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ENGL 112B

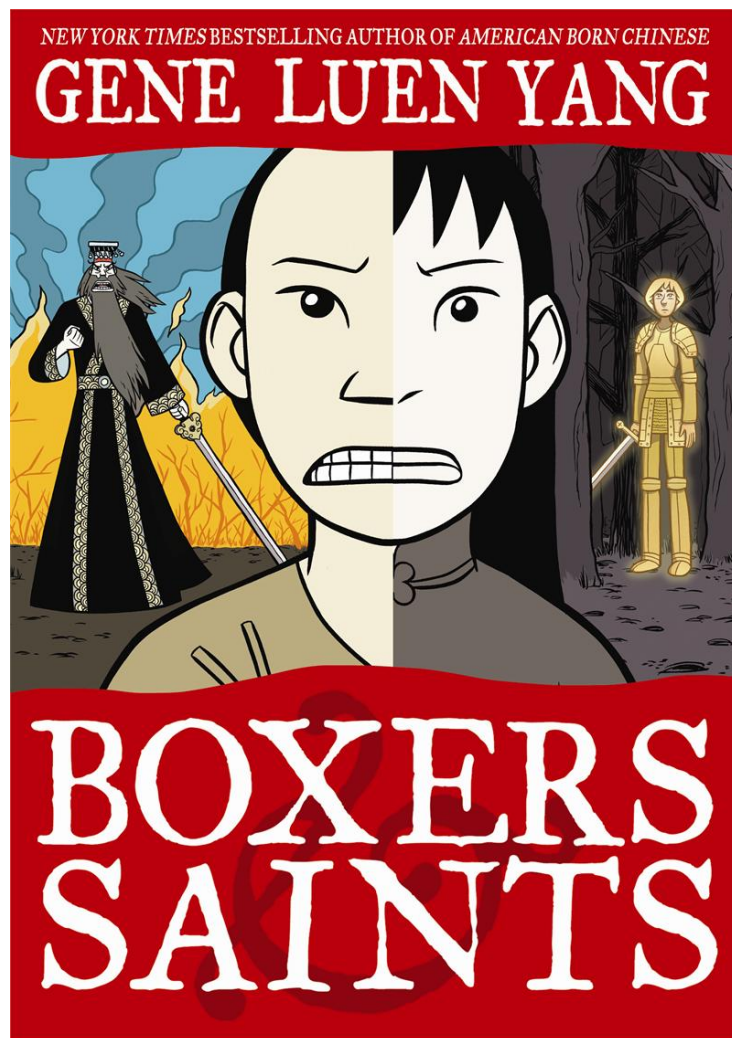
Dr. Warner

7 October 2019

Book Talk

**“Boxers” and “Saints”**

By **Gene Luen Yang**





Source: <https://www.hamline.edu/faculty-staff/gene-luen-yang/>

Author's Webpage: <http://geneyang.com/>

### **Author Biography**

Gene Luen Yang is a cartoonist and a teacher. He has been drawing comics since fifth grade. He was born in Alameda, California. Yang's parents immigrated from Hongkong, so it is a base for his well-known graphic *American Born Chinese*. In 2013, Yang released *Boxers and Saints* which he received an LA Times Book Prize. The two-volume graphic novel is about the Boxers Rebellion and the influence of Christianity on Chinese people in Boxers time. Yang is teaching creative writing at Hamline University. In January 2016, Yang was appointed the National's Ambassador for Young People's Literature by the Library of Congress.

## Summary

### **Boxers:**

*Boxers* sets in a rural unnamed village in China in 1898. The story is about the boy's life named Lee Bao, or as known as Little Bao. Little Bao is a fan of Chinese opera. Bao is the youngest son in a farmer's family, so he would imagine the Chinese Gods helping him out when he is working on the fields, or the Goddess sings him to sleep. It is a peaceful life for Little Bao to be surrounded by his imagination. Then, troubles all started with a dispute over a bun. One day, a bully stirs up the peaceful village by arguing with Crooked Grandma in the village over a bun, then the bully hits the old poor Grandma, Little Bao's father has a fight with the bully to protect Crooked Grandma. Little Bao sees his father as a hero figure in the operas. Many days later, the cheat invites a foreign priest to return to the village to solve the quarrel, but the reconciliation ended up with the foreign priest smashing the village's God - Tu Gi Dong. The smashing of the sacred village's God resulted in Little Bao's father and a Constable are sent to make complaints to the magistrate. However, the plan does not go well. Little Bao's father is beaten to nearly death on his way by the foreign soldiers, and the couple has never brought the complaint to the magistrate. Little Bao's father became ill since the day he was beaten by the soldiers, he talks in weird language and sits by the window all day. When Bao witnesses the sorrow that foreign missionaries and soldiers have brought to his family and his villagers, his life changed. One day, an oil seller comes to the village and starts teaching Kungfu to the men. Thanks to oil seller, Little Bao was given the power to see and use the Chinese Gods by master Big Belly. Little Bao then teaches the ritual to summon the Gods to his brothers. He sees each of his brother resembles a different God. Later, Little Bao establishes an army that go against the foreign missionaries and the soldiers. Little Bao

