

COMFORT ZONE

By Gene Luen Yang



When I was a kid, I was pretty shy.

Colored by Mike Holmes

After I switched schools in the third grade, it took me months to make my first friend.

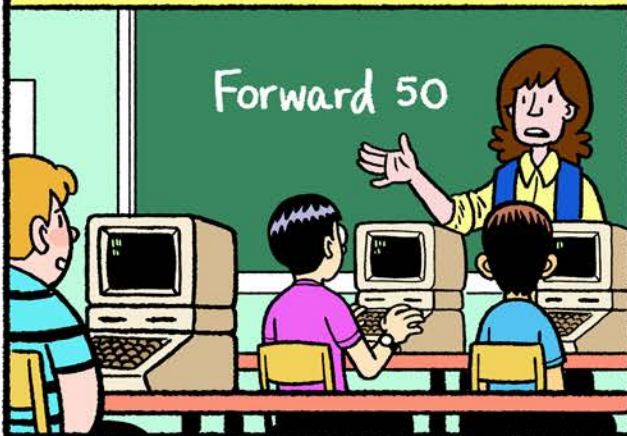
I didn't used to like Chinese people!

But I like you!

Uh... thanks?



There were, however, certain settings where I felt perfectly comfortable. One of these was Summer Computer Programming Camp.



I'd learned how to program the year before, so I went in with the confidence of a rock star.

You did that? That's so rad!

Why, yes. It is pretty rad.



This kid named *Ronnie** started hanging out with me. He marveled at all my programs and laughed at all my jokes.

Orange!

Orange you glad I'm not a banana?

Ha ha!

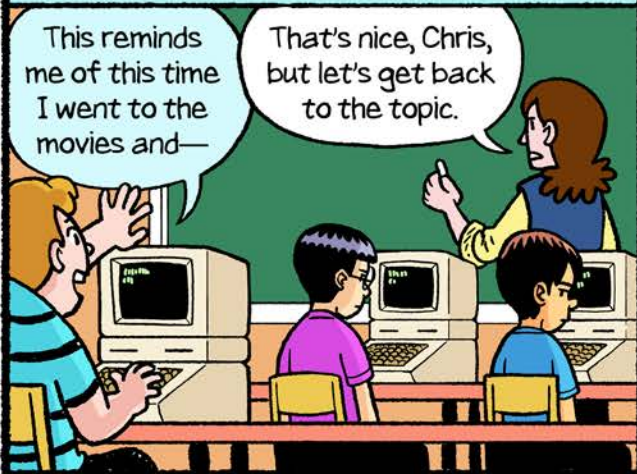


I'd made a friend without even trying.

There was this other kid at the camp named *Chris**. He was stocky and loud.



During class, he couldn't help but blurt out all sorts of *random statements*.



Maybe he was just really *exuberant*, but now that I've been a classroom teacher myself, I wonder if he had something more going on.



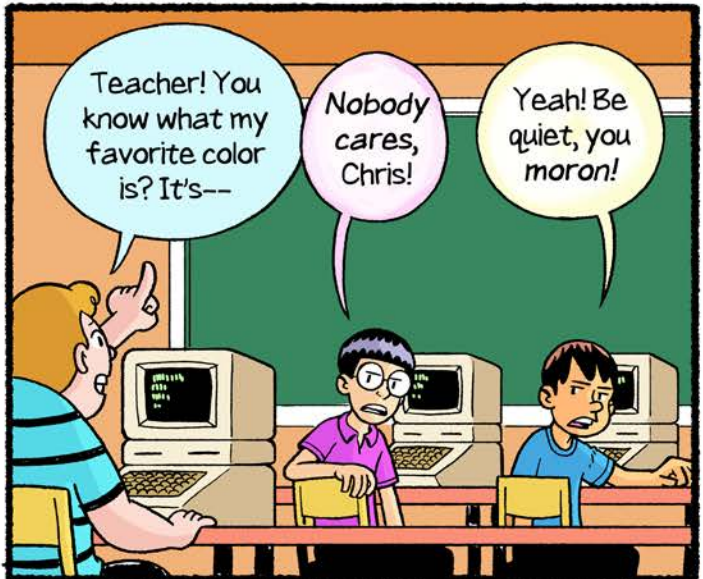
Back then, though, Ronnie and I found Chris *endlessly annoying*. We came up with a plan.



Teacher! You know what my favorite color is? It's--

Nobody cares, Chris!

Yeah! Be quiet, you moron!



After just a few days, Chris went *silent*.



And he stayed silent for the rest of the camp.

Ronnie and I thought we'd done the class a favor.



We actually celebrated our *cruelty*.



Stories about *experiences* I've never had, *struggles* I've never faced, and *perspectives* different from my own help me build empathy.

