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Professor Warner

English 112B

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Asian American Identity in Young Adult Literature

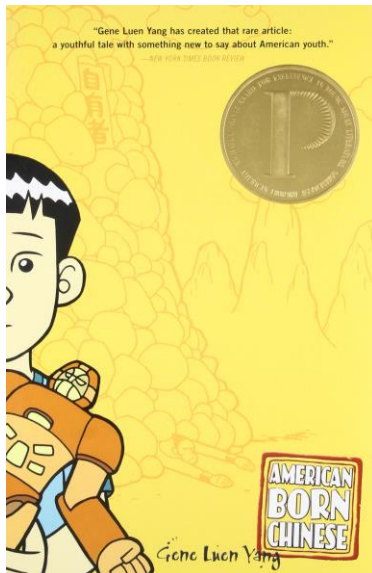
Identity as a whole is hard to find when we were young adults and even now as adults. As an Asian American, examples of representation and identity were scarce when growing up. With the recent surge of Asian American writers young adults of today can find stories of the Asian American identity and the struggles Asian Americans go through while growing up. Asian Americans though pictured as the model minority still face issues that all other minorities have. Issues like racism, discrimination, culture disconnect with parents and struggles to find identity in America as a minority are still prevalent issues within Asian American communities.

For me personally I had trouble finding Asian American representation in literature when I was growing up as a young adult until I read *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan in high school. Before I read *The Joy Luck Club*, I rarely heard of stories discussing Asian matters. Reading *The Joy Luck Club* for the first time, I felt a sense of belonging and identity because it was the first time I knew that someone out there shared the same struggles and issues as I did. Though many Asian Americans have existed here in the United States for so long, many of them did not become writers.

Up until recently Asian Americans started fighting for more roles in film media and for more representation in general. Many Asian Americans of second and first generation Asian parents started to share their stories of growing up with mixed identities and cultures. Authors

like Eddie Huang who wrote *Fresh Off the Boat* and Kevin Kwan who wrote *Crazy Rich Asians* started popping up and sharing their stories and experiences and have been converted to television and film. Many of the pieces of young adult literature I chose for my bibliography are recent works and most were published within the last five years. More and more novels are being published showcasing the struggles of growing up and being an Asian American.

With these Authors becoming popular within the mainstream audience, young adults today can understand not only themselves a little more but also understand the struggles their peers go through. With books, films and television shows, I hope to see the general public notice Asian American struggles even though they are the model minority. Young Adults of today can find these books quite easily through online searching and many of these novels are recognized and have won awards, making it easier to find them in libraries and bookstores.



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Yang, Gene Luen. *American Born Chinese*. W. Ross MacDonald School Resource Services Library, 2017.

A book of three stories that intertwine in to one final ending. *American Born Chinese* deals with identity issues with the story of Jin Wang, the Monkey King and Chin Kee. On one

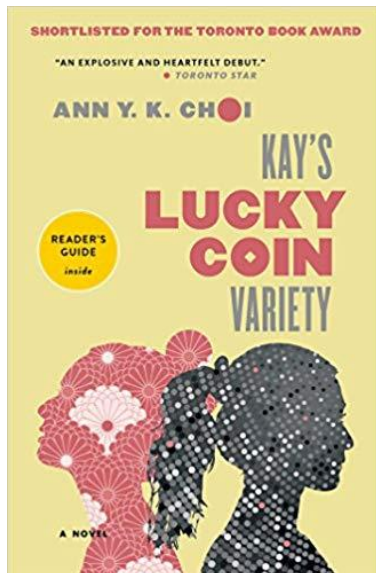
front of the story, it is about Jin Wang a new transfer at his mostly white school in San Francisco. He goes through all the notions of bullying, falling in love and rejecting his own culture in order to fit in. On another front of the story, it is the story of the Monkey King and how he tries to fit in with deities and gods. By the end of the novel both stories come together to form a final ending, all the while teaching an important lesson.



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Goo, Maurene. *Since You Asked--*. Scholastic Press, 2013.