intention is to free China from the foreigners, keeping China's culture and purity. However, the situation does not turn out as Little Bao expected. The gods are their covers, without the gods, they are merely humans. I

**Saints:**

*Saints* is the second volume follows *Boxers*. It sets in 1898 in China. The story is about a girl, who was named Four after her birthday, she was also the fourth daughter of an extended family. When Four's mother asked her grandfather to give her a name, her grandfather refused because he had seen Four as a bad luck to the family. The poor little girl tries every way to find the answer to her existence, to protect her personal image, she was given merely a title to distinguish herself from other family members, from mimicking chopping the woods like her oldest male cousin to perfecting her evil face. However, she later joins Christianity, and she finally has a name – Vibiana.

But still, China is no heaven for Christianity. At the time, Boxer Rebellion is a booming name, many Christians and foreign missionaries are arrested and killed by the Boxers. Poor girl Vibiana is torn between her beloved country and her love for God. Vibiana will have to choose between joining the Boxer Movement or dying for her faith.





Source: [http://blogs.slj.com/goodcomicsforkids/2013/09/19/interview-gene-luen-yang-on-](http://blogs.slj.com/goodcomicsforkids/2013/09/19/interview-gene-luen-yang-on-boxers-saints/)

[boxers-saints/](http://blogs.slj.com/goodcomicsforkids/2013/09/19/interview-gene-luen-yang-on-boxers-saints/)

## Text Complexity

### 1. Lexile Level: 610-800L, Grade 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup>

Based on Common Core Bands, the book's text complexity would be at a 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> grade level because of the narrative style. It is comprised of simple vocabulary and colloquialism. However, readers would need the understanding of China history in order to understand what the author is trying to say through the graphic novels.

### 2. ATOS: 4.6, Grade 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup>

Based on the Common Core Bands, ATOS recognizes that the book's text complexity falls between 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> grade level. The reasoning behind the score is the same as the Lexile because "Boxers" and "Saints" are a simplistic graphic novel, solely in terms of the vocabulary.

### 3. Dale-Chall: Final Score is 5.8, Grades 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>

The Dale-Chall formula shows that students as young as 7<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade are able to read "Boxers" and "Saints". It does not have much complex vocabularies. However, the content is mostly for readers who understand China's history,

## Adolescents in the Search for Meaning

### Chapter 4: Books about Real-life Experience.

*Family Ties, Relating across Cultures, Figurative Quests, and Love & Friendship.*

In “Boxers” and “Saints”, both protagonists need to go on quests to reach their purpose. In “Boxers”, Lee Bao goes against the foreign devils to save his family, to save his country – China. In “Saints”, Vibiana goes against her family by joining Christianity. Vibiana was on a quest of looking for herself. Two books seem like in opposition, but they speak the same language, which is die for what you love.

### Chapter 6: Books About Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions

Themes of identity and discrimination can be clearly seen in “Saints”. The discrimination happens since the day that Vibiana was born. Vibiana’s experience of ignorance in her family made her question about herself, who she really is. Vibiana’s inner conflict is whether she is a true devil like everyone said or she is just a normal girl.

The theme about struggles with decisions is illustrated in “Boxers”. In the novel, when Lee Bao perceive the ability to summon the Gods, he must face the consequence of his summons, which is enduring the controlling of his God. Lee Bao must do everything his God command him to do, or else the God will have a way to make Lee Bao follows his order. Therefore, the commands which Bao sees as merciless and does not agree with his God, Bao’s God will make him suffer from seeing his loved ones killed.

