

American Born Chinese

By Gene Luen Yang

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**During Reading Strategy:
Anticipation Guide for Conformity¹**

Context:

In a ninth-grade class, this simple survey and activity looking at an expressive text (song lyrics) is an easy way to activate students' prior knowledge and help them begin to think about what the underlying messages are within the graphic novel. As they are preparing to read a text with relatively few words written in a more direct fashion (graphic novel genre), studying a poetic text makes sense.

Purpose:

An anticipation guide is intended to be used in order to help students activate their prior knowledge on important issues that will be addressed in their reading of *American Born Chinese*. The issues emphasized here are conformity, navigating the social world of public schools, and stereotypes of middle-class America and cliques. Since these subjects can be a sensitive spot for teenagers on the fringes, it would be good to direct class discussion toward lessons to be learned and ways that students can take control of their lives in positive ways. Students' responses on the survey section of the assignment can help teachers gauge how students feel on these subjects (see discussion suggestions in Step 3 for ways to expand your view of your students' feelings). Using the song and/or movie also allows multimodal learning to take place as students analyze how sounds and images enhance the meaning of the text.

Materials Needed:

- Copies of the survey sheet on "Subdivisions" for each student
- Possibly access the song "Subdivisions" by Rush, or the video online (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lu9Ycq64Gy4>)
- Scratch paper or writing notebooks for written response

Time Allotted:

15-20 minutes

¹ Adapted from "Anticipation Guides," Grierson, BYU, 2007.

American Born Chinese Anticipation Guide

Steps:

1. Introduce the subject of conformity in a writing prompt (“How far are people willing to go to fit in?”) or other attention activity.
2. Distribute the handout with the song lyrics to “Subdivisions” for students to fill out on their own, moving from making predictions in the first column, to reading the lyrics, and then to checking their predictions in the second column. The actual reading can be done as a class.

You may also decide to play a recording of the song (performed by Rush on the 1982 album *Signals*), or the music video. The video highlights themes of teenage isolation, detachment, mass production, fast-paced life, and social hierarchies in schools and communities (and a nice throwback to the 1980s).

3. Provide some outlet for discussion, whether between partners or members of small groups: “Do you agree or disagree with the artist? Do you see these issues at play in our school?” Also consider wrapping up discussion with a full-class discussion of applications: “Is the song outdated? What might you talk about if you were to rewrite the song today? What issues do you think the Chinese American author Gene Yang might discuss in his novel?”

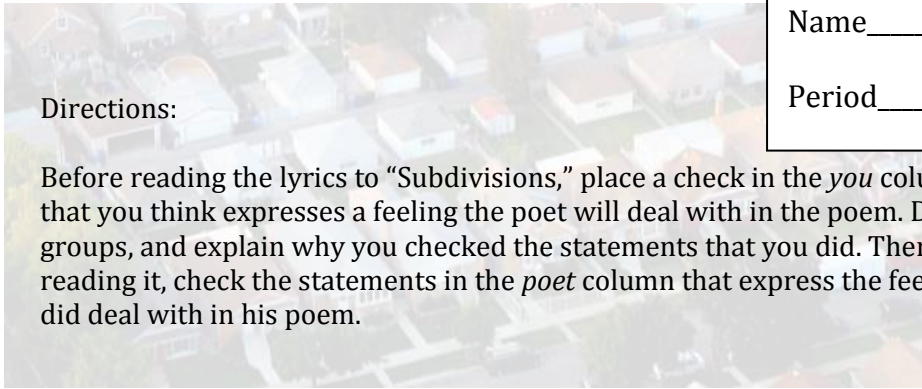
Assessment:

Completed “Subdivisions” surveys can serve as formative assessments themselves, indicating to you what issues your students most associate with the subject of conformity. If students leave statements unchecked that you think are important, then perhaps they do not understand them or do not feel they are as important as you do. Combined with the feeling you get from students’ responses in discussion, you can gain a sense of what themes you should emphasize in future lessons with this graphic novel.

If you would prefer additional evidence of students’ opinions, have them respond to the following prompt as a freewrite. Either this or the survey sheet could be used as a daily grade:

One of the main themes of Gene Yang’s novel is the importance of searching for identity. Where do you think people should go to learn who they are? To their family? To school? To their homeland? To the wilderness? Explain why you think so.

American Born Chinese Anticipation Guide



Name _____

Period _____

Directions:

Before reading the lyrics to “Subdivisions,” place a check in the *you* column next to each statement that you think expresses a feeling the poet will deal with in the poem. Discuss your choices in small groups, and explain why you checked the statements that you did. Then read the poem. After reading it, check the statements in the *poet* column that express the feelings that the poet actually did deal with in his poem.

YOU	POET	
_____	_____	The American dream is to live a peaceful life in the suburbs.
_____	_____	It’s usually better to go with the flow.
_____	_____	Your circumstances determine what you become.
_____	_____	The popular kids are the most cruel.
_____	_____	No one else in the world is exactly like you.
_____	_____	Being yourself is more important than having friends.

Subdivisions – Neil Peart

Sprawling on the fringes of the city
 In geometric order
 An insulated border
 ...

Growing up it all seems so one-sided
 Opinions all provided
 The future pre-decided
 ...

Nowhere is the dreamer
 Or the misfit so alone

Subdivisions



Partial lyrics to the song “Subdivisions” written by Neil Peart and performed by the rock group Rush. Photo courtesy of <http://agentgenius.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/american-suburb-homes.jpg>.