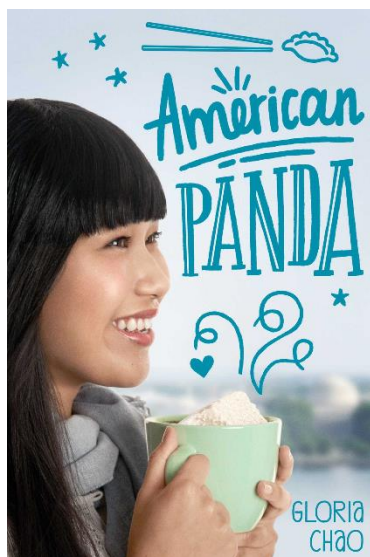
Protagonist Holly Kim is a fifteen-year-old who is a newspaper editor in her high school. She has her typical high school career with homecoming, jocks, cliques and love interests but she also has to juggle and balance her school life with her traditional Korean parents. At the story's very core, it holds what it is to truly be American; assimilating while having immigrant parents with traditional values.



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Choi, Ann Y. K. *Kay's Lucky Coin Variety*. Simon & Schuster, 2017.

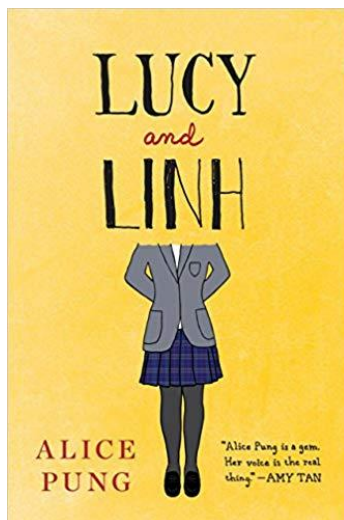
This story takes place in the 1980s in Toronto where Mary Hwang a Korean- Canadian immigrant struggles to fight through family tragedies and pressures of assimilation and parental pressures of success. The story is told through a first-person narrative giving us insight into Mary's life and how she deals with it. She falls in love but has to abide to her parents and find a Korean suitor. This story is very much a coming of age story and we see Mary grow as an individual sandwiched between two cultures.



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Chao, Gloria. *American Panda*. Simon & Schuster Books, 2019.

Mei who is a Taiwanese American college student at the age of 17 has struggles fitting in to college life at such a young age. She deals with defying parental expectations and finding an identity for herself while basing her identity of her own off of traditional Taiwanese and Chinese beliefs that she got from her parents. Through the story she has to restore her relationship with her exiled brother and find a way to integrate her crush on a Japanese student in to her parent's strict traditional culture.

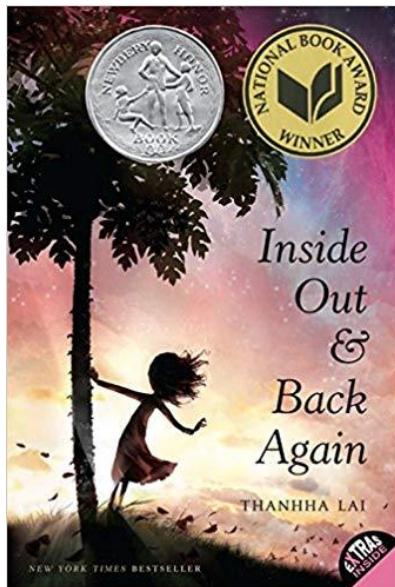


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Pung, Alice. *Lucy & Linh*. Legend Press, 2018.

Lucy Lam is the child of immigrant parents and they are poverty stricken and poor. Lucy, against all odds receives a scholarship allowing her to go to a prestigious school. Lucy's parents like most Asian immigrant parents share the same values of education and family and try to enforce them on to her. Throughout the novel, Lucy has to juggle her family's wishes while

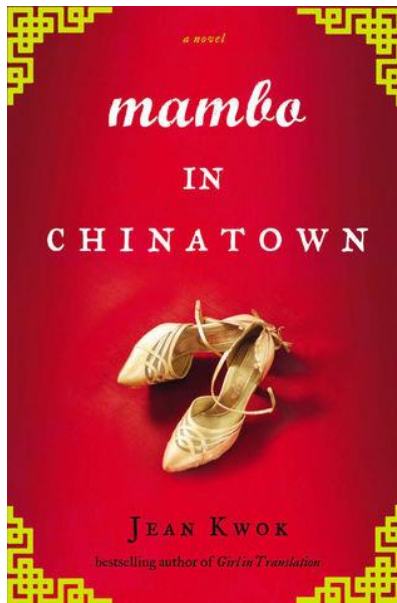
trying to fit in to a new school with privileged students that look down on her because of her impoverished beginnings and background.



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Lai, Thanhha. *Inside out & Back Again*. Harper, an Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2017.

