at lunch, Jin rudely tells Wei-Chen to speak English and that they can't be friends. However, Jin changes his mind about Wei-Chen when Wei-Chen pulls out a Transformer toy, and the two become best friends.

Alongside Jin's story, the novel takes the format of a sitcom called *Everyone Ruvs Chin-Kee*. It's accompanied by a **laugh track that indicates laughter or clapping from an audience**. The scene opens in a suburban living room, where a white boy named Danny studies chemistry with a girl named Melanie. Danny is aghast when his mother announces that cousin Chin-Kee will be here soon and will accompany Danny to school.

Chin-Kee bursts through the door. He's dressed in traditional Chinese clothes and has yellow skin, buckteeth, and a long queue. Chin-Kee mixes up his r's and his l's as he compliments Melanie's bust and salivates. At school, Chin-Kee embarrasses Danny at every turn. He answers every question in class correctly, eats "crispy-fried cat gizzards with noodle" for lunch, and pees in the Coke can of Steve, an older boy on the basketball team whom Danny admires. Chin-Kee goes to the library after school while Danny attends detention, tries unsuccessfully to ask Melanie out again, and goes to the gym. Steve sits down with Danny and Danny shares that every year when Chin-Kee visits, his classmates start to think of him not as Danny, but just as Chin-Kee's cousin. Because of this, Danny has switched schools every year since eighth grade. Steve kindly says that kids at this school are nicer than that, as no one teases him for being overweight, and offers to buy Danny a Coke. Danny angrily asks if that's so he can pee in it, and storms away.

When Jin is in seventh grade, he falls madly in love with a classmate named Amelia. When he confides in Wei-Chen about his crush, Wei-Chen initially teases him for liking a girl at all, but Wei-Chen soon begins dating Suzy. Wei-Chen and Suzy often tease Jin about the fact that he can't speak or behave normally around Amelia. Despite this, Wei-Chen pushes Jin to volunteer to feed some temporary classroom pets after school when Amelia raises her hand, but his outburst causes the teacher to assign Wei-Chen feeding duties instead. That afternoon, Jin fixates on Greg's curly hairstyle, since Greg sits next to Amelia in science and she seems to like him. Jin gets a perm so his hair looks like Greg's, which shocks Suzy and Wei-Chen at school the next morning.

As Wei-Chen and Amelia feed the pets after school, they accidentally get locked in a closet together. While they wait for Jin to figure out what happened, Wei-Chen tells Amelia about how good and kind of a friend Jin is to him. When Jin opens the closet, he feels a jolt of confidence coming from his curly hair and asks Amelia out. She agrees. Since Jin's parents are extremely strict, he pleads with Wei-Chen to lie to Jin's parents about where Jin is so he can go on the date. After Wei-Chen grudgingly agrees, Jin and Amelia decide to go to the movies. Since they can't drive, Jin lets Amelia ride on his handlebars as he bikes up the hill to the theater. By the time they arrive, Jin's armpits reek—his parents don't see any reason for Jin to have deodorant. Near the end of the movie, Jin feels a jolt of confidence. Remembering the advice of his cousin Charlie, Jin rushes to the bathroom, scrubs dry soap into his armpits, and returns to the theater to put an arm around Amelia. She leans into him. As they leave the theater, Jin sees with horror that there are soap bubbles coming through his shirt and onto Amelia's shoulder. Thankfully, Amelia doesn't notice, and they get milkshakes. Greg sees them as they leave.

At school the next day, as Jin prepares to ask Amelia out again, Greg pulls Jin aside and asks him for a favor: to stay away from Amelia. Greg says that he's not interested in Amelia, but he's concerned for her social standing going into high school and doesn't think Jin is right for her. Confused and hurt, Jin agrees, but he regrets it immediately. His anger simmers until later, he approaches Amelia to try again—but loses his nerve when he sees Greg. Despondent, he joins Suzy outside. She's close to tears and shares that over the weekend, she went to a party for one of her friends from Japanese school, but realized quickly that the friend didn't want Suzy to be there. Suzy says she was extremely embarrassed and today, when Timmy called her a "chink" (a racist slur against Asian people) she realized she feels embarrassed like that all the time. Inexplicably, Jin leans over and kisses her. Suzy punches him in the face. Later, Wei-Chen goes to Jin's house and asks why Jin would do something like that. Jin angrily tells Wei-Chen that Wei-Chen isn't good enough for Suzy, and Wei-Chen punches Jin in the face. That night, Jin convinces himself that what he told Wei-Chen is true. He dreams of the herbalist's wife, who says that Jin has finally forfeited his soul. She asks what Jin wants to be. When Jin gets up to use the bathroom, he turns on the light and sees that he's white. He names his new self Danny.

Back in the sitcom *Everyone Ruvs Chin-Kee*, Danny (Jin) goes to the library to find Chin-Kee dancing on a table and singing "She Bangs" by Ricky Martin. Mortified, Danny drags Chin-Kee out of the library by his queue, tells him to leave him alone, and punches him again and again. Chin-Kee takes the abuse, but then fights back with kung-fu moves, all of which have names that come from classic Chinese restaurant dishes. After Chin-Kee appears to emerge victorious, Danny throws one final punch at Chin-Kee—and knocks his head off to reveal the Monkey King. The Monkey King returns to his monkey form and then makes Danny revert to his true form as Jin. The Monkey King explains who he is and that Wei-Chen is his son and an emissary of Tze-Yo-Tzuh. Wei-Chen's test of virtue was to live among humans without vice for 40 years. His test went well for three years, until Wei-Chen lied to Jin's mother. After that, he told the Monkey King that he was uninterested in serving Tze-Yo-Tzuh and finds humans to be selfish and horrible. When he began refusing the Monkey King's visits, the Monkey King started visiting Jin instead. The Monkey King says that he didn't do this to punish Jin; he visited Jin to act "as a signpost to [his] soul." Jin calls after the retreating Monkey King and asks what he's supposed to do now. The Monkey King says that he would've saved himself years of imprisonment in a mountain had he realized how good it is to be a monkey, and leaves Jin a business card for a Chinese restaurant.

Jin goes to the restaurant and orders pearl milk tea every day after school for the next month. Finally, one night, Wei-Chen pulls up outside in his cool car, blasting loud music and smoking. Jin tells Wei-Chen that he met the Monkey King and invites Wei-Chen inside. He can see the small, scared monkey inside of

Wei-Chen. In the restaurant, Jin tells Wei-Chen about the Monkey King's visit and says that he's really just trying to apologize. After thinking for a moment, Wei-Chen says he knows where they can go to get better pearl milk tea. The boys talk and laugh together late into the night.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Jin Wang/Danny – The novel's protagonist. Jin is a Chinese American boy whose mother and father emigrated from China to San Francisco's Chinatown, where Jin is born. Jin spends most of his childhood playing with his **Transformer** toys with other boys in his apartment complex. Not long before Jin's family moves to the suburbs, the wife of Jin's mother's herbalist tells Jin something that sticks with him: that he can be anything he wants as long as he's willing to sacrifice his soul. In the suburbs, Jin is one of only a couple Asian students and experiences overt racism. This is extremely difficult and isolating, and Jin dedicates himself to become as American and as white as possible. Early on, this means that he "befriends" bullies and takes sandwiches for lunch rather than dumplings or foods that his classmates find disgusting. By the time Jin is in fifth grade and Wei-Chen, a Taiwanese boy, join his class, Jin is so ashamed of his own ethnicity that he wants to beat Wei-Chen up. The two quickly become friends, however—they both love Transformers—and in Wei-Chen's eyes, Jin is good and kind. This assessment is called into question in seventh grade, when Jin falls in love with Amelia. To woo her, Jin perms his **hair** so that he looks like his blond and popular classmate Greg, and bullies Wei-Chen into lying for him so he can go on a date with Amelia. At school the next day, Greg asks Jin to not date Amelia because being associated with him could ruin her reputation, and Jin snaps. He kisses Wei-Chen's girlfriend, Suzy, and insults Wei-Chen instead of apologizing. That night, the herbalist's wife comes to Jin in a dream and turns him into Danny, a handsome white boy. Danny is obsessed with being popular, so yearly visits of his Chinese cousin, Chin-Kee, pose major problems for him. Chin-Kee embodies many negative, racist stereotypes about Chinese people, and his antics cause Danny's classmates to think of him only as Chin-Kee's cousin. When other students are kind to Danny, he lashes out and only seems interested in wooing his love interest, Melanie. Danny eventually discovers that Chin-Kee is actually the Monkey King and Wei-Chen's father, and that Wei-Chen is an emissary of Tze-Yo-Tzuh who was sent on an earthly mission to live without vice for 40 years. Danny reassumes his form as Jin and seems to take the Monkey King's advice to take pride in who he is to heart. As Jin, he makes up with Wei-Chen.

The Monkey King/Chin-Kee – The Monkey King is a deity who rules over monkeys on Flower-Fruit Mountain in the world created by Tze-Yo-Tzuh. The Monkey King knows many disciplines of kung-fu. He's a kind leader, and is very social. Because of this, he's thrilled when he smells a dinner party up in Heaven, but when he arrives at the party, he's humiliated that the guard turns him away for being a monkey and not wearing **shoes**. Beginning at this point, the Monkey King demonstrates that when people are rude to him, he reacts with anger, violence, and rudeness. After declaring that all monkeys in his kingdom must wear shoes, the Monkey King spends 80 days studying kung-fu so he cannot be killed and can manipulate his form. He uses these skills to appear more human, and he declares himself The Great Sage, Equal of Heaven. As he travels Heaven to announce his new name, he hurts and intimidates others. Because of this, Heaven's residents call on Tze-Yo-Tzuh to do something. The Monkey King is derisive of Tze-Yo-Tzuh's insistence that the Monkey King should take pride in being a monkey, so Tze-Yo-Tzuh imprisons the Monkey King under a mountain for 500 years. The Monkey King frees himself by returning to his true form so that he can help Wong Lai-Tsao escape being dinner for demons. He agrees to take off his shoes, and embraces both his monkey identity and Tze-Yo-Tzuh. Later, the Monkey King's son, Wei-Chen, becomes an emissary for Tze-Yo-Tzuh and goes to Earth on a mission to live without vice for 40 years. After Wei-Chen refuses to see his father following his Chinese friend Jin's transformation into the white Danny, the Monkey King assumes the persona of Chin-Kee so he can visit Jin. Chin-Kee is an amalgamation of many racist Chinese stereotypes: he has buckteeth, mixes up his r's and his l's, lusts after American women, and knows all the answers in class. Because of this, he humiliates Danny until, finally, Danny punches Chin-Kee's head off to reveal the Monkey King. At this point, the Monkey King returns Danny to his true form and shares his story with Jin. He encourages Jin to learn the same lesson that he did: that it's impossible and unfulfilling to be anyone but one's true self.

Wei-Chen Sun – A Taiwanese boy who moves to Jin's neighborhood when they're in fifth grade. He wears sweatpants, a collared robot shirt, and large, thick glasses when he's in elementary school. Though Jin is initially cold and cruel to Wei-Chen because he represents the Asian identity that makes Jin a target for bullying, the two boys soon become best friends due to their shared love of **Transformers**. Wei-Chen is an extremely kind, generous, and giving individual. Though Jin accuses Wei-Chen at several points of acting like a F.O.B. ("fresh off the boat," or a new immigrant), Wei-Chen gradually embraces California and even starts dating a Japanese American classmate named Suzy. He often encourages Jin to do and be his best, which includes encouraging Jin to speak to Amelia. In a conversation with Amelia, Wei-Chen insists that Jin is one of the kindest people he knows, as Jin's embarrassment over Wei-Chen's accent doesn't hinder their friendship. He does this both because he believes what he says about Jin to be true, and because he knows that speaking about Jin in this complimentary way will pique Amelia's interest. However, Wei-

Chen and Jin's friendship dissolves when, enraged by Greg's racist treatment, Jin kisses Suzy. He then tells a distraught Wei-Chen that Suzy deserves someone better, and specifically, someone who isn't a F.O.B. Later, the Monkey King reveals that Wei-Chen is actually his son and a monkey, sent to Earth by Tze-Yo-Tzuh to live without vice for 40 years. Wei-Chen's time went well until Jin's insults, at which point Wei-Chen told the Monkey King that he's going to use his time on Earth to experience all the earthly delights it has to offer. He also implies that Jin's behavior showed him that humans are all selfish and vain, and therefore he has no interest in serving them and thinks that Tze-Yo-Tzuh is foolish for holding humans in high regard. When Jin reconnects with Wei-Chen in high school, Wei-Chen drives a cool car, blasts bass-heavy music, and smokes cigarettes. He seems to accept Jin's apology, and the novel leaves open the possibility that Wei-Chen will recommit to his quest as an emissary.

Tze-Yo-Tzuh – The creator of the world in the Monkey King's story. He's a tall individual who takes the form of a human, with red flowing robes, long hair and beard, and a tall curved staff. He introduces himself to the Monkey King as someone who was, is, and "shall forever be"—that is, he's everywhere, both in terms of space and time. He demonstrates this by announcing that he created the Monkey King and, when the Monkey King flies to the end of all that is and urinates on five pillars marking the end of the universe, Tze-Yo-Tzuh shows the Monkey King that the five pillars were actually his five fingers. When he speaks to the Monkey King, he does so slowly, wisely, and calmly. He insists that the Monkey King is being foolish by trying to be something other than a monkey, and says that he creates everything perfectly—so there's nothing the Monkey King needs to change about himself, and the Monkey King's desire to be a human is extremely silly. When the Monkey King refuses to accept this, Tze-Yo-Tzuh buries the Monkey King under a mountain of rock that keeps the Monkey King from practicing kung-fu. Five hundred years later, with the help of his emissaries, Tze-Yo-Tzuh sends the monk Wong Lai-Tsao on a quest and offers him the Monkey King as a disciple. This has the desired effect: with some coaxing, the Monkey King turns back into a monkey, agrees to serve Wong Lai-Tsao, and acts as a faithful emissary of Tze-Yo-Tzuh going forward.

Wong Lai-Tsao – A monk who, according to the narrator, isn't special in any notable way—he can't meditate for more than 20 minutes or fast for more than half a day. He does, however, devote himself to Tze-Yo-Tzuh. He emulates what he believes Tze-Yo-Tzuh would do by faithfully care for neighboring vagrants every day, despite their rudeness. This devotion and belief in Tze-Yo-Tzuh's love and positive regard culminates in Tze-Yo-Tzuh's emissaries sending Wong Lai-Tsao on a mission to carry three parcels to the west. One of the disciples that Tze-Yo-Tzuh promises Wong Lai-Tsao is the Monkey King. In his conversations with the Monkey King, Wong Lai-Tsao shows that he fully trusts in Tze-Yo-Tzuh's love, protection, and plan for his life—and he encourages the Monkey King to do the same. Wong Lai-Tsao is wise, and is able to make the Monkey King see that he has the power to free himself from the mountain trapping him, if only he accepts who and what he truly is.

Amelia Harris – A blond girl who goes to school with Jin beginning in third grade, but whom Jin only begins to take notice of her when they're in seventh grade. Amelia wears overalls over a tank top that reveals her bare shoulders, which excites Jin and triggers an intense crush on her. Jin shares with the reader that Amelia isn't especially pretty, speaks with a lisp, and has some dandruff, but this doesn't dull his affections for her. Amelia seems like a genuinely nice individual; she agrees to the movie date with Jin and appears to enjoy his company. However, when (unbeknownst to Amelia) Greg tells Jin to back off so Amelia's popularity doesn't suffer once they reach high school, Amelia doesn't stand up for Jin. Aside from being the only white character who treats Jin like a full person, there's little else defining about Amelia—she exists mostly as the object of Jin's romantic fantasies.

Greg – A blond boy with curly **hair** in Jin's class. When Jin first moves to the suburbs, Greg stands up for Jin when Timmy taunts and harasses him, and though Greg seems potentially interested in getting to know Jin, he also puts a lot of stock into maintaining his social status. This is why, in seventh grade, Greg stands up for Amelia when Timmy sexually harasses her, but later tells Greg to stay away from Amelia to preserve Amelia's popularity. In this way, Greg shows himself to be someone who may know how to behave kindly, but he allows social pressure—much of it racist—to dictate how he chooses to act. Greg's hair is the inspiration for Jin to perm his own hair, and it's likely that Greg is the basis for Jin's white persona as Danny later in the novel.

Suzy Nakamura – The only other Asian student in Jin's elementary school before Wei-Chen arrives from Taiwan. Suzy is Japanese American and wears high-waisted pants and a striped shirt. At first, she and Jin ignore each other because their classmates believe that being the only Asian students means Suzy and Jin must either be related or engaged to be married. Her personality only begins to come out later when, in seventh grade, she begins dating Wei-Chen. At this point, she becomes more of a friend to Jin and teases him about his inability to speak coherently to Amelia. Her teasing, however, is good-natured and not at all malicious. Suzy confides in Jin that their classmates' racism makes her feel somewhat embarrassed about being Asian all the time, which leads Jin to kiss Suzy without her permission. Being a self-possessed and confident individual, Suzy punches Jin in the face for this transgression.

Melanie – One of Danny's classmates and his crush. She's a beautiful, busty white girl who, even from the very beginning, seems far more interested in studying with Danny than she

does in being romantic with him. Melanie is concerned and put off when Danny's Chinese cousin, Chin-Kee, arrives and invades her personal space, but she later suggests that his overtures were somewhat flattering. When Danny attempts to apologize to Melanie for Chin-Kee's behavior and ask her out, Melanie is upfront about the fact that she'd like to remain friends and not take the step to becoming romantically involved. When Danny refuses to accept her answer, she rudely offers him a business card for her uncle, an orthodontist, whom she suggests Danny see on account of his buckteeth.

