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ENGL 112B
Dr. Warner
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BOXERS & *Saints*

By Gene Luen Yang



BIO:

Cartoonist and Bay Area native, Gene Luen Yang, is the birth child of two San Jose State university alumni. Growing up, he dreamed of becoming an animator for Disney, but switched gears when his mother bought him his first comic book when he was a child. Despite his talents as an artist, his father pushed him to pursue a more practical career, so Yang majored in computer science at UC Berkeley, and minored in creative writing. After working as a computer engineer for several years, he realizes that teaching and writing are more of his calling and creates the following award-winning works listed below:

1. Yang, Gene Luen., and Lark Pien. *American Born Chinese*. W. Ross MacDonald School Resource Services Library, 2012.
2. Yang, Gene Luen, et al. *New Super-Man*. DC Comics, 2017.
3. Yang, Gene Luen., et al. *Avatar, the Last Airbender*. Dark Horse, 2012.



Synopsis:

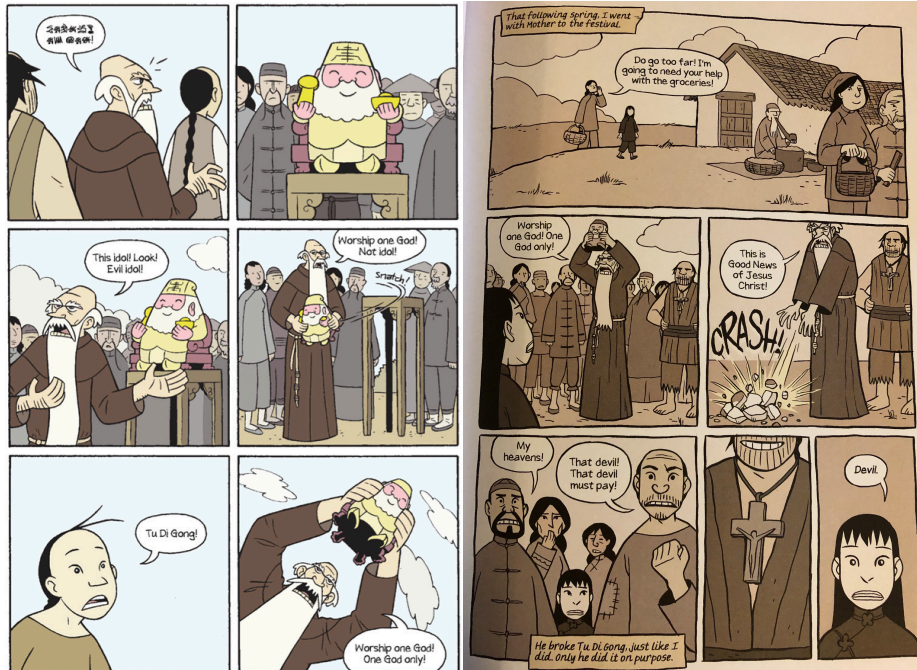
Boxers and Saints is a historical fictitious graphic novel depicted in two converging narratives that takes place during the Boxer rebellion in China during the early 1900s. During this time, China is being colonized by foreign Christians. Some welcome it (*Saints*), while others are against it (*Boxers*). Both protagonists of each novel, experience the same event in their village that catalyzes a chain of events shown through two opposing perspectives.

In *Boxers*, Little Bao negatively experiences a Christian missionary disrespecting his village's faith and display violence towards his father. This causes him to grow a profound hatred toward these "foreign devils" and vows to eliminate all foreign devils to reclaim China. Bao learns Kung Fu, and trains his fellow villagers to create his army called, "The Righteous and Harmonious Fist." Aside from Kung Fu, they practice spiritual possession which they perform a ritual and fuse with ancient Chinese spirits to strengthen them through battle. Bao's spirit is of the first emperor of China, Ch'in Shih-huang. Throughout the narrative, this spirit guides Bao through his journey and reminds him of his goals to restore China, no matter how immoral his actions may be.

Saints follows the story of four-girl, who acquires that name for being the fourth child and is the unlucky number of death in Chinese culture. Due to that superstition, she experiences abuse and neglect from her family. In her search for identity and belonging, she discovers the Christian faith and converts willingly with the help of her spirit guide, Joan of Arc. She is baptized and chooses her new Christian name as Vibiana (after St. Vibiana, known as the virgin martyr of nobodies), and becomes a caretaker at an orphanage in a colonial encampment.

As their two stories converge, Yang ambiguously provides two different perspectives during this violently tragic time in Chinese history.

QUOTES:



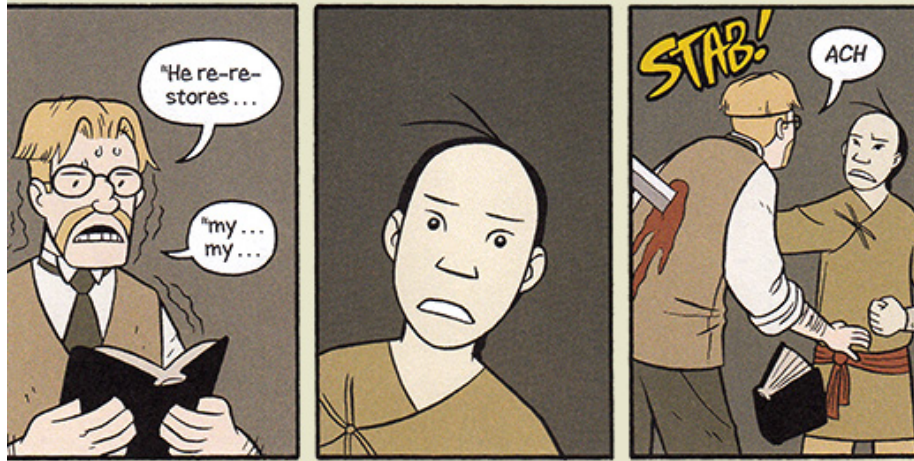
BOXERS

Saints

CONTEXT:

