

The Shadow Hero

Gene Luen Yang

Reviewed by: Anika 18

Star Teen Book Reviewer of Be the Star You Are! Charity

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Hank Chu is a Chinese American living in Chinatown. His parents immigrated to America when they were young. Hank's mother only married his father out of her parents' wishes and unhappily went along with everything that was asked of her. Hank, on the other hand, wants to be a grocer just like his father. One day Hank's mother found herself in an astonishing encounter with a superhero and ever since then her whole demeanor has changed. She became cheerful and adamant about making Hank a superhero, going so far to sew up a special suit for him and researching ways to find superpowers. Hank tolerated her antics, still determined to follow in his father's footsteps, but soon enough that all changed when tragedy struck Hank's family in the most terrible way. The spirit of the Tortoise strikes a deal with Hank to help him avenge what he has lost and truly save the day.

Gene Luen Yang's *The Shadow Hero* is another amazing story that celebrates Chinese culture. He deftly draws from all the typical comic book superhero tropes/cliches to give avid comic book readers a sense of familiarity. Though at the same time he beautifully examines the immigrant experience to make for a unique and authentic graphic novel. The characterization was incredibly spot on as well! Many of the characters had backstories that all came to a converging point and really breathed life into the story. Hank Chu and his father are especially good examples of this with their experiences in Chinatown and family history. Hank's mother was actually my favorite character. She was the funniest person I had come across, being so set on about making Hank a hero. Something I found intriguing was the way the art evolved from the beginning to the end, which really added a whole new layer of depth to the complex plot and development of all the characters. It went from muted gray colors to bright strong hues bursting from the page. *The Shadow Hero* could make way for discussion around the portrayal of Asian characters in popular culture and the history of Asian immigrants. The author goes so far to provide the background behind the Golden Age comic series his novel is based on, [The Green Turtle](#), which I found to be very informative and thought-provoking. I definitely would suggest giving this action packed and exciting book a read!

There are some mature themes that show up in *The Shadow Hero*, but are on the more lighthearted side. Violence makes an appearance a number of times throughout the story and is cartoonish for the most part, excluding one major instance. In terms of romance, there is an awkward moment with Hank's mother accidentally dropping a pork bun down her shirt and also a few moments where Hank is attracted to a woman in a red dress. Alcoholism makes a minor appearance as well. For these reasons, I would recommend this novel for readers 12 years and up. *The Shadow Hero* would make a great gift for fans of comics and superheroes.

Recommended Titles:

Nimona by Noelle Stevenson

Dept.H Pressure by Matt Kindt

The Mermaid and the Fisherman by Bartosz Szybyor

Jim Henson's The Storyteller: Dragons by Jim Henson
The Stonekeeper by Kazu Kibuishi (Amulet Series #1)