The Herbalist's Wife – While Jin still lives in San Francisco, he spends an afternoon every weekend with his mother at the herbalist's shop, sitting in the front with the herbalist's wife. The herbalist's wife is an ancient woman who busies herself on her abacus doing calculations until one day, she engages Jin in conversation and asks what he wants to be. When Jin shares his dreams of becoming a **Transformer** but suggests that this wish is impossible to fulfill, the herbalist's wife suggests this isn't entirely true—Jin can be anything he wants if he's willing to forfeit his soul. When Jin is in seventh grade, the herbalist's wife returns to him in a dream, declares that Jin has indeed given up his soul, and helps him transform into a white boy named Danny.

Ao-Kuang – The Dragon King of the Eastern Sea. In the Monkey King's story, Ao-Kuang is a fearsome god who is tasked with executing the Monkey King for trespassing upon Heaven. He's self-assured, as well as derisive and prejudiced against the Monkey King and monkeys in general—he snidely says that he called the Monkey King to him because no one in Heaven wanted to get fleas by journeying to Flower-Fruit Mountain. He refuses to take the Monkey King seriously until after the Monkey King thwarts the execution attempt and then becomes a giant and squashes Ao-Kuang. Nervous and scared, Ao-Kuang gives the Monkey King a magical cudgel as a parting gift.

Peter Garbinsky – A boy at Jin's elementary school who's a year older than Jin. He's hulking, unpopular, and a bully, known to many as "Peter the Eater" due to his habit of picking his nose and eating his boogers. Though Jin insists that he and Peter are friends, in reality, Peter threatens and intimidates Jin into hanging out and going along with whatever games Peter finds funny. Many of these entail Jin getting hurt or humiliated, and Jin seems sad and afraid whenever he's around Peter. Peter moves away over Christmas break when Jin is in fifth grade, ostensibly to live with his dad in Pennsylvania.

Jin's Mother – A librarian who emigrated from China during graduate school and met and married Jin's father the year after. Jin's mother prizes education and work ethic over anything else: she was attracted to Jin's father initially because of his thick glasses (which, in her mind, signal lots of studying) and tells Jin an old Chinese parable that makes it clear she believes it's important for children to receive as much education as possible. Since Jin and Danny are the same person, Jin's mother is also Danny's mother. However, she only appears as a voice from the next room in Danny's chapters.

Steve – A student and basketball player at Danny's high school. He's older than Danny and is somewhat overweight, but he's a happy, good-humored, and confident student. Steve seems to take genuine interest in both Danny and Danny's Chinese cousin, Chin-Kee, and he gives Danny a pep talk in which he insists that students at their school are better and kinder than to define Danny simply as Chin-Kee's cousin. Though Steve's concern and friendliness seem genuine, Danny still refuses to accept Steve's mentorship. Steve is also the unfortunate recipient of a joke in which Chin-Kee urinates in his can of Coke.

Jin's Father – An engineer who emigrated from China during graduate school. He wears thick glasses and, according to Jin's mother, has an impressive work ethic—which made him a desirable partner for her. He and his wife are extremely strict and ban Jin from dating until he has a master's degree. Due to the fact that Jin and Danny are the same person, Jin's father is also Danny's father—he just never appears as anything but a voice from the next room in those chapters.

The Emissaries of Tze-Yo-Tzuh – Tze-Yo-Tzuh's emissaries are the lion, the ox, the human, and the eagle. They function primarily as a group and have few defining characteristics as individuals aside from their differing forms. They take the form of vagrants in the final chapter of the Monkey King's story, and after testing the monk Wong Lai-Tsao, they send him on his journey to the west.

Mrs. Greeder – Jin's third grade teacher. Though Mrs. Greeder makes an attempt to defend Jin from a classmate's racist remark, she behaves in unwittingly racist ways herself when she mispronounces Jin's name and believes that since he's Chinese he must've come from China. Mrs. Greeder also validates Timmy's suggestion that Jin and other Chinese people regularly eat dogs.

Charlie – Jin's older cousin. Years ago, Charlie shared that the only way to get around their Chinese parents' unwillingness to buy their sons deodorant is to use powdered soap from a public restroom on their armpits. Jin takes this advice while on his movie date with Amelia and is embarrassed when soap bubbles start to come through his shirt.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Lao-Tzu – In the Monkey King's story, Lao-Tzu is the patron of immortality. Like many others, he laughs when the Monkey King announces his new name, but he stops laughing when the Monkey King transforms into a monkey dragon and scares him.

Yama – The caretaker of the underworld in the Monkey King's story. He laughs when the Monkey King visits to announce his new name, but changes his tune when the Monkey King clones himself to terrorize Yama.

The Jade Emperor – The ruler of the celestials in Heaven. He laughs and points when the Monkey King announces his new name, but when the Monkey King stabs him in the face with his new cudgel, he goes along with the Monkey King's demands.

Timmy – A hulking, racist classmate of Jin's. He bullies everyone no matter their race or sex; he sexually taunts Amelia in addition to bullying Jin about Chinese people eating dogs. Timmy often hangs out with Greg.

Chi Dao – An ancient monk who achieved legendary status by meditating until he turned to stone.

Jing Sze – An ancient monk who achieved legendary status by fasting for 14 months and smirking at Death for several of his final months.

Jiang Tao – An ancient monk who achieved legendary status through his sermons, which were eloquent enough to make even the bamboo weep and want to repent.

Mr. Graham – Jin's seventh grade science teacher.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

IDENTITY AND PREJUDICE

American Born Chinese tells three interweaving stories: those of the Monkey King, Jin Wang, and Danny. The Monkey king is a Chinese deity who, after being denied entrance to a party in Heaven for not wearing **shoes**, goes to great lengths to make himself more human. Jin is a second-generation Chinese American junior high school student in a primarily white California suburb. Danny is a white high school student whose life is "ruined" every year when his Chinese cousin, Chin-Kee, comes to visit and attends school with him. The novel ultimately reveals that Danny and Chin-Kee aren't real people at all—Danny is Jin's alter ego (as Jin longs to be white rather than Chinese), while the Monkey King assumes Chin-Kee's form to remind Danny of who he truly is: Jin. Through these three interconnected stories, *American Born Chinese* makes the case that it's unfulfilling and silly to try to be someone other than oneself. It's essential, and necessary for happiness, for people—or monkeys—to celebrate who and what they are.

In Jin's case, most of his ongoing desire to appear more white comes from the racist attitudes and treatment he encounters when his family moves to the suburbs—prior to the move, Jin thought little about being Chinese American. Before the suburbs, Jin lived in San Francisco's Chinatown, where he was one of many Chinese American boys, all of whom experienced a similar upbringing and cultural habits. In other words, the fact that Jin is Chinese didn't matter in San Francisco, when he looked just like a majority of his peers. In the suburbs, however, Jin becomes self-conscious of his ethnicity because he suddenly sticks out and appears visibly different, such as when his packed lunch contains traditional foods that disgust his white classmates. Jin begins to gradually change his identity, which at first seems relatively innocuous and, in some cases, made out of perceived necessity. He soon begins taking sandwiches for lunch rather than dumplings, which means that his classmates can't torment him about eating dogs, and he avoids the only other Asian student in his class, Suzy Nakamura, since their classmates believe that they're either related or engaged to be married given that they're both Asian. Both of these actions allow Jin to feel somewhat more at home in the suburbs, even if he still reads as obviously and undeniably Chinese.

Being one of only two Asian students in his class, however, has major consequences to how Jin thinks about being Chinese. Indeed, by the time that Wei-Chen arrives from Taiwan and joins Jin's fifth-grade class, Jin has separated himself so far from his Chinese identity that he inexplicably wants to beat Wei-Chen up—a desire that mirrors some of the behavior Jin's classmates exhibited toward him when Jin first moved to the suburbs. In this sense, Jin's discomfort with his identity isn't something that just affects him and the food he eats—it's something that makes him devalue and dislike everyone who shares his identity, no matter how cool or interesting that person might be. Later on, Jin's shame about his identity drives him to perm his **hair** and sabotage his genuine friendship with Wei-Chen so that Jin can magically transform into his alter ego of Danny, who's tall, handsome, and most importantly, white.

The Monkey King's parallel story functions as a mirror for Jin's. Like Jin, the Monkey King loves being a monkey until the gods deny him entrance to a party—that is, force him to see for the first time that he's a monkey, and that others believe monkeys are dirty and unworthy of consideration. He then embarks on a quest to turn himself into a human, much as Jin does everything in his power to turn himself into Danny. It takes a magical intervention on the part of Tze-Yo-Tzuh, a supreme deity, and a 500-year imprisonment in a mountain for the Monkey King to take to heart that being a monkey can and will allow him to do great things—like free himself from the mountain—and that his life as a monkey and the ruler of Flower-Fruit Mountain is something he should be extremely proud of. While Danny doesn't have to endure 500 years in a mountain to make him recognize that he's better off as Jin, he still experiences divine intervention as the Monkey King begins visiting him as Danny's Chinese cousin, Chin-Kee. Chin-Kee embodies every negative stereotype about Chinese people, thereby forcing Jin/Danny to face up to the way that people see him and indeed, how he sees

himself—and also to understand that while other people may look at Jin and see only negative stereotypes, Jin has the power to see himself as a valuable person just like anyone else.

This is one of the novel's most important lessons: even in the face of prejudice and racism like the Monkey King and Jin experience, it's still absolutely essential to recognize one's inherent value and celebrate one's true identity, as compromising on those things, the novel shows, inevitably leads to shame, anger, and even violence. While the novel never excuses the racism and prejudice expressed by Jin's classmates or by the residents of Heaven, it suggests that more important than dwelling on the rude or negative things they might say or do is to instead focus on being the best person one can be—no matter one's identity.

RACISM AND POPULAR CULTURE

Racism and the idea of the foreign "other" are woven in throughout the book in a variety of ways, one of the most significant of which is the way that the book handles the intersection between racism and popular culture, specifically when it comes to television media. The chapters telling Danny and Chin-Kee's story are set up to read like a sitcom, *Everyone Ruvs Chin-Kee* with elements like a **laugh track** and organization that follows that of a classic television show. Through this, *American Born Chinese* makes the case that the racism espoused by white characters in Jin's story doesn't emerge out of nowhere. Rather, those characters likely internalized their racist beliefs thanks to an American media landscape that casts Asian characters on the whole as little more than punch lines because of their perceived differences.

Nearly everything Chin-Kee does and the entirety of his appearance were inspired by real world pop culture happenings. He sings a song that a Chinese *American Idol* contestant auditioned with, he eats "crispy fried cat gizzards with noodle" like a Chinese character from a 2001 political cartoon, and he also resembles the lone Asian character from the film *Sixteen Candles*, Long Duk Dong. Drawing inspiration and elements from this wide variety of sources, from cartoons and reality television to American-made kung-fu movies, and even stereotypical dishes from American Chinese restaurants, begins to make the case that Chin-Kee isn't someone whom Yang created out of thin air. Rather, Yang shows that Chin-Kee himself doesn't exist as an actual person—he's the product of non-Asian creators who continue to bring Asian characters to life and present them as nothing more than stereotypes.

When it comes to the specific element of the sitcom setup in Chin-Kee's chapters, *American Born Chinese* then forces readers—especially white readers—to step into the role of a viewer of the sitcom *Everyone Ruvs Chin-Kee* and confront the fact that characters like Chin-Kee are, by design, only supposed to exist as jokes. Having the laughter and applause right there on the page in the form of the laugh track also means that whether the reader is laughing or not, *someone* is, and the laugh track is supposed to tell the reader (or sitcom viewer) when they, too, should be laughing. This, in turn, means that the reader has to acknowledge that even if they might not personally find Chin-Kee funny (and indeed, they shouldn't), the media landscape in which he exists finds him hilarious—and presumably, so do audiences of that media.

The chapters concerning Jin show the consequences of a pop cultural landscape that, through Chin-Kee-like representations of Asian characters, presents the idea that all Asian people, regardless of their country of origin, sex, or any other qualities or identifiers, are just like Chin-Kee. Kids at school accuse Jin of eating dogs and warn him to stay away from their pets, while being called a "Chink" is what causes Suzy Nakamura to realize that on some level, she feels constantly embarrassed about being Asian—that is, she's embarrassed that in the eyes of her racist white peers, she appears as nothing more than a female version of Chin-Kee. In spite these stereotypes, of course, the novel makes clear to the reader that Jin, Wei-Chen, and Suzy all experience the exact same normal teenage things that their white peers do, from awkward movie dates to conflicts with their parents about dating or personal hygiene. In other words, the novel's Asian characters are people just like anyone else—but they're people who must deal with the constant expectation that they, like Chin-Kee, will know all the answers, eat people's house pets, and sexually prey on vulnerable white women.

While *American Born Chinese* offers no real remedy or redemption for individuals like Greg, Timmy, and Jin's teachers who act in racist or offensive ways, it does imply more broadly that the best way to begin to tackle racism like this is to challenge and dismantle the stereotypes that fuel it. Within the novel itself, this happens quite literally when Danny knocks the head off of Chin-Kee. In particular, the fact that Chin-Kee was never a real person (he was a puppet of sorts, created and manipulated by the Monkey King) drives home the fact that what he represents is a fiction that exists nowhere in real life—the stereotypes that make him who he is are simply ideas that other people apply to Asian individuals, whether those individuals are fictional or real. Recognizing that all individuals are people with rich inner lives of their own, and being aware of how media can negatively shape one's perception of a group of people, Gene Luen Yang suggests, are the first steps to creating a pop culture landscape in which Chin-Kee no longer exists.

PRIDE, STUBBORNNESS, AND HUMILITY

One important result of the transformations that Jin and the Monkey King undergo is that both of them, after becoming who they think they want to be (white in Jin's case, and more human in the Monkey King's case) is that both of them double down on the persona they

create for themselves, even when they encounter a great deal of resistance to their new personas. Practically, this means that the Monkey King and Jin learn that they must violently or rudely defend their choices and their new identities, rather than accept the possibility that those transformations may not have been a great idea in the first place. A major part of both of their journeys therefore entails learning to let go of the desire to be right, as the novel suggests that being humble is the only fulfilling way to go through life: relying on pride and stubbornness, and the violence they cause, only serves to distance a person from their peers, resulting in isolation and even more violence and anger.

American Born Chinese makes it clear that a person becoming prideful, stubborn, and unwilling to listen to others sets off a cycle that is then difficult to escape from. In both the cases of the Monkey King and of Jin, they're reasonably happy and fulfilled individuals until they encounter experiences in which they're made to feel small and unworthy. Being made to feel this way, in turn, causes the Monkey King to turn to kung-fu in earnest and Jin to dedicate himself to becoming as white as he can possibly make himself, all with the goal of stubbornly proving their bullies' prejudices to be wrong. While the bullying that the Monkey King and Jin experience is certainly real and horrible, it's also important to recognize that as much as Jin and the Monkey King want to punish or humiliate their bullies, it's not the bullies that suffer as a result of these attempts—it's the Monkey King and Jin themselves. In this sense, all the Monkey King and Jin do by doubling down on their attempts to be more human or more white, respectively, is alienate themselves even further from individuals who might be willing and able to help them, from the Monkey King's monkey subjects (who are disturbed by their king's transformation) and the deity Tze-Yo-Tzuh in the Monkey King's story to Wei-Chen in Jin's story. Their lives don't get any easier, just lonelier—and neither the residents of Heaven nor Jin's classmates feel compelled to apologize or repent for their bad behavior.

As the stories of Jin and the Monkey King converge, the novel suggests that once someone finds oneself in a cycle of constantly needing to prove oneself, it's impossible to escape it by continuing stubbornly along the same path. Rather, the only way forward is to apologize and attempt to develop a sense of humility—ideally, as part of an attempt to help someone else in some way. The Monkey King does this when he's forced to remember his generous and kind nature: as much as he blusters and insults the monk Wong Lai-Tsao for asking for his help, he can't stand the thought of Wong Lai-Tsao being eaten by demons or getting the last word on the matter of the Monkey King's identity. Therefore, the Monkey King feels as though he must reassume his true form as a monkey and harness the kung-fu powers that allowed him to assume a more human form to instead help others. While the Monkey King later gives Danny (Jin's white alter ego) no choice but to become Jin again, Jin similarly chooses to let go of Danny and all of the pride, violence, and stubbornness inherent to that persona so that he can help Wei-Chen undergo a similar transformation and remember who he is: a monkey in disguise and an emissary for Tze-Yo-Tzuh, not the materialistic bad-boy he becomes as a teenager.

Importantly, the Monkey King and Jin's shifts from violence and stubbornness to a state of humility represent a reorientation toward individuals who genuinely care about who the Monkey King and Jin truly are—that is, people who can help Jin and the Monkey King develop stronger, more meaningful communities in their respective worlds that simply don't have room for the bullies. Through this, *American Born Chinese* suggests that being humble, generous, and helpful to others doesn't just make someone a better person morally: it sets them up to find community and camaraderie, and in doing so, paves the way for bringing others to this better way of life.

STORYTELLING AND UNIVERSALITY

American Born Chinese's unique format as a graphic novel that utilizes three unconventional narrative techniques—pairing visual illustrations with text, switching among three interconnected stories, and simulating the form of a sitcom TV show—shows that Gene Luen Yang is acutely aware of the importance of telling a variety of stories in a variety of ways. By using such a wide range of communication tools and modes, *American Born Chinese* suggests that one of the best ways to tackle the many issues it tackles, from unnecessary pride and violence to overt racism, is to tell as many stories about those things as possible. Doing this, it proposes, can help humanize characters whom readers may never have otherwise thought worthy of consideration, and can thus drive home the universality of the issues that all people face.

One of the most important ways in which *American Born Chinese* speaks to the ubiquity of racism in general (and against Chinese individuals in particular) is by telling the parallel stories of Jin and the Monkey King, which differ slightly but are also the same in many ways. Both stories begin in places where Jin and the Monkey King's identities are normal and unproblematic (San Francisco's Chinatown and the mystical realm of Flower-Fruit Mountain, respectively), and both characters then travel somewhere where they stand out as different (the suburbs and a party in Heaven, respectively). In their new surroundings, both Jin and the Monkey King experience prejudice directed at that difference. As, a result they both attempt to change themselves to fit in. Though they're successful at this in some regards, they sacrifice their true identities to make changes that, on the whole, aren't accepted by those they want to impress. By telling the same story of overcoming prejudice through these two very different characters, *American Born Chinese* is able to speak not just to anti-Chinese racism as it

does through Jin's story. Rather, it's able to make the case that the Monkey King could stand in for *any* group that has experienced prejudice, thereby broadening its message and eliciting greater empathy and understanding in the reader.