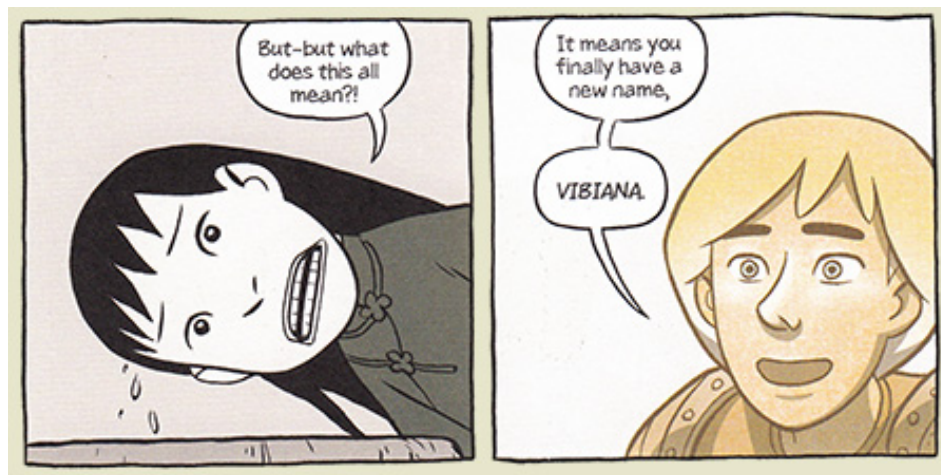
In *Boxers*, Little Bao encounters a “foreign devil” for the first time (*Boxers*, Yang 18/1-6). A Christian missionary and his new Chinese followers enter Bao’s village and smash the idol he worships in the name of the Lord. This scene sets the tone for the entire series, and is the first example of the hostility shown between Christians and non-Christians. In the very first panel, Yang uses random symbols to show how Little Bao interprets whenever a foreigner speaks in their language (which is most likely English), but when Little Bao understands the missionary, it’s portrayed in broken speech, meaning that the missionary is speaking in broken Chinese. In other words, Bao only understands Chinese, but Yang communicates Bao’s thoughts and speech in English for the reader, and censors the English parts to show the language barrier.

Vibiana witnesses the same scenario in *Saints* (Yang 29/ 1-6), but has a different reaction. At the beginning of the novel, Vibiana accidentally smashes the idol in her home after a humorous axing accident which greatly upsets her grandfather, calling her a “devil” (Yang 9/4). Father Bey smashing the idol resonates with her, and eases her guilt. She feels a sense of belonging and it motivates her to become “the greatest devil of them all” (Yang 30/3). In both novels, Yang portrays the narrator’s thoughts in yellow boxes with italicized text, to help distinguish thought and speech.



CONTEXT:

Bao and the Righteous and Harmonious Fist raid a train of foreign devils. After defeating the foreign troops, Bao and his group attack the civilians inside the train. In this scene, Bao encounters a foreign devil and kills him mid-prayer (*Boxers*, Yang 188/ 1-3). Yang portrays Bao's reaction in the second panel as truly speechless. The surprised and confused look on his face translates to the reader that he is questioning the morality of his actions. Yes, they are Christians, but they are also innocent people who are answering Bao's violence with prayer.



Context:

Vibiana is baptized, and is reborn with her new name (*Saints*, Yang 68/5-6). As a child, she experiences abuse and neglect from her family, and often fails to please them despite her numerous attempts. Vibiana's rebirth into the Christian faith gives her the acceptance and identity that she always desired. She finally belongs to a community and finds her purpose.



Context:

The left page shows an interaction between Bao and Vibiana when they finally meet. Bao demands Vibiana to renounce her faith to spare her. Vibiana refuses, but instills a valuable prayer upon Bao right before he takes her life (*Saints*, Yang 161/1-6). This powerful scene shows two individuals remaining loyal to their faith, despite the incredibly difficult life or death situation upon them. Vibiana sharing the prayer with Bao is an act of forgiveness and acceptance of her fate. Vibiana stays true to her Christian values and dies a martyr, similarly and historically to how her spirit guide Joan dies. In a twist of events, the prayer ends up saving Bao who uses it to pass himself off as a Christian when he's confronted by two foreigners (*Saints*, Yang 168/1-3). The passion that both Bao and Vibiana express about their faith, shows Yang's ambiguity towards each narrative. He doesn't choose sides, which is what makes these stories so moving.

Teaching Method:

Age range: 12-18
Grade level: 7-9

1. Since *Boxers & Saints* is based off an actual event, I will have the students provide historical background information on the Boxer rebellion by utilizing their school's library database. They will choose from a list of topics surrounding this event, write a minimum half-page

paper, and will present their findings at the next class. The students will learn the narrative's setting and hopefully will enter the novel with a more inquisitive eye.

2. The students will choose a topic for an analytical essay.
3. The students will select 10 of their favorite quotes, and share them during class, focusing on Yang's artwork, character voice, and layout.
4. The students will write a 1200 page analytical essay.

WHY YOU SHOULD TEACH THIS BOOK TO TEENS:

- Because they might not understand the violence and hardships that comes with colonialization.
- Because the novel teaches compassion through the character's actions.
- Because the novel shows two different perspectives of a historical event presented ambiguously.

