

# American Born Chinese

## Author: Gene Luen Yang

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Empathy is a core cognitive and emotional skill for every general practitioner (GP). Broadly speaking, it is the ability to step imaginatively into the perspectives of another person.

Empathy contributes to high-quality diagnostic and management strategies, in part due to its prerequisites: curiosity and open-mindedness.

*American Born Chinese* is Gene Luen Yang's original graphic novel that has recently been adapted to the small screen and streaming platforms. Yang's creation is a page-turner; he stimulates imaginations by crafting three inter-twining stories for us to step into. The first tells of the Monkey King, from the 16th century Chinese literary novel. In the second, Jin Wang desperately tries to fit in at successive primary schools. Well-meaning mispronunciations by teachers, cold shouldering and taunts from peers and his growing self-doubt and loathing are realistically depicted. The final tale is a testament to how deeply Yang trusts and respects his readers; two cousins, Danny and Chin-Kee, attend the same high school. Chin-Kee, who's every appearance is marked by a TV sitcom laugh-track, is drawn as a deeply offensive and instantly recognisable caricature. Yang brings the three stories to a final denouement, which I will not spoil here. If you are reading with a young person, or as part of a medical humanities

curriculum, *American Born Chinese* will prompt discussions on identities, family, and friendship.

GPs have had a longstanding interest in individual and community responses to the social causes of ill health. Interpersonal and structural discrimination add to the patterns that make people unwell. Cultural resilience and family dynamics can be a pathway to healing and health for children and young people. In a recent landmark survey,<sup>1</sup> Australian student participants in Years 5–9 had seen other students left out or teased by classmates (60%) and teachers (43%) in ways they thought were racially stigmatising. One-third had themselves experienced such discrimination and harassment in school.

I enjoyed the engaging characters and multi-layered artwork in this award-winning graphic novel. The author has a deft touch – although the colours and lines are straightforward, the faces are expressive. I recommend it to GPs who care for young people in Australia today.

## Author

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## Reference

1. Priest N, Alam O, Truong M, et al. Promoting proactive bystander responses to racism and racial discrimination in primary schools: A mixed methods evaluation of the 'Speak Out Against Racism' program pilot. *BMC Public Health* 2021;21(1):1434. doi: 10.1186/s12889-021-11469-2.

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