Similarly to the way in which Jin and the Monkey King's stories very overtly mirror each other, it's possible to draw a variety of connections between the racist remarks lobbed at Chin-Kee (and the negative stereotypes his character embodies), and the racism and prejudice that the Monkey King and Jin and his fellow Asian friends experience in their respective stories. For instance, one of the insults that recurs throughout Jin's story is that he and his family eat dogs, a racist stereotype designed to cast Chinese people as barbarians who capture and kill people's beloved pets for food—while Chin-Kee happily and publically digs into cat gizzards at lunch. Similarly, the suggestion that Chin-Kee carries the SARS virus, a dangerous respiratory virus that originated in China, is an insult in the same vein as the snide remark that Ao-Kuang (another deity) makes to the Monkey King that none of the other gods will go to Flower-Fruit Mountain on account of the fleas. Both of these instances portray the subject of the insult as dirty or barbaric, speaking to the universality of discrimination like this. And while Chin-Kee's character is clearly exaggerated, and the Monkey King's is obviously fantastical, having to consider all of these stories in tandem nevertheless makes clear the idea that this these struggles are ones that repeats over and over again, in a variety of different venues. Showing these insults' effects on so many different characters, meanwhile, allows readers to consider the myriad negative effects of being the targeted by such racism and discrimination—and encourages them to humanize those targets.

Finally, the visual nature of *American Born Chinese* allows it to more easily draw from the visual language and structure of sitcom television shows in Danny and Chin-Kee's chapters, a medium that the novel treats as something well-known to its readership. The **laugh track** in particular means that the novel has the ability to tell the reader when to laugh, rather than relying on the reader to make up his or her own mind about what's funny—and by "playing" the laugh track at times when what's happening is racist and decidedly not funny, the novel forces readers to consider what television shows—and indeed, a variety of other media, from conventional novels to comic books to films—portray as humorous, and why that is. Though the novel never fully answers the "why" of this question for the reader, it does draw connections between what's portrayed on television and how racist characters like Greg and Timmy behave the way they do in Jin's story. Why, the novel asks, would Greg or Timmy choose to associate with any of their Asian classmates when, in a show like *Everyone Ruvs Chin-Kee*, Danny (a white character who's forced to interact and associate with Chin-Kee, his Chinese cousin) becomes the butt of every joke and suffers because of his relationship to Chin-Kee, and Chin-Kee is portrayed as a fundamentally unlikeable person? In this sense, *American Born Chinese* clearly intends to raise readers' consciousness of the universal human struggles it presents. By putting readers, and especially white readers, in a situation in which they're required to look at a story of prejudice from many angles and perspectives, the novel presents storytelling in every form as a tool capable of introducing audiences to the plight of others, eliciting sympathy, and hopefully encouraging those audience members to treat others with kindness and respect.

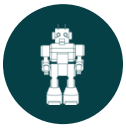
SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

SHOES AND HAIR

Both shoes and hair represent the folly of trying to be something other than one's true identity. The Monkey King's edict that all monkeys on Flower-Fruit Mountain must wear shoes represents his own desire to be more human—that is, his desire to be something he's not, but something that he considers to be superior. In Jin's parallel story, his white classmate Greg's curly hair represents much the same thing: it will, in his mind, make him appear more white and less Chinese, and therefore more appealing to his crush, Amelia. In this sense, both shoes and hair represent a distillation of an entire culture or state of being into one single quality or element, something the novel suggests is misguided and ineffective at turning someone into something they're not. The Monkey King and his fellow monkeys still look like monkeys, just ones that wear shoes, while Jin's permed hair doesn't stop Greg from insisting that Jin shouldn't date Amelia for racist reasons.

This doesn't mean, however, that the shoes and hair don't still *feel* empowering to the Monkey King and Jin—the addition of shoes to the Monkey King's wardrobe are the first step of his transformation to becoming Great Sage, Equal of Heaven, while Jin's confidence as he dates Amelia and considers standing up to Greg's bullying manifests visually as crackling lightning coming from his hair. However, that Jin and the Monkey King must abandon their shoes and hairdo, respectively, speaks to the futility and ineffectiveness of trying to be something they're not—as do the reactions of those who encounter the shoes and Jin's perm with confusion or laughter.



TRANSFORMERS

Broadly speaking, Transformer toys symbolize identity, and particularly how fluid one's identity can be. This can be both a positive and negative thing. When

young Jin first tells the herbalist's wife that he'd like to grow up to be a Transformer, she points out that this isn't impossible—he just has to be willing to forfeit his soul to do so. In this context, especially when Jin transforms into the white persona of Danny a few years later, the Transformer represents a person's ability to completely reject who they truly are in favor of being someone else. Meanwhile, the Monkey King gives his son, Wei-Chen, a Transformer to remind him of who and what he is inside (a monkey), even as he must look the part of a human on the outside while on his earthly mission. For Wei-Chen, the Transformer is a symbol of his true nature, while for Jin, the Transformer speaks to his desire to be anyone but who he really is.

THE LAUGH TRACK

The laugh track—the "HA HA HA" and "CLAP CLAP CLAP" that run along the bottom of panels in the chapters telling Danny's story—symbolizes American pop culture and sitcoms, and specifically, the racist attitudes expressed in pop culture. Danny's chapters take the form of a sitcom called *Everyone Ruvs* Chin-Kee. Sitcom television shows tell viewers what (and who) to laugh at when the laugh track plays, and in *American Born Chinese*, this is most often Danny's Chinese cousin, Chin-Kee. Chin-Kee's stereotypically Chinese antics and Danny's embarrassed reaction to whatever Chin-Kee is doing are portrayed in an exaggeratedly humorous manner. By framing Danny and Chin-Kee's chapters in this way, the reader has to confront the fact that the Chinese stereotypes embodied by Chin-Kee are common punch lines, even if the stereotypes themselves are racist, misguided, and not actually funny at all. In this sense, even if a laugh track is typically supposed to signal what's humorous, the laugh track in the novel isn't actually meant to be funny—instead, it symbolizes a culture that casts Chinese characters not as people, but as objects to laugh at due to their appearances, customs, and speech.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Sqaure Fish edition of *American Born Chinese* published in 2008.

Chapter 1 Quotes

"I, too, am a deity! I am a committed disciple of the arts of kung-fu and I have mastered the four heavenly disciplines, prerequisites to immortality!"

"That's wonderful, sir, absolutely wonderful! Now please, sir—"

"I demand to be let into this dinner party!"

"Look. You may be a king—you may even be a deity—but you are still a monkey."

Related Characters: The Monkey King/Chin-Kee (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 14-15

Explanation and Analysis

When the Monkey King, a deity who rules over the other monkeys in the mystical kingdom of Flower-Fruit Mountain, smells a wonderful dinner party going on in Heaven and tries to attend, the guard turns him away. They do so on the grounds that the Monkey King is a monkey and doesn't wear shoes, and therefore isn't welcome. Because the Monkey King is a monkey rather than a human and therefore doesn't represent any one ethnic group, this allows the Monkey King's plight more generally to stand in for prejudice that all different ethnic groups experience and have experienced throughout history. In particular, the way that the guard brushes off the Monkey King's accomplishments in kung-fu particularly speaks to the way in which highly-educated individuals of color experience prejudice: racist individuals focus only on the fact that the person in question is a minority and therefore, according to stereotypes, is believed to be somehow subpar to white people—even when they have the degree, experience, or professional accomplishment that clearly disprove the stereotype.

When he entered his royal chamber, the thick smell of monkey fur greeted him. He'd never noticed it before. He stayed awake for the rest of the night thinking of ways to get rid of it.

Related Characters: The Monkey King/Chin-Kee

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 20

Explanation and Analysis

After being turned away from the dinner party in Heaven, the Monkey King notices for the first time that Flower-Fruit Mountain smells like monkey fur, and he begins to consider how he can do away with the odor. This shows that after experiencing the kind of prejudice that the Monkey King did at the dinner party, one of the first reactions to that sort of a situation tends to be shame. The Monkey King is now embarrassed that he smells like a monkey, something that has never even registered before for him.

Fixating on the smell, however, is something the novel suggests is shortsighted and won't help the Monkey King at all in the long run. Focusing on the smell will only make the Monkey King more and more ashamed of who and what he is—a powerful king and a monkey—and instead, lead him to do everything in his power to make him seem less of a monkey. This, it's important to note, does nothing to convince others that the Monkey King isn't a monkey—it only makes the Monkey King angrier, more violent, and more hateful toward himself.

Chapter 2 Quotes

"Yeah, but Ma-Ma says that's silly. Little boys don't grow up to be Transformers."

"Oh, I wouldn't be so sure about that. I'm going to let you in on a secret, little friend: it's easy to become anything you wish...

...so long as you're willing to forfeit your soul."

Related Characters: The Herbalist's Wife, Jin Wang/Danny (speaker), Jin's Mother

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

While Jin sits in the front of the herbalist's shop where his mother goes every weekend, he shares his desire to grow up to be a Transformer like the toys he plays with. The herbalist's wife says that it's actually possible to transform oneself, as long as Jin agrees to give up his soul. It's significant that Jin looks disturbed in this frame's illustration, as though the thought of giving up his soul is something abhorrent, and moreover, something he's never thought of doing. Despite this initial reaction, however, Jin soon must contend with the realization that giving up his soul—which, though the herbalist's wife doesn't say so in so many words, includes both Jin's kindness and his identity as a Chinese American person—is surprisingly easy. Jin quickly stops taking dumplings for lunch after his family moves to the predominantly white suburbs, which gives his racist classmates one less thing to torment him about. He eventually takes the final steps in giving up his soul when he creates his white Danny persona, thereby giving up his identity as Jin and all of Jin's friendships along with it.

"Class, I'd like us all to give a warm Mayflower welcome to your new friend and classmate Jing Jang!"

"Jin Wang."

"Jin Wang! He and his family moved to our neighborhood all the way from China!"

"San Francisco."

"San Francisco!"

Related Characters: Jin Wang/Danny, Mrs. Greeder (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

As Mrs. Greeder introduces Jin to the other students in his third-grade class, she mispronounces his name and incorrectly identifies where he lived before coming to the suburbs. This shows, first of all, that Mrs. Greeder probably didn't ask Jin his name or to confirm any biographical details before she introduced him to the class. In a generous reading, this could mean that Mrs. Greeder simply doesn't take much of an interest in any of her students, but a more critical take suggests that Mrs. Greeder pronounces Jin's name the way she does and insists he came from China because that's simply what she believes about people who look Chinese: that their names are either too difficult to pronounce or sound stereotypically Chinese, and that they must've come directly from China. In doing this, Mrs. Greeder fails to set herself up as an ally to Jin, and instead becomes someone who, inadvertently or not, condones the racism and bullying of Jin's classmates by showing them that behaving in this way is acceptable.

"My momma says Chinese people eat dogs."

"Now be nice, Timmy! I'm sure Jin doesn't do that! In fact, Jin's family probably stopped that sort of thing as soon as they came to the United States!"

Related Characters: Mrs. Greeder, Timmy (speaker), Jin Wang/Danny

Related Themes:

Page Number: 31

Explanation and Analysis

Following Mrs. Greeder's introduction of Jin, Timmy raises his hand to share that according to his mom, Chinese people eat dogs. It's important to keep in mind the origins of the stereotype that Asian people (as a monolithic group, regardless of national origin) eat dogs. While dog meat is sometimes a part of Asian cuisine, the stereotype that all Asian people (and particularly Asian American people) do so casts Asian people as barbarians who will capture, kill, and eat man's best friend—in other words, it has little connection to the actual practice and is really just a way of dehumanizing and vilifying Asian people. When Mrs. Greeder assures Timmy that Jin's family certainly stopped eating dogs before coming to the U.S., she effectively tells Timmy that Jin and his family once did unspeakable things from an American perspective—but now that they live in the U.S., they're gradually becoming more civilized. This allows Timmy to feel justified in treating Jin horribly, since it makes the case that Jin isn't worthy of kindness or of being treated like a regular human being.

"Class, I'd like us all to give a big Mayflower Elementary welcome to your new friend and classmate Chei-Chen Chun!"

"Wei-Chen Sun."

"Wei-Chen Sun! He and his family recently moved to our neighborhood all the way from China!"

"Taiwan."

"Taiwan!"

Related Characters: Wei-Chen Sun (speaker), Mrs. Greeder, Jin Wang/Danny

Related Themes:

Page Number: 36

Explanation and Analysis

In fifth grade, when Wei-Chen moves from Taiwan and starts school with Jin, the teacher's introduction follows, almost word for word, the introduction that Mrs. Greeder showed Jin when he first moved to the suburbs. As with the first occurrence, this is a way for the teacher, possibly unintentionally, to show the class that he himself holds racist stereotypes against Asian people. Wei-Chen and Jin's teacher makes it clear that he doesn't value Wei-Chen enough to check on his name first, or ask where he lived before—and therefore, none of Wei-Chen's classmates should bother to gather this information either. The repetition of this carelessness shows how crushing and constant this kind of casual racism is. Wei-Chen's facial expression here is very similar to what Jin's was on his first day—embarrassed, ashamed, unhappy—and it shows that no matter where exactly a person lived prior to the U.S., if they look at all Asian, they will at some point have to suffer this kind of casual racism.

Something made me want to beat him up.

Related Characters: Jin Wang/Danny (speaker), Wei-Chen Sun

Related Themes:

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

After the teacher introduces Wei-Chen to the class, Jin inexplicably wants to beat up Wei-Chen. Keep in mind that by his point, Jin has been in the suburbs for somewhere between two and three years, and has been dealing with his classmates' racism and bullying that entire time. In other words, Jin has spent years living in a place where he's constantly bullied for being Chinese, whether because of the food he eats or the way he looks. On the whole, the novel suggests that it's impossible to exist in this kind of environment without internalizing this kind of negative talk to some degree, which means that on some level, Jin now sees being Chinese as a bad thing. Further, because he's experienced the bullying from his white classmates, he now understands that bullying is something that white people do—and Jin wants to be as white as possible, though he doesn't directly act on this idea until later in the book. Because of all of this, Jin wants to behave violently toward Wei-Chen, since the Asian race they have in common is the very thing Jin has been conditioned to loathe about himself.

Chapter 4 Quotes

"The morning after the dinner party the Monkey King issued a decree throughout all of Flower-Fruit Mountain: all monkeys must wear shoes.

Related Characters: The Monkey King/Chin-Kee

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

Ashamed and embarrassed after being turned away from a dinner party in Heaven for not wearing shoes and for being a monkey, the Monkey King forces all of the monkeys in his kingdom to wear shoes. The illustrations paired with this quote show monkeys struggling to climb trees while wearing shoes. The fact that the illustrated monkeys struggle so much with their new footwear makes it very clear that while the Monkey King's decree may be understandable—he's upset, ashamed, and trying to make himself appear less monkey-like to the other deities—it's still misguided. The shoes keep the monkeys from doing what they naturally do: climb trees. Within the logic of the novel, this is a representation of a person or being suppressing who they really are in order to be who they want to be or who they think is more valuable—in this case, being a human. When the Monkey King refuses to acknowledge his subjects' struggles with the shoes, it shows that he's far more interested in selfishly and stubbornly proving himself. The shame he feels means that he doesn't have the capacity at the moment to understand that he's hurting his subjects as well as himself.

"This 'Monkey King' it speaks of no longer exists, for I have mastered twelve major disciplines of kung-fu and transcended my former title! I shall now be called—The Great Sage, Equal of Heaven!"

Related Characters: The Monkey King/Chin-Kee (speaker), Ao-Kuang

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

When the Monkey King receives a summons to go to Ao-Kuang to be executed for trespassing upon Heaven, the Monkey King insists that the person listed in the summons doesn't exist and shares his new name—The Great Sage, Equal of Heaven—with several of his monkey subjects. Changing his name like this represents a major turning point in the Monkey King's conception of his identity. While his original name gives some indication of who or what the Monkey King is (it makes it clear that he's a monkey), his new name instead casts him in the role of someone who is extremely powerful and could take any form. This shows that now, the Monkey King values his power and his ability to get his way through force more than he values who he is on the inside. The novel shows this specifically when the Monkey King says that he gets a new title because he's mastered new kung-fu disciplines. While the Monkey King doesn't always use kung-fu for violence, in this situation, he turns to using kung-fu for violent means almost exclusively in order to seek revenge for the discrimination he faced.

"My apologies for not sending someone to arrest you in person, but frankly none of the gods wanted to go anywhere near your mountain. Nothing personal—we just aren't particularly fond of fleas."

Related Characters: Ao-Kuang (speaker), The Monkey King/Chin-Kee

Related Themes:

Page Number: 62

Explanation and Analysis

Ao-Kuang, the Dragon God of the Eastern Sea, receives the Monkey King in his palace and apologizes for summoning the Monkey King in the first place—he or someone else would've gone to Flower-Fruit Mountain were the monkeys not infested with fleas. Given Ao-Kuang's sneer and the fact that he was one of those who laughed at the Monkey King at the dinner party in Heaven at the beginning of the novel, it's easy to see that Ao-Kuang is saying this just to be rude and to rile the Monkey King up. He's expressing a fictionalized version of a stereotype that plagues many non-Western people: that they're dirty, infested with parasites, or carry deadly diseases, and therefore that's it's dangerous to befriend, engage with (or in this case, visit) them. This is "nothing personal" because Ao-Kuang doesn't see the

Monkey King as an individual worthy of respect or kindness. In his eyes, the Monkey King is nothing more than a filthy animal, whom Ao-Kuang believes to be dirty and flea-ridden no matter how powerful the Monkey King might be.

"Silly monkey. You were never out of my reach. You only fooled yourself."

