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Chinese Born an American

“I’m not different!”

As a Chinese American, I was raised with two conflicting cultures. When I was younger, my parents instilled qualities such as hard work, collectivism, and obedience. From my peers at school, I learned what it meant to chase my dreams and have a good time. While my friends hung out on Friday nights and watched movies, I was forced to study at home. This isolation strained many of my friendships and ultimately ended some. Over time, I grew restless and confused about my identity. One place I could find clarity, through the chaos, was the library. Luckily, the only library in my town is close to my elementary school and I would habitually go there. As I waited for my parents to pick me up, I delved into any reading material I could get my hands on. Around the age of 9, I naturally gravitated towards frivolous, childish books such as: Star Trek, Captain America, and Spiderman. Although those books lacked informative content, my creative process stemmed from envisioning myself within the novels. I escaped into the fantasy worlds, fighting villains, in impossible situations, where the doom of the hero seemed inevitable. I used this technique to confront conflict, while both my family and friends pressured me to pursue different aspirations. Both claimed reading such outlandish novels would alienate and corrupt me. Neither realized that it allowed me to develop my character and problem solving

skills. Without the numerous hours I spent lost in between the frames and lines of the comic books, I doubt I would have the ability to convey myself in my writing.

In particular, I sought inspiration from a comic book I read cover to cover numerous times. Not many people know about the book, yet it is one of the only comics I read on a regular basis. *American Born Chinese* is written by Gene Luen Yang, and it encapsulates many experiences of an Asian-American in the Bay Area. The artist is local Asian-American, he taught computer science at Bishop O'Dowd in Oakland, which is a school my sister attended. The book tells three tales, which all morph into one idea: to preserve Chinese culture despite external influences and difficulties. The book is so simple, yet it addresses a concern that is overlooked by a majority of people. Many people generalize Asians as a group, and that includes Asian Americans. It is shocking how much in common I have with Jin Wang, the main character. Jin Wang was raised in San Francisco and had parents that embraced anything that remotely resembled Chinese culture. In the novel, he experiences the identity crisis that many, if not all, Asian-Americans withstand. I incessantly asked myself why I was different than my fellow classmates, and I wondered why I wasn't accepted into certain social groups. Jin Wang underwent a phase of acculturation and changed his name to Danny after being rejected by a Caucasian girl because he was Chinese. He then transformed into a "white boy" in order to gain approval from her and his classmates. He abandoned the Chinese norm, and he acquired a new haircut, fashion style, food habit, hobby, and friend group. It is not until the end when Jin realizes that in the process of becoming American, he has neglected the persona he was raised to be. Similarly, as I grow older, I understand that my Chinese culture is more important than fitting in with a completely different culture. This particular reading taught me to analyze writing

beyond its initial meaning and consider all other viewpoints it may have. Gene Luen Yang intended for *American Born Chinese* to teach its readers identity, but I withdrew acceptance and patience. In a way, it is like Jin experienced the obstacles for me. This further supports that all reading and writing helps us, as the readers, to evaluate other people's ethics. Since reading the comic, I understand that one can explore and try new cultures while remaining close to their own. College stresses the importance of this, taking in as many things out of our comfort zone. I will apply the morals I have learned from *American Born Chinese* into my writing and reading for English 1A.

Just recently in class, I read *A Homemade Education*, which is an excerpt from Malcolm X's autobiography. The main idea I extracted from the autobiography correlates to *American Born Chinese*. Despite the adversity race presents in life, it is crucial to persevere and proceed to execute every task to the best of my ability. I hope to reach a level where my hard work manifests in my assignments, and just like how Malcolm X "...woke up the next morning, thinking about those words- immensely proud", I hope to acquire a similar sense of performance. Malcolm X was able to teach himself to love literature after being illiterate, and I have confidence that I can achieve anything I dedicate myself to.

Another essential piece of literature that we have read in class is *Always Living in Spanish* by Marjorie Agosín. Agosin combines the ideas of both *A Homemade Education* and *American Born Chinese* because she was displaced from home but was able to recover her identity by utilizing Ladino literature and language. Jin Wang experienced this socially while Malcolm was physically constrained in prison. In all situations, each character was placed in a

new, unfamiliar environment in which they were presented the option to determine their future. Even if it is laborious, I equivalently feel as if I can determine the path I desire in school and life.

I'm excited to pursue my studies at San Jose State University, and I am especially thrilled to be accepted into a nourishing learning environment, where I can continue to explore my interests in reading and academia. *American Born Chinese, Homemade Education, and Always Living in Spanish* provide me with a proper mindset to endeavour new forms of composition and language.