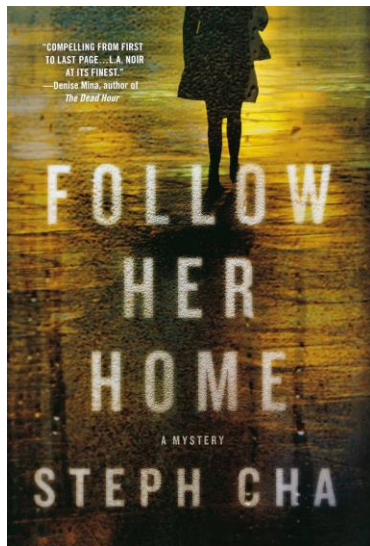
This story is a Vietnamese refugee story where Hà a ten-year-old girl is displaced from Saigon because of the Vietnam War and ends up in Alabama. The entire story is written in poetic form which adds meaning and emphasis to what Hà is experiencing. Hà goes through immigrant struggles of fitting in and finding one's identity while learning the language and adopting an entirely new culture. She finds it difficult to adjust throughout the story but eventually she creates a new life in America.



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Kwok, Jean. *Mambo in Chinatown*. Riverhead Books, 2015.

Charlie Wong is the daughter of Chinese immigrants and life is a constant struggle for her. She is a dishwasher at a restaurant, did not do well in school, and has no real domestic or tech skills. Her mother died when Charlie was fourteen and her father has been taking care of her and her sister for most of their lives. Her younger sister Lisa urges her to go to a dance studio to teach dancing and her life changes. As the story progresses Lisa falls ill and Charlie has to choose between her father's traditional ways of using Eastern Chinese herbal medicine or Western medicine. Throughout the novel she fights with the ideas of blending old and traditional ideas with new ones.



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Cha, Steph. *Follow Her Home*. St Martin's Press, 2013.

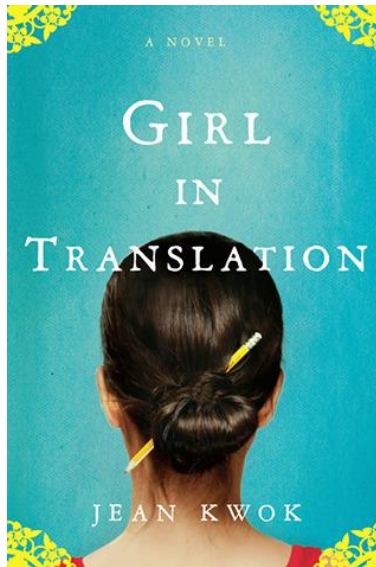
Juniper Song, like the children of many Asian American immigrants grew up with parental roles. With her younger sister Iris going on to be the good Korean American child who went to an Ivy League school, Juniper becomes a detective when a friend asks her for help with family affairs. As a mystery novel, the story goes in to murder, crime, family dysfunction and racial fetishism. With the help of Raymond Chandler's, Philip Marlowe, Song will try to solve the mystery with many tragic twists and turns.



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Nguyen, Bich Minh. *Pioneer Girl: a Novel*. Penguin Books, 2015.

Lien Lee is the daughter of Vietnamese immigrants who have spent their lives in America managing a variety of restaurants. Her father died when she was young, but her mother and grandfather continue in the restaurant business, expecting Lee and her brother Sam to make this their life's work as well. Both Lee and her brother Sam broke family expectations with Lee earning a PhD in Literature and her brother fleeing the family home and maintaining only minimal contact with his sister, mother, and grandfather. The novel really starts off when Lee finds a gold pin in one of his grandfather's restaurants that she recognizes from her readings. Lee goes off and tries to find the origin of the pin leading to mystery.



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Kwok, Jean. *Girl in Translation*. Noordhoff, 2013.

When Kimberly Chang and her mother immigrated from Hong Kong to Brooklyn, their lives changed. They both had to adjust to the new language and culture in America but for Kimberly, she had to lead a double life. She was a student by day and a sweatshop worker by night. She has to struggle with the weight on her shoulders while holding her family's future on her shoulders. She has to struggle to achieve the American dream and an immigrant and while living in poverty but her one ticket out of poverty are her skills in math and the hopes of joining an elite private school.

These novel gives young adult readers a looking glass in to a young Asian American's life and what he has to deal with all the while teaching a lesson in believing in one's own identity. These stories follow the trope of young adults wanting to not only fit in but also wanting

to be a part of something they are not. With these novels it shows that one's individuality should not be given up even though they are mistreated or bullied because they are different. They go through a variety of topics and genres, but they all share the same goals of assimilation and finding common ground between two cultures.