Related Characters: Tze-Yo-Tzuh (speaker), Jin Wang/Danny, The Monkey King/Chin-Kee

Related Themes:

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

When the Monkey King discovers that the five pillars at the edge of the universe that he defaced and urinated on were actually Tze-Yo-Tzuh's hands, Tze-Yo-Tzuh insists that the Monkey King was simply fooling himself that he could escape. Though Tze-Yo-Tzuh is a deity and his own person within the novel, he's also the person who created the entire universe in which the Monkey King's story takes place—and, by extension, created who and what the Monkey King is. In this sense, Tze-Yo-Tzuh is responsible for the Monkey King's identity. His insistence, then, that the Monkey King only fooled himself suggests that the Monkey King's attempts at becoming more human and escaping his identity are silly and futile.

It's important to keep this idea in mind going forward, as Jin, the other character who tries to escape his identity, appears for much of the novel as a white boy named Danny—and yet, the novel leaves clues that the reader (who shares Jin's perspective) is the only one who sees Jin as Danny—that is, as white and blond. Others see Jin as the Chinese American person he is, regardless of the white Danny persona that he tries to project to the world.

Chapter 5 Quotes

"When I move here to America, I was afraid nobody wants to be my friend. I come from a different place. Much, much different. But my first day in school here I meet Jin. From then I know everything's okay. He treat me like a little brother, show me how things work in America. He help me with my English [...] I think sometimes my accent embarrass him, but Jin still willing to be my friend."

Related Characters: Wei-Chen Sun (speaker), Jin Wang/Danny, Amelia Harris

Related Themes:

Page Number: 102

Explanation and Analysis

While stuck in a supply closet with Amelia, Wei-Chen tells her about his friendship with Jin, and how kind Jin is to him. Though the reader doesn't know it yet, it's eventually revealed that Wei-Chen is actually one of the Monkey King's sons and an emissary of Tze-Yo-Tzuh, sent to Earth to serve the deity. Because of this, it's possible to read Wei-Chen himself as a version of Tze-Yo-Tzuh in Jin's story—that is, someone who has an accurate read on who Jin is inside. Even though Jin has already behaved in questionable or rude ways (initially refusing to be friends with Wei-Chen, avoiding everything to do with Chinese culture), it's reasonable to believe what Wei-Chen says about Jin given his connection to the divine figures in the Monkey King's story. Making these connections among the book's three parallel stories encourages the reader to understand that in many ways, what it has to say is universal and can be applied almost anywhere—and, especially in this case, that being kind and generous to one's friends is one of the best ways to live a fulfilling life and earn the positive regard of others.

Chapter 6 Quotes

"Ooh ooh! Chin-Kee know dis one!"

"Put your hand down!"

"Go ahead...Chin-Kee, was it?"

"Judicial, executive, and registrative!"

"Good, Chin-Kee! Very good! You know, people—it would behoove you all to be a little more like Chin-Kee."

Related Characters: Jin Wang/Danny, The Monkey King/Chin-Kee (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 111

Explanation and Analysis

When Danny, who is white, takes his Chinese cousin, Chin-Kee, to school with him, Chin-Kee is able to correctly answer every question Jin's teachers pose to the class—and even more humiliatingly for Danny, his government teacher suggests that his students should all be more like Chin-Kee.

Chin-Kee's seeming encyclopedic knowledge of every high school subject draws on the stereotype that Asian people are naturally academically gifted, unlike their white counterparts. In this moment, it's significant that Danny looks white to the reader—Danny is merely the white persona of Jin, and the novel suggests through his classmates' reactions that to them, he still looks like Jin even if he's going by a different name. His teacher's comment, then, is especially difficult for Jin/Danny to hear, as he's made ridding himself of his Chinese identity his goal in life—and here his teacher his telling him, in effect, to be more Chinese.

It's worth noting, then, that Jin—who, no matter what form he takes, is Chinese—isn't raising his hand. This shows one of the damaging effects of this particular stereotype: Jin and other Chinese students are likely punished by well-meaning teachers who believe that their Chinese students should be smarter or more academically inclined than they are, which can lead to those students being unwilling to participate or ask for help if they're struggling. Even these "positive" stereotypes, the novel shows, are damaging.

"Every year around this time, I finally start getting the hang of things, you know? [...] Then he comes along for one of his visits."

"Who?"

"Chin-Kee, my cousin. He's been visiting me once a year since the eighth grade. He comes for a week or two and follows me to school, talking his stupid talk and eating his stupid food. Embarrassing the crap out of me. By the time he leaves, no one things of me as Danny anymore. I'm Chin-Kee's cousin."

Related Characters: Steve, Jin Wang/Danny (speaker), The Monkey King/Chin-Kee

Related Themes:

Page Number: 126-27

Explanation and Analysis

After missing basketball practice, Danny confides in Steve that every year, just as he gets settled at a new school, Chin-Kee visits and ruins everything for him. The specific "crimes" that Danny lists, eating "stupid food" and speaking "stupid talk" speak to the way in which Danny has learned to despise everything that has to do with being Chinese. Given that Danny is merely the white persona of Jin, it seems that Chin-Kee's antics remind Jin of everything he's trying to leave behind by becoming Danny in the first place—that is, concerns expressed by those like Greg that Jin is going to eat pet dogs, and the idea that a person who speaks with an accent is automatically less intelligent, which Jin implied to Wei-Chen during Wei-Chen's first day at school. The worst part of this for Danny is that by the time Chin-Kee has been around for a week, all of his classmates have, in his estimation, learned that all of those negative stereotypes are correct—and therefore, must apply to Jin too. Chin-Kee, in this sense, exists to confirm stereotypes for both Jin and his white classmates, and remind Jin that no matter how hard he tries to be Danny, he's never going to entirely escape these stereotypes.

"People here aren't like that. No one ever says anything about my weight. Well, maybe that's because I broke Todd Sharpnack's nose for calling me 'Mr. Jiggles' when we were freshmen. But whatever. People here are different. You'll see. Heck, if anyone ever gives you trouble, I'll break his nose."

Related Characters: Steve (speaker), The Monkey King/Chin-Kee, Jin Wang/Danny

Related Themes:

Page Number: 128

Explanation and Analysis

Kindly, Steve tells Danny that people at Oliphant High School aren't racist like Danny fears they are, simply because they don't torment Steve for being overweight. Though Steve is trying to be generous and kind to Danny here, it's somewhat short-sighted to compare his weight to being Chinese—though he may suffer from stereotypes about overweight people, Steve is also white, male, popular, and on the basketball team—things that give him a great deal of power to push back when and if people do bully him. It's possible that if Danny—who, keep in mind, only looks white to the reader; to other characters he looks like a high school-aged Jin—were to punch someone for bullying him about being Chinese, it wouldn't go over so well for Danny. Further, it's worth keeping in mind that because Steve isn't Chinese, he may not be entirely aware of his classmates' racism—for instance, in the next Danny/Chin-Kee chapter, a student suggests they get tested for SARS, a severe respiratory virus that originated in China, when Chin-Kee accidently spits on them while singing in the library.

Chapter 7 Quotes

"The form you have taken is not truly your own. Return to your true form and you shall be freed."

"Is there no end to your stupidity, you sod?! That seal above me prevents me from exercising kung-fu!"

"Returning to your true form is not an exercise of kung-fu, but a release of it."

Related Characters: The Monkey King/Chin-Kee, Wong Lai-Tsao (speaker), Tze-Yo-Tzuh

Related Themes:

Page Number: 145

Explanation and Analysis

As the monk Wong Lai-Tsao asks the Monkey King to help him with his quest, he attempts to convince the Monkey King to reassume his monkey form, which he suggests is the Monkey King's "true form." Tellingly, Wong Lai-Tsao encourages the Monkey King to understand that becoming a monkey again means he'll need to give up on kung-fu, which the Monkey King has been using as a violent means of getting his way ever since getting turned away from the dinner party in Heaven. Essentially, Wong Lai-Tsao is advocating for nonviolent soul-searching rather than a violent attempt to change others' minds, as the Monkey King had been doing prior to his imprisonment. The way in which the Monkey King lashes out at Wong Lai-Tsao for this suggestion shows how caught up he is in proving that he and his attempts to be human are correct. He's willing to insult and be rude to Wong Lai-Tsao, just as the residents of Heaven were willing to be rude and insulting to the Monkey King when he tried to attend the party. The Monkey King's reaction suggests that even when an individual is confronted with the errors of their ways, they may still stubbornly hold onto their convictions, and in doing so, deny their true self and impede their own progress.

"Mortal, there are demons behind you."

"Yes. I am aware of them. That is why I ask you to free yourself quickly."

"And if I refuse?"

"If it is the will of Tze-Yo-Tzuh for me to die for your stubbornness, then I accept."

Related Characters: Wong Lai-Tsao, The Monkey King/Chin-Kee (speaker), Tze-Yo-Tzuh

Related Themes:

Page Number: 146

Explanation and Analysis

When the Monkey King points out the two demons hunting Wong Lai-Tsao, the Monkey King stubbornly suggests that he won't reassume his true form to save Wong Lai-Tsao. The way that the Monkey King behaves here shows that at this point, he's almost entirely given up on the kindness and generosity he embodied at the beginning of the novel. Now, the only way he knows how to act is rude and sarcastic. Wong Lai-Tsao, on the other hand, behaves in a way that the novel suggests is superior and most effective in situations like this: he remains firm with his request, and he doesn't rise to the Monkey King's bait and start hurling insults in return. By presenting Wong Lai-Tsao as the bigger person here, the novel indicates that often, the best way to deal with bullies—even if they're supposed to be helpers, like the Monkey King—is to not engage in bullying behavior oneself. Doing so will only incite a cycle of violence that will make it even harder to return to a state of generosity and kindness, or to find genuine, supportive community.

"To find your true identity...within the will of Tze-Yo-Tzuh...that is the highest of all freedoms."

"So is your 'true identity' the supper of two demons?"

"Perhaps...is yours the eternal prisoner...of a mountain of rock?"

Related Characters: The Monkey King/Chin-Kee, Wong Lai-Tsao (speaker), Tze-Yo-Tzuh

Related Themes:

Page Number: 149

Explanation and Analysis

The Monkey King, still annoyed and offended that Wong Lai-Tsao wants his help on a quest, insults Wong Lai-Tsao as the demons begin to roast the monk over a spit—but Wong Lai-Tsao gets the last word and cleverly insults the Monkey King, which results in the Monkey King agreeing to return to his true form. What Wong Lai-Tsao essentially asks the Monkey King here is whether it's really worth it to be right about his identity if being right means that he has to remain in the mountain of rock forever. More broadly, this poses the question of whether it's more important to stand by one's incorrect beliefs or to admit fault and embrace the

truth , especially when there's clear evidence that the incorrect or misguided beliefs aren't making a person happy. When the Monkey King considers this and chooses to return to his true form, it suggests that it's far better to be who one actually is—especially if making that choice means that one will be able to help others, as the Monkey King does by saving Wong Lai-Tsao from these demons and then accompanying him on the quest.

Chapter 8 Quotes

"It's just that she's a good friend and I want to make sure she makes good choices, you know? We're almost in high school. She has to start paying attention to who she hangs out with.

Aw, geez. Look, Jin. I'm sorry. That sounded way harsher than I meant it to. I just don't know if you're right for her, okay? That's all."

Related Characters: Greg (speaker), Amelia Harris, Jin Wang/Danny

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 179-80

Explanation and Analysis

The day after Jin's successful movie date with Amelia, Greg pulls Jin aside and asks him to not ask Amelia out again, citing Amelia's reputation as they enter high school as his reasoning. In reality, what Greg is saying is that it'll be damaging to Amelia's reputation to be romantically involved with an unpopular Chinese American boy, no matter how many qualities Jin might have that would make him a good romantic partner. Importantly, Greg doesn't seem to fully recognize how unkind and racist he's being here—he's doing this, supposedly, in service of his friend and is certain that Jin will understand and support his attempts. Even though Greg has shown himself capable of standing up for Jin in the past, this makes it very clear that Greg is far more concerned with social status than he is with being kind, and he's willing to sabotage what could've been a friendship, as well as Jin's budding relationship with Amelia, in the service of his and his white friends' popularity.

"About twenty minutes into the party, though, I figured out that Lauren didn't actually invite me. Her mom wanted to hang out with my mom, and I sort of just got brought along. Lauren and her new friends had their own thing going, so I spent the rest of the party watching TV in the living room. I felt so embarrassed.

...Today, when Timmy called me a...a chink, I realized...deep down inside...I kind of feel like that all the time."

Related Characters: Suzy Nakamura (speaker), The Monkey King/Chin-Kee, Timmy, Jin Wang/Danny

Related Themes:

Page Number: 187

Explanation and Analysis

Outside after school, Suzy shares with Jin her embarrassing experience at a party over the weekend, and admits that on some level, she constantly feels embarrassed and excluded. That Suzy feels this way speaks to the immense damage that can be done through constant exposure to negative stereotypes and bullying. Suzy, like Jin, has to deal with Timmy and their classmates' unending stream of racist comments and remarks. Further, Jin, Suzy, and Wei-Chen's experiences in the classroom have made it clear to them that they cannot rely on their teachers to shut down this kind of racist bullying, as the teachers often confirm their students' racist ideas.

It's also worth noting that what brings about this realization is being called a "chink," a racist slur against Asian people which is also the root of the character Chin-Kee's name in the novel. In this sense, Suzy realizes here that she has to constantly contend with the fact that when her white classmates look at her, they don't see Suzy Nakamura. They see a female version of Chin-Kee and all the negative stereotypes about Asian people that he embodies.

I replayed the day's events over and over again in my mind. Each time I reached the same conclusion: Wei-Chen needed to hear what I had to say. It was, after all, the truth. And at around three in the morning, I finally believed myself.

I dreamt of the herbalist's wife.

"So, little friend. You've done it. Now what would you like to become?"

Related Characters: The Herbalist's Wife, Jin Wang/Danny (speaker), Amelia Harris, Greg, Wei-Chen Sun

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 192-94

Explanation and Analysis

The night after telling Wei-Chen that Wei-Chen isn't good enough for Suzy because he's too much of a new immigrant, Jin convinces himself that he was correct in his assessment and then dreams of the herbalist's wife. The herbalist's wife turns Jin into Danny. When considering what happened before this moment, it's easy to see how Jin got to the point where he has, as the herbalist said in Jin's first chapter, "forfeited his soul." Jin kissed Suzy, a friend, against her will, and then insulted Wei-Chen, Suzy's boyfriend, in an attempt to deal with his own conflicting emotions about the bullying Jin experienced from Greg. It's the fact that Jin trampled all over his friendships, the herbalist's wife suggests, that causes Jin to lose sight of his soul and who he truly is and then transform into Danny. Significantly, this is the moment in which Jin comes to the conclusion that being Asian is a horrible thing that makes a person unworthy of love—which is exactly what Greg said to Jin when he asked Jin to not date Amelia. Now, Jin has essentially become Greg by bullying Wei-Chen in the exact same racist way.

Chapter 9 Quotes

"Take this with you. It's a human child's toy that transforms from monkey to humanoid form. Let it remind you of who you are."

Related Characters: The Monkey King/Chin-Kee (speaker), Tze-Yo-Tzuh, Jin Wang/Danny, Wei-Chen Sun

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 217

Explanation and Analysis

Wei-Chen, in his monkey form, is about to descend to Earth for his test of virtue—to live among humans for 40 years without vice—and his father, the Monkey King, gives him a Transformer toy to remind him of who he is. Here, the novel shows that the idea of transforming doesn't have to be a bad thing. Wei-Chen's transformation into a human is supposed to be so that he can serve humanity and spread the word of Tze-Yo-Tzuh, something that the novel presents as wholly positive. However, Wei-Chen undergoes this change in identity in a fundamentally different way than either the Monkey King or Jin do when they became more human and turn into Danny, respectively. While both the Monkey King and Jin transform specifically so they can forget who they are, Wei-Chen doesn't seek to forget that he's a monkey. With this, the novel suggests that changing one's identity in the short term, with the purpose of helping others, can be a positive thing—the problem comes when transformation is undertaken for the wrong reasons.

"You misunderstand my intentions, Jin. I did not come to punish you. I came to serve as your conscience—as a signpost to your soul."

Related Characters: The Monkey King/Chin-Kee (speaker), Wei-Chen Sun, Jin Wang/Danny

Related Themes:

Page Number: 221

Explanation and Analysis

As the Monkey King and Jin stare at the puppet head of Chin-Kee (who is really the Monkey King in disguise), the Monkey King explains to Jin that he hasn't been visiting yearly to punish him or to punish Wei-Chen: he's been coming to essentially remind Jin of who he is. Chin-Kee, in this moment, reminds Jin that over the last few years, he's done everything in his power to separate himself from his identity as a Chinese American person, down to transforming himself into the white persona of Danny. Because of this, the Monkey King embodied Chin-Kee when he visited Jin so that Jin would have to face up to the fact that, according to the novel, it's impossible to escape one's true identity—even one that's plagued with negative stereotypes. In this sense, Chin-Kee functions as a reminder that though others may project the stereotypes onto Jin that Chin-Kee embodies, Jin knows in his heart that they aren't true and he's not just a walking stereotype. He is, like everyone else, a human worthy of kindness and respect, and should show that same kindness and respect to others in his life too.

"You know, Jin, I would have saved myself from five hundred years' imprisonment beneath a mountain of rock had I only realized how good it is to be a monkey."