## Chapter 8: Books on Allegory, Fantasy, Myth, and Parable.

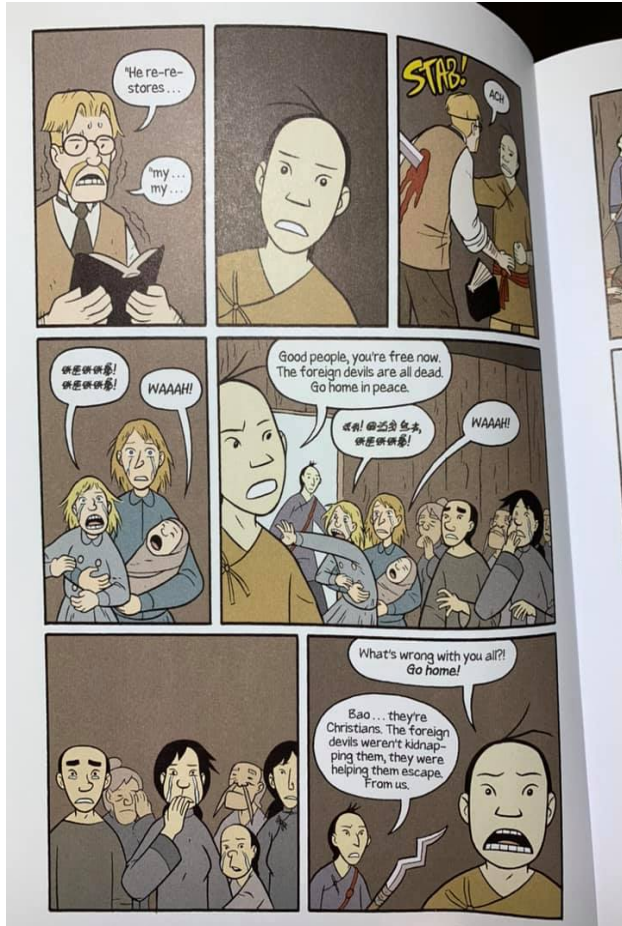
The theme fantasy occurs because of the imagining God in “Boxers” that control over the protagonist. Lee Bao has a meeting with his God every night in his dream. However, the God is too ambitious, which make Lee Bao fails his mission as a Chinese savior. Also, the raccoon in “Saints” stands for the immature evilness inside of Vibiana, but Joan of Arc appears just in time to stop Vibiana from the devils.



<http://www.quickmeme.com/meme/3sykq6>



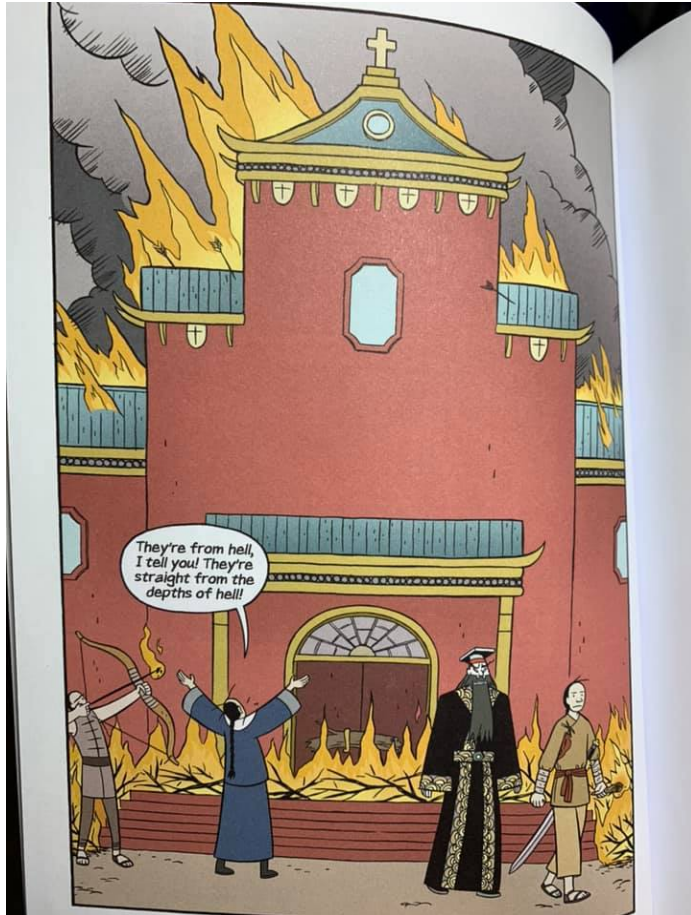
## Quotes



“Boxers” page 188

home without an explanation.

