(New York: First Second, 2014)

Audience: Grades 7-12

**Summary**
Set in San Francisco’s Chinatown in the 1930’s, *The Shadow Hero* tells the origin story of the first Asian American superhero, The Green Turtle. Hank is a mild mannered young man who wants nothing more than to follow in his immigrant father’s footsteps and become a grocer. However, after his mother is rescued by a superhero known as the Anchor of Justice, she is determined for Hank to become a superhero as well. After his father is killed by Chinese gangsters, Hank inherits the turtle spirit from him and decides to become the Green Turtle in order to avenge his death.

**Introduction**
The character of the Green Turtle was created in the Golden Age of comics by a Chinese American cartoonist named Chu Hing. As Gene Yang notes in the back of *The Shadow Hero*, rumor has it that Hing wanted the Green Turtle to be Chinese, but the publishers did not think the comic would sell and he was told to make the character white. Hing responded by never fully showing his character’s face, thereby allowing the possibility that he was Chinese. The Green Turtle first appeared in the series *Blazing Comics* in 1944 (the first story is reproduced in the last pages of *The Shadow Hero*), but never won much of an audience and was discontinued after five issues.

Although the Green Turtle’s sidekick, Burma Boy, repeatedly asked him how he became a superhero, he was always interrupted before sharing the tale. Since Hing never supplied an origin story for his character, contemporary author Gene Yang and artist Sonny Liew decided to create one. Their collaborative effort has been published as *The Shadow Hero*.

**Creators**
Author Gene Luen Yang is a comic book writer and artist perhaps best known for his first book, *American Born Chinese* (2006), which won numerous accolades including the Printz Award and an Eisner Award for Best Graphic Album. His other works include *The Eternal Smile, Prime Baby,*
Boxers & Saints, and Level Up; he also has contributed to the Avatar: The Last Airbender comic book series. In his free time, Yang teaches high school computer science in California.

Sonny Liew is a Malaysian born comic book artist who currently resides in Singapore. He has provided art for several Marvel, DC Comics, SLG, Disney, and First Second comic books and series, including Flight, Wonderland, Liquid City, and the adaptation of Sense & Sensibility. He also wrote and illustrated the Xeric award winning Malinky Robot (Image comics, 2011).

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Hank’s mother was so determined for him to become a superhero? Why did she change her mind towards the end? Do you think she is a stereotypical Chinese tiger mom? Why or why not? In what other ways does the author play with Asian American stereotypes in the book?

2. Why does Hank go along with his mother’s wishes initially? Can you relate to his decision? Why or why not?

3. Think about the immigrants in the story. In what ways does the book expose the plight of Chinese American immigrants in the early nineteenth century? In what ways are their stories alike, and how do they differ? How were they treated? Do you think times have changed for immigrants? Why or why not?

4. Do you think either Hank or his mother was responsible for his father’s death? If so, in what way? If not, who was ultimately responsible?

5. When approached by the turtle spirit, Hank chooses as his promise to “never get shot” in return for the spirit living in his shadow. Do you think this was a good choice? Why or why not? If you were in Hank’s situation, what would you choose?

6. How does The Shadow Hero compare to other superhero origin stories you are familiar with? In what ways is it alike, and in what ways does it differ? Do you think that the creators have made a believable origin story for the original 1944 character?

7. The book is a product of collaboration between the artist (Sonny Liew) and writer (Gene Yang). How would you describe the artist’s style? Does the art work well with the story? Why or why not?

8. Why does Liew use different sizes and shapes of comic book panels and lay them out differently from page to page? What effect does this have on the story? Compare, for instance, pages 101-102 to the following pages, 103-104.

9. Do you think that the comic book medium is a good choice for this story? Why or why not?
Activities

1. Design your own superhero that is based on your family’s cultural background. Draw your own comic strip to demonstrate your character’s capabilities, or use a computer based program such as ToonDoo to create one.
2. Write an origin story for a superhero that is based one of the other mythological Chinese spirits from the book, or from a different culture. Create a costume or logo for your superhero, either using your own drawing skills or a computer program.

Resources

- Gene Yang’s website, www.geneyang.com, especially:
  - http://geneyang.com/the-shadow-hero, the author’s web page on The Shadow Hero. Don’t miss the video book trailer!
  - http://geneyang.com/tag/the-shadow-hero, which displays all of Yang’s blog posts on The Shadow Hero
- The Digital Comic Museum webpage where copies of Hing’s “The Green Turtle” can be downloaded http://digitalcomicmuseum.com/index.php?dlid=5928
- Sonny Liew’s blog at https://sonnyliew.wordpress.com/

If you enjoyed The Shadow Hero, try:

- Convergence (the first book of The Zodiac Legacy) by Stan Lee (Disney Press, 2015)
- Battling Boy by Paul Pope (First Second, 2013)
- Ichiro by Ryan Inzana (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012)