Related Characters: The Monkey King/Chin-Kee (speaker), Jin Wang/Danny

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 223

Explanation and Analysis

Before returning to Heaven, the Monkey King leaves Jin with some parting wisdom: that the best thing in the world is to be oneself. While Jin hasn't had to spend 500 years trapped under a mountain of rock like the Monkey King has, he has spent the last several years walking around in an identity that's not his own, acting in ways that he knows he shouldn't and doesn't want to, and denying everything about his identity as a young Chinese American. The Monkey King wants Jin to realize that this kind of angst is unnecessary; Jin just needs to understand that he is a Chinese American, which can't be changed and isn't the horrible thing Jin makes it out to be. If Jin, like the Monkey King, chooses to accept his true identity, he will be able to live a far happier and more fulfilled life—and most importantly, he'll be able to share what he's learned with others, as the Monkey King is doing now.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

One bright night, the gods, goddesses, demons, and spirits gather in Heaven for a dinner party. The various guests try to show each other up by bragging about their achievements, while some make bad jokes. The sounds and smells of the party drift down until they reach Flower-Fruit Mountain, where the magical Monkey King oversees his kingdom of monkeys. The Monkey King is a powerful deity. According to legend, he was born of a rock and when his eyes opened, rays of light beamed into the sky. As a young deity, he did away with the tiger-spirit that haunted Flower-Fruit Mountain and established his kingdom, where monkeys from all over the world came to live. The Monkey King rules gently but firmly.

This passage's description of the Monkey King suggests that the he is a generous individual who looks out for others—he gets rid of evil spirits and benevolently oversees a kingdom where all monkeys choose to live happily. By contrast, the party guests brag about their achievements, which implies that they might not all be as good and benevolent as the Monkey King is.

The Monkey King spends all his time studying the arts of kung-fu. He has mastered thousands of minor disciplines, as well as the prerequisites to immortality: the four major heavenly disciplines. These are fist-like-lightning, or strong fists; thunderous foot, or the ability to deal major kicks; heavenly senses; and cloud-as-steed, or the ability to ride on clouds. On the night of the party, the Monkey King uses his senses to detect the dinner party. Since he loves parties, he summons a cloud to take him up to Heaven.

At this point, the Monkey King's grasp of kung-fu is portrayed as relatively neutral. While there are some violent aspects to the kung-fu, it's portrayed more as a tool that allows the Monkey King to both effectively defend Flower-Fruit Mountain and to navigate Heaven and deduce when there might be fun events going on.

The line to get into the party is impossibly long. The Monkey King fidgets, excited to join the other deities. By the time he reaches the front of the line, he's beside himself. The guard announces the arrival of the Dragon King of the Western Sea and then pulls the Monkey King aside. The Monkey King tells the guard that he'd like to be announced as the Monkey King of Flower-Fruit Mountain, but with a laugh, the guard says the Monkey King can't enter, as he has no **shoes**. The Monkey King insists that there must be a mistake since thousands of subjects pledge loyalty to him, but the guard tries to drag the Monkey King out.

Here, saying that the Monkey King can't enter because he doesn't have shoes reads as something that's meant to mask the real reason why the partygoers don't want the Monkey King to join them. Regardless, the Monkey King's response to this treatment shows that he makes it clear that he's little different from any of the other guests and can sees that what's happening here is just prejudicial nonsense.

The Monkey King loudly insists that he's a deity like everyone else, as well as a disciple of kung-fu and a master of the four major heavenly disciplines. The guard compliments the Monkey King on his achievements, but insists he still cannot enter. When the Monkey King argues again, the guard points out that even if the Monkey is a king and a deity, he's still a monkey. Everyone else at the party laughs. The Monkey King is extremely embarrassed. He almost leaves without saying anything, but decides that shouting "Die!" as he throws the guard at the other guests will make him feel better. He only leaves when everyone at the party is in a pile, injured and bruised. When he returns to Flower-Fruit Mountain, he feels acutely aware of the smell of monkey fur. He spends the night wondering how to get rid of the smell.

Finally, the guard is forced to say outright why the Monkey King can't enter: the guard and those he serves are prejudiced. It's important, then, that the Monkey King's first emotional response is embarrassment—that is, he fears that there's something wrong with him, rather than recognizing that the partygoers are rude and judgmental individuals whom he probably doesn't want to spend time with, anyway. This incident shows that this kind of prejudice can make a person feel embarrassed about who they are and then seek to change themselves, as when the Monkey King considers how to get rid his fur of its natural smell.

CHAPTER 2

On their way to their new house, Jin's mother tells Jin a Chinese parable. She says that long ago, a mother lived with her young son near a marketplace. The son spent his time pretending to buy and sell sticks and haggled with his friends. The mother decided to move to a house next to a cemetery, where the son played by burning incense and singing songs to dead ancestors. Finally, the mother moved to a house across from a university. Her son spent his time reading books about science, math, and history, and they stayed there for a long time. In the backseat, Jin plays with his **Transformer** action figure. They arrive at their new house.

The parable that Jin's mother tells shows the reader as well as Jin that she values education above all else. Her story implies that it's not acceptable for Jin to become a salesman or shop owner, or for him to seek a religious life. Instead, he must pursue a career that's academic in nature. This is potentially why Jin's family is in the process of to a new house, since the schools may be better in this neighborhood.

Jin's parents arrived in America at the same airport in the same week, but they didn't meet until a year later in graduate school. Jin's mother worked at a cannery, while Jin's father sold wigs to pay for school. His father became an engineer and his mother became a librarian. They lived in an apartment near San Francisco's Chinatown, where Jin was born. There were a number of other Chinese boys who lived in the same apartment complex. They'd all spend Saturday mornings in Jin's apartment, watching cartoons, and then they'd stage epic battles between their **Transformers**.

In Chinatown, Jin doesn't stick out or appear different—he's one of many young Chinese boys, and so he never has to think about the fact that in the U.S., he's a minority and may suffer because of that. This mirrors the way that the Monkey King didn't experience prejudice or question his identity as a monkey until he attempted to attend the dinner party with a diverse group of people.

Every Sunday, Jin's mother visits the Chinese herbalist and takes Jin with her. The appointments often seem to drag on forever, and Jin has to sit out front with the herbalist's wife. One slow Sunday, the herbalist's wife asks Jin what he's going to be when he grows up. Excitedly, Jin says he wants to be a **Transformer**. He holds up his Transformer toy and explains that Transformers are "robots in disguise." He shows the woman how his Transformer changes from a robot into a truck. The herbalist's wife seems amused. Jin sighs that his mother says that boys don't grow up to be Transformers, but the herbalist's wife says she has a secret for Jin: he can easily become anything he wants if he's willing to forfeit his soul.

Here, the herbalist's wife sets up one of the novel's most important ideas: that people can change into anything, like the Transformer action figures, but that in order to do so, one must inevitably compromise who one really is on the inside. This doesn't resonate with Jin, as he isn't yet aware that people are going to bully him for being Chinese, but this does foreshadow events that happen years later, when Jin struggles with his Chinese identity.

The day after Jin's family moves into their new home, Jin starts third grade at Mayflower Elementary School. Mrs. Greeder introduces Jin as "Jing Jang" and says he came all the way from China. Jin corrects her on his name and that he's from San Francisco. A boy named Timmy raises his hand and says that according to his mom, Chinese people eat dogs. Mrs. Greeder says that she's sure Jin doesn't do that—his family probably stopped as soon as they arrived in the U.S. The only other Asian student in the class is Suzy Nakamura. The class believes at first that Suzy and Jin must be related but when they realize they're not, rumors spread that they're arranged to be married on Suzy's 13th birthday. Suzy and Jin avoid each other as much as they can.

Though Mrs. Greeder might not mean to, she makes the racist reactions of Jin's classmates even worse by not checking on the pronunciation of his name before announcing it to the class and then essentially confirming that Chinese people eat dogs. Confirming Timmy's assertion in particular allows Timmy to go on believing that he's right to think this way, while mispronouncing Jin's name sends the message that it's not essential for the other students to learn their classmates' names—even if doing so is a simple way to show respect.

Every day at lunch and recess, while the other kids play, Jin eats by himself at a picnic table. On one of Jin's first days at school, Timmy and his crew approach and ask Jin what he's eating. When Jin explains that he has dumplings for lunch, Timmy warns Jin to stay away from his dog. A blond boy with curly **hair** named Greg tells Timmy to be cool, but Timmy calls Greg a "pansy-boy." Greg intimidates Timmy into backing down and taking back his insult. Timmy leads his friends away, insisting that they leave "bucktooth"—Jin—alone so he can finish eating Lassie. Greg looks back with pity and concern, but says nothing.

In this situation, Timmy is punishing Jin for eating foods that are unfamiliar to him—and he's showing Jin that if he wants to avoid being bullied, he must avoid any habits that might make him look even a little bit Chinese. This begins to teach Jin to be ashamed of his cultural identity. Greg, meanwhile, shows promise of eventually standing up for Jin in more meaningful ways.

Jin makes his first friend about three months later. His name is Peter, and he's known as "Peter the Eater" because he eats his boogers. At recess one day, he introduces himself to Jin by insisting that if Jin gives Peter his sandwich, they'll be best friends—otherwise, Peter will beat Jin up and make Jin eat his boogers. Jin hands over his sandwich. They soon become friends and play games like "Kill the Pill" and "Crack the Whip." Peter physically hurts Jin during these games. When they play their other favorite, "Let's Be Jews," Peter forces Jin to wear his mother's bras on his head. Two years later, when Jin is in fifth grade, Peter goes to visit his dad over winter break. Peter never returns.

The relationship that Peter and Jin have is, importantly, not genuine friendship—it's a relationship in which Peter bullies Jin, and Jin accepts it because it means he's getting attention from one of his white peers (and furthermore, likely doesn't feel as though he has the power to stop Peter's bullying anyway). Jin seems to occupy one of the lowest rungs on the school social hierarchy, which is likely why Peter targets Jin in the first place.

Wei-Chen Sun moves to town two months after Peter moves away. The teacher introduces him as Chei-Chen Chun from China. Wei-Chen corrects the teacher on his name and that he's from Taiwan. For some reason, Jin wants to beat Wei-Chen up. Wei-Chen looks uncool: he wears huge glasses, a robot shirt, and high-waisted sweatpants. He approaches Jin during lunch and, in Mandarin, asks if he is Chinese. Jin spits that Wei-Chen should speak English in America. Wei-Chen struggles to ask his question in English and then asks if they can be friends. Jin insists he has enough friends. Though Jin is sitting alone, he points to the boys playing football in the field and ignores Wei-Chen.

When Wei-Chen and Jin's fifth-grade teacher makes the exact same mistakes that Mrs. Greeder did in introducing Jin years ago, it illustrates just how widespread this brand of casual racism is. It shows that Asian students in general cannot expect basic respect in the form of having their name pronounced correctly, or having a teacher confirm their biography before making assumptions in front of the class. Jin's desire to beat Wei-Chen up, meanwhile, shows how much he's internalized the idea that being Asian is something negative—like Timmy and Peter when Jin arrived, Jin now wants to punish those who embody that identity.

Wei-Chen sits down a little ways away from Jin and sadly pulls out a **Transformer**. This sparks Jin's interest. Wei-Chen explains that his Transformer changes from a robot into a monkey. His father gave it to him just before he left as a goodbye present. Jin asks to see it. Wei-Chen soon becomes Jin's best friend.

The Transformer in this situation functions as a symbol for the fact that Jin and Wei-Chen aren't that different, even if Jin is doing his best to appear as white as possible. This offers hope that going forward, the idea that all people are fundamentally the same will expand to more characters.

CHAPTER 3

The frame reads, "*Everyone Ruvs* Chin-Kee" alongside an illustration of a laughing Chinese person with buckteeth and a traditional queue hairstyle. A **laugh track** indicating clapping runs along the bottom of the frame. In a suburban California home, two white teenagers named Melanie and Danny study chemistry. Danny drools, and the laugh track plays when Melanie calls him out. Melanie tries to draw Danny's attention back to what they're studying, but Danny starts to ask Melanie out. Danny's mom interrupts from the kitchen, however, and says that cousin Chin-Kee is coming to visit. Danny drops his book and looks horrified, prompting the laugh track. Danny's mom says that Chin-Kee is coming from the airport now. Melanie asks who cousin Chin-Kee is.

The first frame of this chapter tells the reader that this section is supposed to take the form of a sitcom television show. For readers familiar with the sitcom format, this conveys valuable information: that Danny, the "show's" protagonist, is probably going to fail a lot, in humorous ways. It also tells the reader that what's funny in this chapter isn't up for debate or interpretation—the laugh track will tell readers what's supposed to be funny, and what isn't. In this case, the rather racist depiction of Chin-Kee, whose name (which is intentionally similar to the racial slur "chink") and appearance embody common racist stereotypes of Chinese people, yet are presented as something to be laughed at.

Chin-Kee bursts through the front door, larger than life, as the **laugh track** plays. He has yellow skin, a long queue, buckteeth, and wears traditional Chinese garb. Chin-Kee bows to "Cousin Da-nee" and says he's as happy as "ginger root pranted in nutritious manure of well-bred ox" to see him. Then, Chin-Kee notices Melanie. He spits and slobbers as he crouches down by Melanie, insisting she's beautiful, has a "bountiful Amellican bosem," and needs to have her feet bound so she can have Chin-Kee's children. When they hear Danny's mom in the kitchen, Chin-Kee wipes his mouth and announces that Melanie must belong to Danny. He suggests, however, that he could find his own beautiful American girl when he accompanies Danny to school. Danny looks horrified as the laugh track laughs and claps.

Notice that Chin-Kee himself is what's supposed to be funny here—and since Chin-Kee is a combination of many negative and racist stereotypes about Chinese people, the laugh track is saying that Chinese people are something to be laughed at. In this way, the novel shows how television shows like the fictional Everyone Ruvs Chin-Kee *train viewers to accept racist and narrow views like this as fact. Further, it's significant that Chin-Kee isn't exactly a likeable person—he invades Melanie's personal space and is aware that he's making Danny uncomfortable. This furthers the racist portrayal of Chinese people as lewd and impolite.*

CHAPTER 4

The morning after the dinner party, the Monkey King declares that all monkeys on Flower-Fruit Mountain must wear **shoes**. The monkeys comply, but they struggle to climb in their new footwear. The Money King asks that no one disturbs him and locks himself in his innermost chamber. There, he studies kung-fu fervently, training by day and meditating by night. After 40 days, he achieves the four major disciplines of invulnerability: invulnerability to fire, cold, drowning, and wounds. The Monkey King studies for another 40 days and achieves the four major disciplines of bodily form. He learns to turn himself into a giant, make himself miniature, turn his hair into a million clones, and to shape-shift.

The decree that all monkeys must wear shoes doesn't fix the actual problem: the prejudice of the gods and goddesses in Heaven. Instead, this is a way for the Monkey King to try to make himself more appealing to those who tried to turn him away. When the Monkey King turns to kung-fu to make himself invulnerable and change his bodily form, it shows that he is potentially turning to violence in reaction to the poor treatment he experienced. It's also telling that he can change his form at all—through that, he can alter how others see him and how they treat him.

The other monkeys are ecstatic when they see the Monkey King coming out of his chambers, but they're also puzzled. He looks tall and walks in a more human fashion, but the monkeys can't figure out what's different. One monkey offers him a scroll that came from Heaven on the first night of his seclusion. It reads that the Monkey King is convicted of trespassing upon Heaven and must go to Ao-Kuang, Dragon King of the Eastern Sea, to be executed. The Monkey King growls that this is a mistake: the Monkey King no longer exists, as he has now mastered the 12 major disciplines of kung-fu and transcended his old name. Now, people must call him The Great Sage, Equal of Heaven. The monkeys are confused and try to offer their king a banana, but the Monkey King storms off to announce his new name to Heaven.

Here, the novel reveals that the Monkey King is trying to make himself both more human (through his altered appearance) and less of a target for bullying (through acquiring the kung-fu skills). Changing his name is the cherry on top of this transformation, as his original name tells people exactly who and what he is—a monkey. This new name conveniently ignores that the Monkey King is a monkey, and instead focuses on his admirable might and wisdom.

Ao-Kuang insists that he's been anxiously awaiting the Monkey King's arrival, but he's inwardly nervous at how much bigger the Monkey King is now. Ao-Kuang apologizes to the Monkey King for not sending someone to arrest him; Ao-Kuang says that none of the gods wanted to pick up fleas on Flower-Fruit Mountain. He calls his guard, who chops the Monkey King's head off—but the Monkey King's head returns to his shoulders, and he insists that the execution isn't necessary. Ao-Kuang deems this an impressive trick and calls the Monkey King "little monkey," but the Monkey King says he's *not* a monkey. Ao-Kuang and his guard giggle and laugh as the Monkey King declares that he's The Great Sage, Equal of Heaven.

Ao-Kuang's comment about not wanting to get fleas on Flower-Fruit Mountain is a clear version of common real-world prejudices against people from non-Western countries—that they're dirty, carry exotic infectious diseases, or are infested with parasites. That the fictional and fishlike Ao-Kuang is the one spewing this rhetoric begins to show that this kind of prejudice isn't unique to either Heaven or California where Jin lives. Rather, it's a problem that crops up everywhere, against many different groups of people.

The Monkey King performs the discipline of giant form and stomps on Ao-Kuang, which convinces the dragon king. Ao-Kuang gives the Monkey King a magic cudgel (staff) that grows and shrinks with a single thought. Next, the Monkey King visits Lao-Tzu, Yama, and the Jade Emperor. They all laugh at his pronouncement, but the Monkey King performs his newly-mastered disciplines and shows off his new cudgel. When the Monkey King is through with them, they're convinced that he's The Great Sage, Equal of Heaven.

Now, the Monkey King is no longer using his mastery of kung-fu for good. He's using it instead to exact revenge and to make others suffer a similar pain to what he did, something that the novel suggests is unfulfilling for the person in the Monkey King's position and won't do him any good in the long run. He may believe he's changing minds, but he's really just making others even more suspicious of him.

Not long after, the gods, goddesses, demons, and spirits go to the lion, the ox, the human, and the eagle, the emissaries of Tze-Yo-Tzuh: the lion, the ox, the human, and the eagle. They beg the emissaries to do something, as the Monkey King is a menace. The emissaries agree to relay their request to Tze-Yo-Tzuh. A few days later, as the Monkey King beats someone over the head and forces them to repeat his new title over and over again, a voice asks "little monkey" where his anger comes from. The Monkey King declares that he's not a monkey and turns around. Behind him is a tall man with a white beard and hair, flowing robes, and a huge staff.