Lee Bao and his Kungfu army just killed an army of foreign soldiers for thinking that they are rescuing the people on the train. However, the people on the train was trying to run away from Lee Bao and his people. Until then, Lee Bao is pretty sure that he is a good person, who is trying to save China from being invaded. However, Bao is no longer a good person when he decided to kill the innocent foreign soldiers. Individuals can see that Bao’s thoughts is simple, after killing the soldiers and a Father, Bao simply tells the people to go



“Boxers” page 188

This is when Lee Bao has set a fire to the church full of Christians and the man in black next to him is his God – Ch’in Shih-huang. From the picture, people can see that Lee Bao’s face has no expression of sad or regret, because he thinks that his action and decision of burning the church was right. Ch’in Shih-huang stands for the immorality inside Lee Bao; the magistrate is the catalysts that feeds the relationship between Lee Bao and Ch’in Shih-huang when he yells out the Christians are from hell, adding to the elements that Lee Bao did the right thing when burning down the church. Through this picture, readers can see that lack of knowledge causes a lot of trouble, the misunderstanding of Lee Bao and his people towards Christianity results in lots of innocent deaths. This picture also gives the audience a hint of history, how brutal it can be when misunderstanding of knowledge affects other people.



“Saints” page 159

This is when Vibiana also knows why God

brings her to see Lee Bao, it is to teach Lee Bao about Christianity and praying. Vibiana has her eyes opened by God when she hears about the Parable of the Good Samaritan; it is about compassion and being good to each other. Lee Bao has done wrong from the time he created an army, but at this moment, he decides to listen to Vibiana teaching him how to pray, he even questions Vibiana. This picture also shows the crossing of Eastern culture and Western culture. Lee Bao represents for the East and Vibiana represents for the West. In the moment, the lack of understanding of Lee Bao about Christianity made him accidentally insulted Vibiana by calling her a foreign devil. However, Vibiana does not care about what he calls her, she just wants Lee Bao to know the prayer.

## Teaching Resources

- 1.** Before reading the novel, have students discuss the impact of knowledge on people in groups. Ask students to write down what their opinion on mini whiteboards. It can be any idea based on their knowledge. After finishing “Boxers” and “Saints”, have students write down how knowledge impact on the characters in the story and compare with what they wrote.
- 2.** Have a student represent for each group, stands up and put forward of what they wrote. Teacher tells the class the compact history about Boxers Rebellion. Have each group summarize each part of the novel, they can choose, or teacher can assign parts for the groups. When one group is presenting the summarized part, the other groups must jot down the summarizing ideas, and all of them will have to submit the summary at the end of class. Categorize the themes of the story: obsession, character evolution, the definition of compassion between two cultures, the image of saint and god in the story, the power of community, the dreams and reality, and the effect of racism. List the question related to each theme.
- 3.** Have students do a presentation in groups of four or five. They can one of the given themes or they can choose other themes related to the story; it can be a specific page they want to talk about or a specific object in the story. Students must include a hint of what they know about Boxers Rebellion in their presentation. Also, students need to put in a slide of tone and mood of the story. Students should include pictures, as many as possible, to make the

presentation more interesting. If students choose one of the given themes, there are questions to answer in order to help them with the presentation. However, if students choose an outside theme, they must make sure that it is comprehensive. Students should submit an e-copy of the presentation to teacher before presenting in class. Time to be announced. The limit time for a presentation should be 5 minutes to no later than 10 minutes

4. Have students play a game. Divide the class into 2 groups. Divide the board into 2 segments. Have students lined up in groups. Given 30 seconds, each student must run to the board and write about ideas related to the novels; the rules are: must be one word, it can be anything, from object to human. The winners will get extra credit.
5. After finishing the book, have students talk about the twisted ending. Then, students write in what they think about the ending of both books, there should be separated opinions on one paper. Submit the written summarize with the opinions.

### **Why Should Teens Read This Book?**

“Boxers” and “Saints” are great graphic novels that focus on many problems that somehow relates to the modern day. Teenagers should read these books to enhance their knowledge of Christianity and China’s history. It is also for teens to understand more about the customs of being a bad luck, like Vibiana. The book “Saints” can be a motivation for depressed teens, who are denied by their family, it is a reminder for them to find where they really belong.

## Exeter Qualities

In the Exeter qualities, characteristics 5 and 6 fit most to the two graphic novels. The books provide lots of perspectives in the Eastern province, enough for readers to understand the history of China and their rebellions. Also, the protagonists of the book must make some achievement, in order to be considered smart and respected by the viewers.