The gods, goddess, demons, and spirits are (in theory, at least) the very people whom the Monkey King wants to impress and have on his side—but because he's been so violent to them, they're even less willing to accept him and just want him to go away. While this doesn't excuse the behavior of Heaven's residents by any means, this does show how isolating turning to violence can be—the Monkey King has no allies now.

The man—Tze-Yo-Tzuh—again calls the Monkey King a "silly little monkey." The Monkey King stows his cudgel behind his ear and gets in Tze-Yo-Tzuh's face. Tze-Yo-Tzuh says that he created the Monkey King as a monkey, so he's a monkey. The Monkey King insists that he was born of a rock and that no one created him, but Tze-Yo-Tzuh says that he formed the Monkey King within the rock. The Monkey King asks whether Tze-Yo-Tzuh can prove this. In response, Tze-Yo-Tzuh announces his name and says that all he's created—everything in existence—is always within hand's reach. Because he created the Monkey King, the Monkey King can never escape him.

For the Monkey King, who believes himself wholly invincible now that he has 12 major kung-fu disciplines to rely on, Tze-Yo-Tzuh's insistence that the Monkey King's power isn't all that it's cracked up to be is entirely unwelcome. Accepting Tze-Yo-Tzuh's information as truth would mean that the Monkey King would need to accept that he can't do things on his own, and instead must turn to his community to make sense of who he is and how he fits in.

The Monkey King summons a cloud to prove Tze-Yo-Tzuh wrong. He flies into the sky and taunts Tze-Yo-Tzuh, but Tze-Yo-Tzuh reaches a hand into the sky after the Monkey King. The Monkey King flies as fast as he can. He flies past the planets, stars, and edges of the universe. He finally flies through the boundaries of reality. At the end of all that is, he reaches five pillars of gold. The Monkey King uses his cudgel to carve his name into one of the pillars and then urinates on it. Satisfied, he flies back through the universe and informs Tze-Yo-Tzuh that he escaped. The Monkey King declares that Tze-Yo-Tzuh is the most pitiable god he's ever met and tells him to leave.

Again, the most significant element of the Monkey King's downfall is that he believes he can proudly and stubbornly insist that he's the only individual who matters, an idea that Tze-Yo-Tzuh shows clearly isn't true. It's also worth considering another possible consequence of the Monkey King's insistence on his own powers: Tze-Yo-Tzuh now has to spend his time trying to convince the Monkey King he's right, rather than making the case to the other residents of Heaven that they should be kind to the Monkey King.

Tze-Yo-Tzuh asks the Monkey King to come closer and look at his hand. The Monkey King is shocked: the god's finger is marked with the Monkey King's name and urine. Tze-Yo-Tzuh explains that the five pillars of gold were the five fingers of his hand; the Monkey King only fooled himself that he could escape. Tze-Yo-Tzuh walks away from the dumbfounded Monkey King and invites him to walk across a stone bridge. He repeats his name and that he was, is, and "shall forever be" Tze-Yo-Tzuh. He's searched the Monkey King's heart, knows all his thoughts, and knows everything he does and says. He says that the Monkey King can never escape him, as he's in Heaven and in the underworld—and his hand is at the end of all that is.

The assertion that the Monkey King only fooled himself is important—everyone else, from Tze-Yo-Tzuh to Ao-Kuang, is well aware that the Monkey King may be taller and straighter than before, but he's still a monkey. This is an idea that will become important as Jin's story develops as well. As an omnipresent and powerful god, Tze-Yo-Tzuh attempts to situate himself as an essential person in the Monkey King's community. He is, he suggests, the one who gets to make the final call on what someone's identity is, which means that as long as the Monkey King goes against Tze-Yo-Tzuh, the Monkey King cannot know who he really is.

He formed the Monkey King with awe and wonder, as everything he makes is wonderful. Tze-Yo-Tzuh says he didn't make a mistake. The Monkey King is supposed to be a monkey, and he still is a monkey—so he needs to stop being silly and accept this. The Monkey King seems startled for a moment, but then insists he can take Tze-Yo-Tzuh down. With a sigh, Tze-Yo-Tzuh causes the stone bridge to collapse, sending the Monkey King falling to the depths below. When he hits the ground, the stone covers him and traps him in a mountain. Tze-Yo-Tzuh sets a seal on the mountain to prevent the Monkey King from exercising kung-fu, and the Monkey King stays there for 500 years. Only the Monkey King's upper body sticks out from the mountain.

At this point, the Monkey King is still so caught up in the humiliation he experienced at the party to stop and think about the truth of what Tze-Yo-Tzuh is saying (essentially, that it's impossible and unfulfilling for the Monkey King to try so hard to be someone he isn't). Locking the Monkey King in the mountain deprives him of kung-fu, which he believes gives him all of his power. Without it, the Monkey King will have to reflect on who he really is when he's not behaving violently.

CHAPTER 5

One day in seventh-grade English class, Jin notices a girl named Amelia for the first time when she takes off her sweater to reveal her bare shoulder. In this moment, Jin's life changes forever. From then on, Jin feels Amelia's presence everywhere. She makes Jin so nervous that he constantly drops things—like his and Wei-Chen's science project—if she's around. Jin spends his nights thinking about her. Amelia isn't especially beautiful, and has a slight lisp and a bit of dandruff, but her smile drives Jin crazy. After a month, Jin tells Wei-Chen about her. Wei-Chen laughs at first and explains that in Taiwan, boys who like girls before they turn 18 are laughed at. Jin scolds Wei-Chen for being F.O.B. (fresh off the boat). Two weeks later, Wei-Chen and Suzy Nakamura start dating, much to Jin's surprise.

The very fact that Jin has an all-consuming crush like this shows clearly that he's a normal teen like anyone else in the novel, or indeed, the world. Everything he's experiencing is somewhat universal—it has nothing to do with him being Chinese. Because of this, American Born Chinese *is more broadly able to humanize its Asian characters and make it clear that they're no different from white readers, thereby encouraging readers to be more empathetic in their own lives and experiences.*

Not long after this, Jin's science teacher, Mr. Graham, introduces the class to several animals—a lizard, a monkey, and a rabbit—who are temporarily on loan to the class from a classmate's mother. The mother runs Babelene Cosmetics, and all the animals have long, curled eyelashes and huge, human-like lips—as does the classmate responsible for bringing in the animals. Mr. Graham asks for volunteers to care for the animals after school and offers extra credit to volunteers. Amelia, who sits next to Greg, volunteers. Behind her, Timmy offers to let her "pet his lizard" any time, but Greg shuts Timmy down and makes Amelia laugh. Across the room, Wei-Chen encourages Jin to raise his hand, but Mr. Graham insists that Wei-Chen must want to volunteer if he's making so much noise. Wei-Chen agrees to volunteer and thinks that Jin is a scared turtle.

The appearance of the lab animals makes another point about changing one's appearance or identity: when it's done by force (as the scientists likely did to these animals) it takes on a sinister quality, given how abnormal and scared the animals look. When Timmy taunts Amelia, it shows that he bullies everyone—he doesn't confine himself to hurling racial slurs or stereotypes at his Asian classmates, he's just a rude and mean person. Just like Timmy may have learned to detest his Asian classmates from television shows akin to Everyone Ruvs Chin-Kee, *it's also possible he learned to treat women like this from the media.*

Jin stares across the room at Greg and Amelia, who are chatting happily, and later asks Wei-Chen and Suzy if they think Amelia likes Greg. Wei-Chen and Suzy are too caught up in "looking at each other with eyes of love" and giggling to hear. Jin repeats his question. Suzy tells Jin to not be so paranoid since talking doesn't mean anything, but Wei-Chen points out that Jin is a "little cowardly turtle" and hasn't even spoken to Amelia. When Jin insists he's spoken to Amelia before, Suzy insists that dropping his books in front of Amelia and then giggling doesn't count. Wei-Chen and Suzy laugh as they recount an episode from science class last week, when Jin walked in front of Amelia's desk, knocked over a bunch of test tubes, and then made a bad joke about not breaking all of them. They laugh hysterically.

Again, the way that Wei-Chen and Suzy good-naturedly tease Jin about taking his crush on Amelia too seriously shows that these are normal teenagers who aren't not fundamentally different because they're not white. For Jin, however, focusing on whether Amelia might have a crush on Greg means that he's sizing up the differences between Greg and himself, trying to figure out where he falls short in the scheme of things. Given Suzy's recitation of Jin's embarrassing incident in science class, it appears the main difference between Jin and Greg isn't their races, it's that Greg can speak without losing his cool—something Jin could learn to do too.

Jin tells Wei-Chen and Suzy that they're awful as they continue to laugh uncontrollably. Timmy and a friend walk by and loudly remark that it's getting cold, fitting in as many racist slurs as they can. They laugh as they pass Jin, Wei-Chen, and Suzy, who all burn with shame. Jin walks home alone and thinks of Amelia. He pictures Amelia next to Greg, and then thinks of Greg only. As he gets home, he thinks only of Greg's curly blond **hair**. The next day at school, Suzy and Wei-Chen are floored when Jin comes to school with Greg's hairstyle. Suzy stops Wei-Chen from saying something rude to Jin, but after Jin is gone, Wei-Chen incredulously asks why Jin's hair looks like broccoli.

For Timmy and his friends, tormenting Jin, Wei-Chen, and Suzy is recreational—they don't care that it's hurtful, as they potentially don't even see their Asian classmates as truly human due to their differences. When Jin fixates on Greg's hair, this characteristic becomes akin to the Monkey King's shoes. It's not about the hair or the shoes at all, but changing that one thing makes Jin feel as though he's controlling something and changing himself to appear more like a white boy, a change that his friends who care about him can see right through.

After school, Wei-Chen goes to science class to feed the animals with Amelia. The monkey grabs Wei-Chen's face and chatters at him, and Amelia comments that the animal seems quite attached to him. Wei-Chen corrects Amelia's assumption that the monkey is female. Amelia asks if Wei-Chen will get the pinky mice for the lizard from the back of the closet. As he searches, Amelia says she's thrilled Wei-Chen could volunteer with her, since the furless mice creep her out. Wei-Chen can't find the mice, so Amelia goes into the supply closet to help look. She finds them, but only after the door closes behind them. They realize that there's no knob on the inside of the door, so they sit down to wait for someone to rescue them. Wei-Chen shares that he's supposed to meet Jin after school, and Jin will figure out where they are.

The monkey seems to be unusually drawn to Wei-Chen, and the fact that he knows the sex of the animal suggests that there is some kind of connection between them. Meanwhile, the way that Amelia talks to Wei-Chen throughout this chapter is significant—she doesn't appear to treat him any differently because he's Chinese, which makes Amelia the only white character in the novel who treats Jin and Wei-Chen like real people worthy of respect and kindness. In this sense, she may be worthy of Jin's affections.

Amelia confirms that Jin is the Asian boy with the Afro and then asks if Wei-Chen and Jin are good friends. Wei-Chen says that Jin is his best friend, and he owes Jin a lot. When Amelia asks him to elaborate, Wei-Chen says that when he first moved to America, he was afraid nobody would be his friend. He met Jin on the first day, and Jin made him feel like everything would be okay. Jin treats Wei-Chen like a little brother, teaches him English and slang phrases, and buys him McDonald's French fries. Wei-Chen says that sometimes he thinks his accent embarrasses Jin, but Jin is still his friend—and really, Jin was Wei-Chen's only friend for a long time. Wei-Chen says that Jin has a good soul.

Here, Wei-Chen's description of Jin shows how good and generous of a friend Wei-Chen is. He surely knows that speaking so highly of Jin to Amelia will pique her interest in Jin, but Wei-Chen doesn't seem to be saying any of this as part of an act. This, then, suggests that like the Monkey King, Jin is a naturally kind, generous, and giving person. Given the parallels between the Monkey King and Jin, then, this foreshadows a similar trajectory in their stories—Jin will likely continue to attempt to change his identity, and ensue dire consequences as a result.

Wei-Chen smiles to himself and Amelia asks if Jin likes her. With a laugh, Wei-Chen tells Amelia to ask Jin herself. Meanwhile, Jin waits for Wei-Chen for almost an hour. He has to bribe the custodian with an orange freeze from the cafeteria and a promise of doing garbage duty to open the biology room, but Jin gets in and figures it out. He's worried and jealous that Wei-Chen is alone with Amelia, but when he opens the closet, everything is a blur. Jin looks down at Amelia and Wei-Chen whispers in his ear that this is the chance of a lifetime. Jin feels a jolt of confidence that comes from his **hair** and awkwardly asks Amelia if she'll go out with him. Amelia agrees. Her "yes" keeps Jin warm all night long.

The fact that Jin's confidence seems to come directly from his curly hairstyle, modeled after Greg's hair, suggests that being Chinese made Jin feel less confident, while looking more white (even if, given Wei-Chen and Suzy's reaction, Jin really just looks silly) makes Jin feel far more invincible. Further, by taking on the role of the rescuer and then being the one to ask Amelia out, Jin also begins to embody a bit of stereotypical masculinity. Regardless, experiencing this success after changing his hair will likely show Jin that acting like someone he isn't yields positive results.

CHAPTER 6

The **laugh track** plays as the bell rings, signaling the start of the school day at Oliphant High School. Danny and Chin-Kee sneak in after the bell. Chin-Kee is annoyed that Danny brought him late, but he exclaims that the school is big and beautiful. He laughs and says he likes it. In government class, the teacher asks exasperatedly what the three branches of the American government are. The laugh track plays when Chin-Kee puts his hand up and Danny hisses at him, but Chin-Kee correctly gives the answer. The teacher is delighted and tells the class they should be more like Chin-Kee as the laugh track runs.

Danny very clearly wants as few people as possible to notice Chin-Kee, hence why he sneaks Chin-Kee in late and then doesn't want him answering questions in class. This is because Danny doesn't want to have to acknowledge that many people see him as just another version of Chin-Kee, not as a whole person in his own right.

In world history, Chin-Kee names Christopher Columbus's three ships. He correctly identifies bones in anatomy class, solves equations in math, and answers questions in Spanish. Danny becomes more and more embarrassed. At lunchtime, he sits moodily next to Chin-Kee, who happily eats crispy fried cat gizzards with noodles and offers some to Danny. A huge jock, Steve, stops by the table and congratulates Danny on making the varsity basketball team. They joke about Danny's old team, which wasn't very good, but Danny insists he has a great jump shot. Steve laughs, says he'll see about that at practice, and then asks about Chin-Kee. Danny morosely introduces Chin-Kee as his visiting cousin. The **laugh track** plays as Chin-Kee happily waves "harro."

As Chin-Kee correctly answers question after question, he plays to the stereotype that all Chinese people are naturally extremely smart. Chin-Kee's lunch is a reference to a 2001 political cartoon drawn by a white cartoonist, which implies that white people have invented and perpetuated the racist stereotypes Chin-Kee embodies. The cat for lunch, meanwhile, continues to flesh out the stereotype that Chinese people eat American house pets.

Steve starts to engage Chin-Kee in conversation, but Danny interjects and asks if Steve has a copy of the game schedule. Steve opens his Coke and then digs in his bag for a schedule. While he and Danny are occupied, Chin-Kee snatches the Coke, pulls it to his side of the table and outside the frame, and then pushes it back to Danny and Steve's end as Steve hands over a crumpled schedule. Chin-Kee's cheeks bulge. Steve jokingly says he's going to charge Danny $100 and a date with the girlfriend Danny doesn't have, and the **laugh track** plays. He walks away with his Coke as Chin-Kee giggles hysterically. Chin-Kee tells Danny, "Me Chinese, me play joke! Me go pee-pee in his Coke!" Danny is horrified. From outside the frame, Steve spits his Coke and asks what's wrong with it. The bell rings and the laugh track laughs.

Interestingly, Danny doesn't want Steve to treat Chin-Kee like a real person—doing so would force Danny to acknowledge his connection to Chinese culture. Chin-Kee demonstrates yet another stereotype when he repeats a common schoolyard rhyme, and actually makes good on it. The rhyme itself invokes the stereotype that Chinese people are tricksters willing to make disgusting "jokes," and the word choice makes fun of people for whom English isn't their first language.

Chin-Kee answers questions correctly in chemistry and English, which embarrasses Danny as the **laugh track** runs. After school, Danny gets his detention slip. Chin-Kee taunts Danny and says that he deserves the detention since he came to school late. As Danny heads for detention, Chin-Kee laughs, says he's having a great day, and says he loves American school. He salivates as he says this and heads for the library, announcing as he goes that he's going to find an American girl to marry and have children with. He invites Danny to join him after detention. The laugh track laughs. As Danny walks away, he sees other white classmates pulling their eyelids flat and laughing along with the laugh track.

The way that Chin-Kee salivates while talking about finding a girlfriend speaks to the racist belief that Chinese culture is sexually deviant—Chin-Kee, in other words, embodies the idea that all Chinese men are out to prey on innocent white women. The laugh track, meanwhile, tells the reader that this all is supposed to be funny—when really, it's wildly racist and mean. When Danny's other classmates pull on their eyelids and laugh with the laugh track, it shows that the result of viewing media like Everyone Ruvs Chin-Kee *is people believing that racist mockery is okay.*

Danny comes across Melanie in the hallway and apologizes about what Chin-Kee said last night. Melanie apologizes in turn and says it wasn't Danny's fault; in a way, it was kind of flattering. The **laugh track** runs. Danny hopefully asks Melanie if she'd like to see a movie on Saturday. Melanie nervously looks around and says that they're good friends and she'd like to stay good friends, not mess it up. Angrily, Danny says that he's not like Chin-Kee, but Melanie says it has nothing to do with Chin-Kee. Danny loudly and angrily says that he's nothing like Chin-Kee and he has no idea how they're related, but Melanie repeats that she just wants to stay friends. Melanie says she just noticed that Danny's teeth buck out a bit. She gives him a card for her uncle, who's an orthodontist, and leaves. Danny is mortified. The laugh track plays.

Danny's insistence that he's not like Chin-Kee reads as expressly odd, since he's white and not visibly Chinese. It's unclear at this point how, exactly, Danny and Chin-Kee are related given their different races (are they cousins by marriage?) and what Danny's connection to Chinese culture is. While there's no way to verify whether or not Melanie is telling the truth about why she doesn't want to date Danny, the fact remains that Danny cannot escape from the haunting thought that nobody will want to date him because he's associated with a Chinese person. Melanie confirms this when she gives him her uncle's card for his buckteeth—another racist stereotype about Chinese people.

After detention, Danny goes to the gym and sits under the basketball hoop. Steve comes up to Danny, says that practice is over, and tries to joke with Danny. Danny doesn't respond; concerned, Steve sits down and asks what's wrong. Danny confides in Steve that he's a junior and has transferred schools three times already because every year, just when he starts to make friends and feel like he fits in, Chin-Kee visits. Chin-Kee has been visiting every year since eighth grade and spends his visits at school with Danny, eating his "stupid food" and talking in "stupid talk." When Chin-Kee leaves, people think of Danny just as Chin-Kee's cousin, and he has to transfer.

The fact that Danny is willing to open up to Steve at all about his problems shows that on some level, Danny is lonely and craves friendship and community—but because of the shame he feels about being related to Chin-Kee and the stereotypes that constantly haunt him, he's unable to find any friends. Further, the way that Danny talks about Chin-Kee's behavior as being "stupid" across the board shows that Danny's hatred of Chinese culture has intensified since junior high.

Steve is quiet for a moment, but he assures Danny that that won't happen here. Steve says that no one at Oliphant is like that, since no one has ever said anything about his own weight. Steve amends this, though, when he remembers that he broke a boy's nose for calling him "Mr. Jiggles" once. He offers to break the nose of anyone who gives Danny a hard time. Danny thanks Steve for listening and Steve offers to buy Danny a Coke. Danny is incredulous and asks if Steve is going to buy him the Coke so Danny can pee in it. Realizing that Chin-Kee peed in his Coke back in the cafeteria, Steve is disgusted and incredulous, and the **laugh track** runs. Danny angrily leaves the gym as Steve vomits into a garbage can.

Though Steve means well, it's worth considering that as a white boy who appears relatively popular, Steve has a lot of social capital to throw around and force people to treat him with respect, something that Danny doesn't have due to his association with Chin-Kee. Being rude to Steve seems to be just a way for Danny to avoid being further misunderstood or bullied.

CHAPTER 7

The narrator explains that only four monks have ever achieved legendary status. Chi Dao focused on meditation until he turned to stone, while Jing Sze fasted for 14 months. Jiang Tao's sermons were eloquent enough to make bamboo weep. The final monk, Wong Lai-Tsao, is comparatively unremarkable. He can't meditate for more than 20 minutes or fast for more than half a day, and his sermons don't make sense. Every morning, however, he gets up early, picks fruit, and shares it with vagrants who live outside of town. He then dresses their wounds and heads home at night. The vagrants are cruel and dismissive, and one refers to Wong Lai-Tsao as a "lazy bum." Still, Wong Lai-Tsao performs this routine daily for years.

Wong Lai-Tsao embodies the idea that a person should be extremely humble and generous to others, and that living a life centered on generosity is what makes a person great and worthy of divine attention. Applying this to the Monkey King's story, this suggests that his grasp of kung-fu isn't what makes him a great sage—rather, the Monkey King could likely become an even greater deity if he chose to use his kung-fu mastery to better the lives of his monkeys on Flower-Fruit Mountain.

One afternoon, a vagrant asks Wong Lai-Tsao why he continues to serve the vagrants and another asks if he's too dumb to get a real job. Very seriously, Wong Lai-Tsao says that he's no more worthy of love than the vagrant, but that Tze-Yo-Tzuh still loves him deeply and faithfully. Because of this, he believes he must love others like Tze-Yo-Tzuh loves him. The vagrant thinks for a moment, declares that this answer is good, and then suddenly the group of vagrants transforms into Tze-Yo-Tzuh's emissaries. The lion explains who they are and says that Tze-Yo-Tzuh has chosen Wong Lai-Tsao for a mission. The human motions to three boxes and says that he needs to carry three packages to the west. A star will guide him. The eagle warns that the journey will be perilous—demons believe the old wives' tale that eating a holy man grants eternal life.

That the emissaries can change their form in this situation, and that this ability is presented as a positive thing, suggests that there are times when changing one's form is acceptable and even desirable. In this case, shape-shifting is useful in that the emissaries can test Wong Lai-Tsao and give him his divine mission. However, it's worth keeping in mind that even though the emissaries' forms change, their true natures as disciples of Tze-Yo-Tzuh don't really change (their insults, presumably, were part of the test, not a true reflection of them being malevolent individuals). Through this, the novel encourages readers to understand the importance of being true to oneself—even if one must temporarily take on a new identity to do so.

The emissaries ask if Wong Lai-Tsao accepts the mission and after a moment of silence, Wong Lai-Tsao says he accepts any plans that Tze-Yo-Tzuh has for him. The lion then explains that Wong Lai-Tsao will receive three disciples, whom he'll gather along his journey. The first is an ancient monkey deity, who is currently imprisoned beneath a mountain. The following morning, Wong Lai-Tsao gets up early and sets off. He struggles through the jungle and crosses a wide river. He climbs mountains, crosses deserts, and camps—and as he travels, two demons begin to follow him.

Tze-Yo-Tzuh created everyone and everything, and therefore gets the last say on what a person's identity is. Because of this, Wong Lai-Tsao believes that if Tze-Yo-Tzuh wants him to undertake this quest, he has no choice but to accept and tackle it as best he can. His willingness to eschew any potential selfish desires, in other words, opens him up to new experiences and the full extent of his own potential.

After hiking for 40 days, Wong Lai-Tsao reaches the Monkey King's mountain. The Monkey King snoozes where he lies trapped, but wakes and perks up when Wong Lai-Tsao calls him "disciple" and asks him to free himself from the mountain quickly—Wong Lai-Tsao needs help bearing his burden. The Monkey King is incensed and asks if Wong Lai-Tsao knows who he is. When Wong Lai-Tsao replies that he's the monkey disciple promised to him by Tze-Yo-Tzuh, the Monkey King loses his temper. He shouts that he's The Great Sage, Equal of Heaven, the ruler of Flower-Fruit Mountain, and the master of 12 major disciplines of kung-fu. He reaches for Wong Lai-Tsao and threatens to beat him for his rudeness. Wong Lai-Tsao calmly asks the Monkey King to stop so they can get on with their journey.

Because of the effort the Monkey King put into turning himself into The Great Sage, Equal of Heaven, it's understandably annoying to be referred to merely as a disciple—but given that Tze-Yo-Tzuh promised the Monkey King to Wong Lai-Tsao, it's reasonable to assume that an essential part of the Monkey King's true identity is to be a helper to Wong Lai-Tsao. This makes the Monkey King's personal quest even more difficult, as his pride makes it hard for him to accept not just that he's a monkey, but that his purpose in life is to serve others.

Enraged, the Monkey King insults Wong Lai-Tsao and points out that he's stuck in a mountain, so even if he wanted to help and hang out with such an unintelligent person as Wong Lai-Tsao, he can't. Wong Lai-Tsao points out that the Monkey King's current form isn't his true form and if he assumes his true form, he'll be free. Even angrier, the Monkey King calls Wong Lai-Tsao stupid and points to the seal that Tze-Yo-Tzuh left, which forbids him from exercising kung-fu and escaping. Wong Lai-Tsao points out that returning to his true form means *releasing* kung-fu, not exercising it. The Monkey King starts to respond, but stops and falls silent.

When Wong Lai-Tsao insists that the Monkey King must release kung-fu in order to free himself from the mountain, what he's really saying is that the Monkey King needs to let go of everything that made him violent, proud, and stubborn—only through doing that can the Monkey King learn to be happy with who he is. Essentially, the Monkey King can't muscle his way out of this. He needs to free himself by engaging in self-reflection instead.

The Monkey King points out that there are slobbering demons behind Wong Lai-Tsao, but Wong Lai-Tsao already knows this. He says this is why the Monkey King needs to get out of the mountain immediately. The Monkey King asks what will happen if he refuses to do so, and Wong Lai-Tsao responds that if Tze-Yo-Tzuh wants him to die due to the Monkey King's stubbornness, then that's the way it is. As the demons close in, the Monkey King says he'll enjoy watching the demons pick Wong Lai-Tsao out of their teeth, since he's dumb and deserves it. Wong Lai-Tsao points out that this is the Monkey King's last chance at freedom, but the Monkey King insists that serving as a mortal's slave boy isn't freedom.

The Monkey King is insulated by the idea of being a disciple to Wong Lai-Tsao, equating the role with slavery . This speaks to just how far away from his true nature the Monkey King has gotten—remember at the beginning of the novel, the Monkey King used his powers to rule gently and fairly over his subjects, essentially dedicating his life to serving others. Further, the Monkey King's unwillingness to serve a mortal suggests that the he may harbor prejudices of his own, just like the other residents of Heaven are prejudiced against monkeys.

The Monkey King stops abruptly when the demons stab Wong Lai-Tsao. Wong Lai-Tsao manages to say that finding one's true identity within Tze-Yo-Tzuh's will is the highest freedom. Snidely, the Monkey King asks if Wong Lai-Tsao's true identity is to be dinner for demons. Wong Lai-Tsao says it might be and asks if the Monkey King's true identity is the eternal prisoner of a mountain of rock. The Monkey King harrumphs and looks away, but groans when the demons put Wong Lai-Tsao on a spit and begin to roast him.

Even if Wong Lai-Tsao is extremely virtuous and, on the whole, tends not to engage in petty insults, he gets the last word here when he asks if the Monkey King is really going to hang out in a mountain his entire life. Through this, he essentially asks the Monkey King if it's worth it to hang onto his pride when letting it go of it would allow him to get so much more out of life—not least his freedom.

With a sigh, the Monkey King returns to his original form. The mountain around him crumbles and he's able to crawl out. He stretches, dusts himself off, pulls out his cudgel, and proceeds to beat up the demons. The Monkey King unties Wong Lai-Tsao, but a demon lifts the Monkey King up by his head. The demon growls and swings the Monkey King back and forth, sniffing him. The Monkey King farts, so the demon throws him forcefully away. Before the Monkey King hits the mountain, he conjures a cloud and races back for the demon, crashing into his face with a deafening crack. He then transforms into a cannon and shoots his head at the demons, sending them flying. In a monstrous form, he tells the demons to leave. They run away, terrified.

In this battle with the demons, the Monkey King finally learns how to use his kung-fu disciplines for good: fighting true evil demons, rather than engaging in pointless arguments with others about whether or not he's a monkey. Indeed, he's able to use his true nature as a monkey—who sometimes stinks—to get the better of the demons, which suggests that even one's supposed negative qualities can be positive assets if utilized properly.

The Monkey King returns to his normal size and offers his hand to Wong Lai-Tsao, calling him Master. Wong Lai-Tsao accepts the Monkey King's help. The Monkey King offers to fly Wong Lai-Tsao to the nearest town so he can receive medical attention, but Wong Lai-Tsao says they can't take shortcuts. Instead, the Monkey King can retrieve and carry the heavy parcels. Wong Lai-Tsao adds that on this journey, there's no need for **shoes**. The Monkey King looks down at his feet but abandons his shoes. Barefoot, The Monkey King accompanies Wong Lai-Tsao to the west and serves faithfully until the journey's end.

Calling Wong Lai-Tsao "Master" shows that the Monkey King has taken the final step as he accepts his true identity. Now, he's learning the value of being humble and serving others. When Wong Lai-Tsao encourages the Monkey King to leave his shoes behind, it marks the final step of the Monkey King's journey. Now, he can take pride in who and what he is and what he can do, and he understands that it's pointless to try to change what he is—a particularly impactful lesson when taken in context with Jin's story and his own struggle to accept his identity.

CHAPTER 8

Jin's mother once said she married Jin's father because he had the thickest glasses. His thick glasses, to her, meant that he spent hours studying and therefore had a strong work ethic. This, in turn, corresponded to a high salary and to him being a good husband. She counsels Jin to focus on his studies so that in the future, he can have whatever girl he wants—but only after he has a master's degree.

Once again, Jin's mother shows that she values education above everything else, especially romance, when it comes to Jin's future. Importantly, this signals for the reader that in order to go on a date with Amelia, Jin is going to have to go against his parents' wishes.

As Jin explains this to the reader, he pleads with Wei-Chen to tell Jin's parents that they're together so that Jin's parents will let Jin go out. Wei-Chen insists he can't lie, but Jin tries to say that it's not really a lie, but a "delayed truth." He points out that Wei-Chen was the one who said this was the chance of a lifetime and if he doesn't help now, Jin will never get this chance. With a sigh, Wei-Chen agrees.

Wei-Chen likely agrees to go along with Jin's scheme because he still believes that Jin is a good, kind, generous person—and therefore, it's worth it to lie for him. Wei-Chen likely sees doing so as a way for him to help someone he cares about, though it's unclear at this point how the plan will pan out.

Jin tells the reader that he has a cousin named Charlie. Charlie is a few years older and once warned Jin to not bother dating until he could drive. Since Charlie smelled like old rice, had a bad haircut, and had extremely strict parents, Jin always thought that Charlie was just being cynical. But as Jin bikes up a hill, huffing and puffing due to Amelia on the handlebars, he's not so sure. Jin tries to look cool and strong in front of Amelia, but by the time they reach the theater, Jin's armpits are so smelly that he knows he can't put an arm around her.

To Jin, Charlie is somewhat akin to a real version of Chin-Kee (who's also an embarrassing Chinese cousin), and therefore, didn't register with Jin as something he should take seriously. The fact that Jin wants to look cool in front of Amelia and possibly put his arm around her again shows that he is a normal teenage boy who wants to have a nice date with a girl—he's not a walking stereotype.

Jin and Amelia sit awkwardly in the theater until Amelia remarks that the movie is about to start. Jin quips that it's because they "lurned off the tights" and then winces. Despite this, Jin spends the whole movie drooling, watching Amelia, and listening to her breathe. She giggles and clutches his shoulder during the dramatic parts. With 20 minutes left, Jin's **hair** appears to crackle with a kind of electric energy. He feels suddenly confident and begins to stretch so he can put an arm around her. When he remembers that he stinks, he excuses himself. His parents have never heard of deodorant and never bought him any, but Charlie once mentioned that he could use powdered soap from a public restroom. Jin scrubs powder into his armpits until a theater employee walks into the restroom.

Given Jin's speech patterns throughout the novel, his mispronunciation of "turned" here is likely just a genuine nervous mistake. However, it's impossible to ignore that mixing up l's and t's is part of the stereotype regarding how Chinese people talk. Because of this, Jin is probably scared that Amelia is going to start to treat him differently, now that he's (possibly) revealed that in his case, this stereotype holds true. However, when Jin's curly hair gives him courage, it shows that his confidence is dependent on appearing white.

Jin races back to the auditorium and retakes his seat next to Amelia. As she sighs over the romantic ending, Jin experiences another jolt of confidence from his **hair** and puts his arm around Amelia. She's shocked at first, but leans into Jin, much to his surprise. Jin is ecstatic. As they leave the theater a bit later, Amelia talks about the movie and Jin notices suds on Amelia's bare shoulder. He realizes that the powdered soap bubbled up and is now bubbling through his shirt. Amelia invites Jin to get a milkshake with her and doesn't seem to notice his odd behavior—or the bubbles on either of them. Jin clamps his arms down to his sides and follows her. Greg and his date leave the theater right behind Jin and Amelia, and Greg looks at them with concern. Jin and Amelia drink their milkshakes happily.

The way that Amelia behaves with Jin and accepts his affections again shows that she's the lone white character in the novel who treats Jin and Wei-Chen like real, full people worthy of her attention (and potentially affection). While this likely has as much to do with Amelia's natural kindness than anything in particular about Jin, it's worth considering that Jin may feel as though he's receiving this attention now because he's changed his hair into a hairstyle worn by his white peers. In other words, Amelia might be naturally kind, but Jin is still liable to misinterpret why *because he so desperately wants to believe that being white is better than being Chinese.*

That night, Jin feels haunted by the possibility that Amelia was just too polite to say anything about the bubbles. He wonders if Amelia thinks he's a freak whose armpits bubble. At school the next day, Jin desperately confides in Wei-Chen. Wei-Chen insists that Amelia probably didn't notice, but he offers to sneakily find out if she did. He adds that Jin's mother called while Jin was out, and Wei-Chen spent two hours trying to make her forget why she called. It worked, but Wei-Chen had to agree to go shopping with her on Saturday. She's going to buy Wei-Chen **shoes** and an electric wok. Glumly, Wei-Chen says that Jin owes him.

Jin's fears are still those of a normal teenager—any person would be concerned about having an embarrassing moment on a date with someone they really like. This continues to humanize Jin and show that he is a real, feeling person, not just a walking stereotype. The promise of shoes from Jin's mom foreshadows Wei-Chen becoming someone he's not, just as Jin's hairstyle does to him and the shoes do to the monkeys in the Monkey King's story.

During a class that Wei-Chen has with Amelia, Wei-Chen approaches her and asks how the date was. Greg, who's horsing around with other boys, watches curiously. Amelia says she had lots of fun. Wei-Chen asks if Jin was nice and funny. Amelia answers affirmatively, but is confused when Wei-Chen asks if Jin was bubbly and motions to his armpits. With a laugh, Wei-Chen tells her to forget he asked and then gives Jin, who's watching through the window in the classroom door, a thumbs up.

Wei-Chen's willingness to go along with deducing whether Amelia noticed the bubbles again speaks to how kind and generous of a friend he is. Asking about bubbles in a person's armpits seemingly without cause could come off as extremely odd, and could possibly damage Wei-Chen's reputation at school, so it's easy to see this as a potential sacrifice on Wei-Chen's part.

For the entire morning, Jin dreams of his future with Amelia. In his daydreams, Amelia quickly says she loves Jin. They get married, have sex, and have a baby with curly **hair** just like Jin's permed hair. He knows he's getting ahead of himself, but he's blissfully in love. During lunch, Jin excuses himself to go buy the custodian an orange freeze. He catches sight of Amelia walking with one of her friends and feels a jolt of confidence, but before he can follow her, Greg calls to him. Greg asks Jin for a favor: to not ask Amelia out again. Jin asks if Greg likes Amelia. Greg says that he likes Amelia like a sister, but she's a good friend and he wants her to make good choices. They're almost in high school, and Amelia needs to pay attention to who she's spending time with.

That Jin and Amelia's imaginary baby has curly hair speaks to just how intent Jin is on taking on characteristics he perceives as white. It's not enough, in his mind, to get the girl—he has to entirely change who he is as he does so, and consequently imagines his future children as visibly less Chinese. Meanwhile, Greg's request is extremely racist, even if he tries to hide his true intentions. He's essentially suggesting that having a relationship with a Chinese student is going to make Amelia less popular, speaking to the fact that at Jin's school, the Asian students aren't accepted.

Jin stares at Greg, dumbfounded. Greg apologizes for his request sounding so harsh, but says he just doesn't know if Jin is the right match for Amelia. He asks if they're "cool" and Jin says that they are. Greg asks if Jin will do him the favor, and Jin grudgingly agrees. Greg happily leaves with a wave and a smile. Jin looks back one last time at Amelia and then stands near Wei-Chen and Suzy, staring off into space as he eats his sandwich. In class, he imagines angrily refusing to follow through with Greg's favor and feels a jolt of confidence, especially as he imagines punching Greg in the face.

Up until this point, Greg showed potential to be a kind defender of targets of bullying. By becoming the bully, however, Greg shows that he cares far more about upholding the current social hierarchy (that likely places him on top) than he does about behaving in a way that makes his school a safer, happier place for kids like Jin.

When the bell rings, Jin's **hair** seems to crackle as he marches through the hallways to where Amelia chats with a friend and Greg. Jin calls to Amelia, but Greg answers first. His hair crackles with even more power than Jin's. Jin's confidence fades and he stands awkwardly for a moment before turning and walking away. Greg says to Amelia that Jin is nice, but that he's a bit of a geek and has weird hair.

Greg's quips that Jin has weird hair is humorous given that Jin modeled the hairstyle after Greg's in the first place, but it still serves its purpose: it makes Jin look as though he's trying in a very uncool way to make himself fit in, and it's apparent to everyone else that he's failing miserably.

Outside the school, Jin finds Suzy sitting on a low wall, waiting for Wei-Chen to get out of his math group. He sits down with her and asks if she's okay. Suzy says that Timmy said something mean to her. When Jin doesn't ask any more questions, Suzy says that over the weekend, she went to a birthday party for her best friend from second grade. They'd gone to Japanese school together but hadn't seen each other in a while, and Suzy was thrilled to see her when Suzy's mom said they were going. Suzy says she realized quickly, however, that her friend didn't want to see her at all—their moms just wanted to hang out, so Suzy's mom brought her along. Suzy spent the party watching TV alone.

That Timmy said something mean isn't a surprise by now, but it's worth keeping in mind that in moments Jin doesn't choose to share with the reader, Timmy probably says all sorts of horrible things to his classmates. Essentially, it's crucial to realize that the bullying that Jin, Suzy, and Wei-Chen experience is omnipresent; the instances Jin shares with the reader are likely only the tip of the iceberg. Meanwhile, Suzy's rejection at the party is similar to Greg's rejection of Jin, as the Japanese friend likely saw Suzy as a threat to her status in her group.

Suzy recounts that she was so embarrassed. As her eyes fill with tears, she turns to Jin and says that earlier, Timmy called her a "chink." She realized that she kind of feels embarrassed like she did at the party all the time. Suzy cries and Jin experiences a burst of confidence from his **hair** again. He leans in and kisses Suzy. Suzy angrily punches Jin in the face and asks what's wrong with him before striding away.

Here, it's telling that being called "chink" (a racist slur against Asian people) brings about Suzy's revelation, given that it's so close to Chin-Kee's name. In essence, Suzy realizes that she's embarrassed because in so many situations, her classmates see her as a female version of Chin-Kee: nothing but negative stereotypes. Meanwhile, Jin's betrayal of Wei-Chen here shows that he is no longer the kind person and loyal friend he used to be—it seems that in distancing himself from his true identity, he has also lost sight of his true friends.

Jin sits at home with an ice pack on his cheek when the doorbell rings. It's Wei-Chen. The boys stare at each other, and then Wei-Chen confusedly asks how Jin could even think of kissing Suzy. Wei-Chen says Jin could've told him if he had a crush on Suzy; he wouldn't have abandoned Jin. Sadly, Wei-Chen says that Jin has completely broken his heart. He continues that he and Jin are alike. They're brothers. Jin is shocked and angry. He spits that he and Wei-Chen are nothing alike, since Wei-Chen only cares about his "stupid girlfriend" who isn't Jin's type anyway. Wei-Chen asks why he kissed Suzy then, and Jin replies that he doesn't think Wei-Chen is worthy of or right for Suzy. He suggests that she could do better than a F.O.B. like Wei-Chen. Wei-Chen punches Jin on his other cheek and storms away.

The way that Wei-Chen frames his plea to Jin again shows that Wei-Chen is an honest, generous, and kind person—he believes that if he and Jin were able to talk about this, they could've come to some sort of agreement. However, it's important to keep in mind that Jin didn't kiss Suzy because he has a crush on her; he kissed her because it was something that made him feel more white or American, in the sense that he can take what he wants and feel powerful. This is the same reason why Jin says these horrible things to Wei-Chen: it makes him feel powerful and white, as he's behaving just like Greg and Timmy.

Jin glumly ices his cheeks. That night, he struggles to fall asleep. He plays the day's events over and over in his mind and comes to the conclusion that he told Wei-Chen the truth, and Wei-Chen needed to hear it. By three a.m., Jin believes this wholeheartedly. He falls asleep and dreams of the herbalist's wife. She tells Jin that he's finally "done it" and asks what Jin wants to become. As she clicks on her abacus, Jin transforms into a blond boy. He wakes up long before his alarm clock goes off. Jin's head hurts, but his bruises are gone. He stumbles to the bathroom in the dark and turns on the light. Jin is now blond and tall. Amazed, Jin touches his face and decides he needs a new name: Danny. The **laugh track** claps at the bottom of the frame.

Jin falls asleep and dreams of the herbalist's wife when he finally believes that Wei-Chen really needed to hear what Jin said. This implies, first of all, that Jin doesn't actually believe what he said, deep down. Then, when the herbalist's wife says that Jin has "done it"—that is, forfeited his soul—it shows that the way a person does this is by hurting their friends and ignoring what they know to be right and true. Meanwhile, the revelation that Jin and Danny are the same person sheds new light on Danny's storyline up until this point. Now that Jin is Danny, his life takes on qualities of a sitcom: he's viewing racist stereotypes as a white outsider, since he's ignoring that he's still Chinese.

CHAPTER 9

The **laugh track** applauds at the sight of the high school library. Danny angrily walks in and overhears two guys saying that "he" spit on them. One guy tells the other to get checked for SARS. as the laugh track plays. Danny is confused, but then alarmed as he hears Chin-Kee singing "She Bangs." When Danny finally catches sight of Chin-Kee, he's horrified: Chin-Kee is dancing and singing on top of a table, spitting as he sings, as students and the librarian grumpily flee. Danny drags Chin-Kee, still singing, out of the library by his queue, throws him onto a bench, and hits him across the face. Chin-Kee explains that the library was boring, so he decided to entertain everyone with a song—and he's ready to perform his second set now. The laugh track howls with laughter.

SARS is a dangerous respiratory illness that first emerged in China, which is why the kids talk about getting checked—they imply that they believe that Chinese people naturally harbor infectious diseases like this. Chin-Kee's performance, meanwhile, is taken directly from a Chinese contestant William Hung's American Idol *audition, which got him kicked off the show but catapulted him to fame anyway—fame that many believe was due to the fact that the Hung humorously embodied many negative stereotypes about Chinese people. Again, this forces readers to understand that this racism doesn't just exist in the novel: it's lifted directly from the real world.*

Danny grabs Chin-Kee's clothes and spits that he's sick of Chin-Kee ruining his life, so it's time for Chin-Kee to pack up and go home. With a laugh, Chin-Kee says his visit isn't over yet and refuses to leave. Danny shakes with anger and then punches Chin-Kee again. Danny continues to punch Chin-Kee as the **laugh track** plays, but Chin-Kee begs Danny to stop and warns that he's playing with fire. When Danny doesn't stop, Chin-Kee says that Danny will have to suffer the fury of Spicy Szechuan Dragon. Confused, Danny stops, and Chin-Kee takes the opportunity to perform a kung-fu kick to Danny's chin, which sends Danny flying. The laugh track plays.

Danny turns on Chin-Kee like this because Chin-Kee forces him to sit with the fact that no matter how hard he tries, in his experience, his classmates will always see him as just another version of Chin-Kee. For Danny, it's essential to banish Chin-Kee to China so that Danny can move on with his life and continue his attempt to make himself as white as possible. This is, importantly, an attempt that Chin-Kee's visits expose as unsuccessful and misguided, which is likely one of the reasons that Chin-Kee refuses to leave.

As the **laugh track** continues, Danny tries to come up behind Chin-Kee. Chin-Kee, however, hits Danny with different martial arts moves: the Mooshu Fist, the Kung Pao Attack, the Twice Cook Palm, the Happy Famiry Head Bonk, the General Tsao Rooster Punch, and the House Special Kick in Nards. Danny sweats and grimaces as he takes Chin-Kee's punches and kicks, while crackling electricity comes from Chin-Kee's fists and feet. Chin-Kee performs the Peking Strike, the Three Flavor Essence, the Hot and Sour Wet Willy, and the Pimp Slap Hunan Style. Menacingly, Chin-Kee apologizes and says he loves America and will come to visit every year forever.

In addition to drawing on stereotypical dishes found in Chinese restaurants, the drawings here also draw from the imagery of classic kung-fu movies like those of Bruce Lee or Jackie Chan. This pulls in another common place where westerners are exposed to a number of Chinese stereotypes, especially the idea that all Chinese people are skilled kung-fu masters and are willing to demonstrate their skills at the slightest provocation. Meanwhile, Chin-Kee's proficiency at martial arts heavily implies that he is actually the Monkey King.

Danny sweats and his fists shake as the **laugh track** begins to expand outside of the frame. He throws one punch at Chin-Kee and knocks Chin-Kee's head off. The head bounces away, and on Chin-Kee's shoulders sits the head of the Monkey King. He compliments Danny's punch and as Danny watches, confused and scared, the Monkey King shrinks and reassumes his true form. Then, he says that it's time to reveal *Danny's* true form. He calls Danny Jin Wang, and slowly, Danny transforms back into Jin. Jin stares down at the Monkey King for a moment and asks who he is. The Monkey King says that he's an emissary of Tze-Yo-Tzuh. He's been an emissary since he completed his journey to the west, which was his test of virtue.

Beheading Chin-Kee represents killing all the stereotypes that make Chin-Kee who he is. Getting rid of the stereotypes reveals Chin-Kee's true identity as the Monkey King, suggesting that once someone can get rid of the stereotypes surrounding them, they can be seen for who they truly are. In the same vein, returning Danny to his form as Jin suggests that Jin was doing much the same thing as the Monkey King was in previous chapters by making himself more white—and now, he'll have to deal with the consequences, admit he's wrong, and make things right.

The Monkey King says that Wei-Chen Sun, Jin's friend from junior high, is his son. He explains that soon after he became an emissary, he sent for his huge family. Soon, his oldest son approached Tze-Yo-Tzuh about being an emissary too. Though Tze-Yo-Tzuh warned that it'd be hard, Wei-Chen accepted. His test of virtue was to live in the mortal world for 40 years without experiencing human vice. The Monkey King promised to visit once per year to check in and sent him with a **Transformer** to remind him who he was. Wei-Chen leapt off the cloud and fell to Earth, transforming into a human as he went. The Monkey King says that Jin met Wei-Chen during Wei-Chen's first week, and Wei-Chen always spoke highly of Jin.

For Wei-Chen, the Transformer didn't represent his capacity to give up his true identity in favor of one he found more tenable—it represented the fact that even though he might have to temporarily take on a form different from his true identity, that doesn't mean he has to compromise who he is inside. And at first, it appears as though Wei-Chen took the Transformer's lesson to heart: he befriended Jin and, as the reader saw in previous chapters, behaved kindly, generously, and without vice.

During the Monkey King's third visit, things began to go downhill. Wei-Chen confessed to the Monkey King that he told a lie. The Monkey King scolded his son, but Wei-Chen angrily asked for the exact duties of an emissary. The Monkey King explained that Tze-Yo-Tzuh's emissaries serve him and all that he loves, and Wei-Chen asked if that included humans. The Monkey King said that Tze-Yo-Tzuh considers humans to be the pinnacle of his creation—even more so than the emissaries. After a moment of silence, Wei-Chen said that Tze-Yo-Tzuh is a fool and that he didn't want to be an emissary anymore. In his experience, humans are petty and soulless, and he didn't want to serve them. The Monkey King pleaded with Wei-Chen to change his mind so he could face Tze-Yo-Tzuh, but Wei-Chen leapt off the cloud and said that anything was better than serving humans.

The lie that Wei-Chen refers to is the lie he told Jin's mother, while Wei-Chen's new assessment that humans are petty and soulless is likely reflective of Jin's horrendous behavior. Especially combined with the revelation that Tze-Yo-Tzuh finds humans superior to emissaries, even if there are some bad ones like Jin and Timmy, Wei-Chen comes to the conclusion that everything he's ever been told is a lie—and so it's better to just focus on himself while he can.

The Monkey King tells Jin that after this, Wei-Chen stopped accepting his visits, so he started visiting Jin instead. Jin accuses the Monkey King of punishing him for Wei-Chen's failure, but the Monkey King says this isn't true—Wei-Chen made his own choices and Jin doesn't control Wei-Chen. Instead of coming to punish Jin, the Monkey King has been coming to serve as a conscience or a signpost to Jin's soul. Jin looks at Chin-Kee's head and then looks straight ahead. The Monkey King looks downcast and then summons a cloud to leave, but Jin asks him to wait. Jin asks what he should do now. The Monkey King smiles and says he would've gladly saved himself from 500 years of imprisonment had he realized how good it is to be a monkey.

The idea that the Monkey King has been coming as Chin-Kee to serve as Jin's conscience suggests that the Monkey King believes it's essential for Jin to accept that whether he likes it or not, he's going to have to deal with the stereotypes surrounding what it means to be Chinese—and along with that, he must understand that he can't change who he is, just as the Monkey King couldn't effectively turn himself into a human. Indeed, the Monkey King suggests that it's most fulfilling to be exactly who one is, no matter what other people might say about one's identity.

The Monkey King turns and flies away into the sky, but he drops a business card for a Chinese bakery and restaurant. Jin catches it and then heads home. He asks his father to borrow the car keys. Jin's father asks if he's taking Chin-Kee out, but Jin says that Chin-Kee went home early. Jin fetches the keys from his mother and waves goodbye. His parents argue over which of their sisters is Chin-Kee's mother and who needs to make the call to share that Chin-Kee is coming home early.

This passage continues to make the connections between the novel's three stories extremely clear. Chin-Kee is evidently someone who Jin's parents expect to have around, since Jin is Danny, which makes them Danny's parents too. Notably, though Jin leaves out important information in his excuse as to why Chin-Kee is gone, he doesn't actually lie. This suggests he's making strides toward being a more truthful and kind person.

Jin goes to the restaurant listed on the business card from the Monkey King, the 490 Bakery Cafe. When the waitress comes to take his order, Jin points to something on the menu. The waitress informs him that he pointed to a notice reading "cash only," not a dish. Jin blushes in shame but stays until closing, drinking pearl milk tea. For the next month, Jin goes to the restaurant every day after school and stays until closing time. One Friday night, Wei-Chen arrives just as Jin orders his pearl milk tea. Jin can hear Wei-Chen's tricked out car outside as its engine revs and it blasts bass-heavy music. Jin goes to the window and greets Wei-Chen, who's smoking and wears dark sunglasses. Wei-Chen angrily asks Jin what he wants, but seems to shrink and turn into a monkey when Jin says he met the Monkey King and wants to talk.

That the Monkey King sent Jin to a Chinese restaurant and bakery is important, as it suggests that the Monkey King is trying to guide Jin back to his identity as a Chinese person. Importantly, however, the Monkey King doesn't force Jin to go; Jin has to make the conscious choice himself. When Jin can't read the menu (which is presumably in Chinese), he has to face up to his ignorance of his own culture, even if his parents came from China. Extending his hand to Wei-Chen, meanwhile, allows Jin to begin to do some of the same things the Monkey King did: now, he's trying to help others and make things right.

Over some pearl milk tea, Jin shares with Wei-Chen about his visit from the Monkey King. Wei-Chen asks why Jin is sharing this at all. Hesitantly, Jin says he's just trying to say that he's sorry. Wei-Chen continues to silently smoke and sip his tea. Finally, he says that the milk tea at this restaurant is terrible: it's oily, like someone stir-fried something next to it, and the boba are like rabbit poop. He takes off his sunglasses and says that there's a hole-in-the-wall place down the street that has the best pearl milk tea ever, and offers to take Jin sometime. Jin says he'd like to go. They talk and laugh at the restaurant until late in the night.

Jin's apology is incredibly meaningful: it's an admission that he was wrong in his treatment of Wei-Chen and of himself. Now, Jin is ready to move forward with a more humble outlook on life and without trying to hide who he really is. When Wei-Chen accepts the apology and the friendship appears to be saved, the novel suggests that one of the most positive effects of humbling oneself and accepting one's identity is gaining a community of friends.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

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Brock, Zoë. "*American Born Chinese.*" *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 27 Jan 2020. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Brock, Zoë. "*American Born Chinese.*" LitCharts LLC, January 27, 2020. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/american-born-chinese.

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Yang, Gene Luen. American Born Chinese. Sqaure Fish. 2008.

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Yang, Gene Luen. American Born Chinese. New York: Sqaure Fish. 2008.