

Summary of *American Born Chinese*

Characters

Primary Characters	• The Monkey King • Jin Wang • Danny
Secondary Characters	• Wei-Chen Sun • Amelia Harris • Greg • Melanie • Wong Lai-Tsao • Suzy Nakamura • Tze-Yo-Tzuh • Chin-Kee

Setting

The story is told in three separate tales. The first is a Chinese folktale and takes place in ancient China. The second and third both take place in contemporary America.

Summary

The Monkey King (pp. 7–20): The book begins with a Chinese folktale about the Monkey King, who rules firmly yet gently. He studies kung fu and the Four Major Heavenly Disciplines, the prerequisites to immortality: fist-like-lightning, thunderous foot, heavenly senses, and cloud-as-steed. Using these disciplines, he notices that the gods, goddesses, demons, and spirits are having a party in heaven, but he is turned away for not wearing shoes and being a monkey. Mortified and full of anger, he kills the guests and returns to his kingdom, dejected.

Jin Wang (pp. 23–40): The story moves to the present day, where Jin, a Chinese American boy, is moving to an American suburb from his home in Chinatown, San Francisco. While living in San Francisco, his mother takes him to the Chinese herbalist in their neighborhood. The herbalist's wife tells him, "It's easy to become anything you wish so long as you're willing to forfeit your soul." When they arrive in the suburbs, Jin is immediately faced with the racism of his white classmates; his teacher mispronounces his name, and his classmates make fun of his lunch. Another student, named Wei-Chen, joins his class. At first, Jin doesn't want to associate with his Taiwanese classmate after being bullied by his classmates. When Wei-Chen shows him his robot monkey, Jin changes his mind, and they become best friends.

"Everyone Ruvs Chin-Kee" (pp. 43–52): The story switches to Danny, a white American boy with a Chinese cousin who comes to visit. His cousin is named Chin-Kee. When Chin-Kee arrives, he plays into many Chinese stereotypes, mispronouncing English words, bringing his luggage in large take-out containers, and speaking with many idioms. Chin-Kee is creepy around Danny's study buddy, Melanie, and Danny is mortified.

The Monkey King (pp. 55–84): The story returns to the Monkey King, where he decrees that all the monkeys in his kingdom wear shoes. He spends his days training and locks himself deep in his chamber so as not to be disturbed. In forty days, he learns the Four Major Disciplines of Invulnerability and the Four Major Disciplines of Bodily Harm. He renames himself the Great Sage. After all this, he returns to his kingdom, only to receive a notice from heaven that he has been convicted of trespassing upon heaven and will be put to death. When he arrives at his execution, they fail to kill him because of his new abilities. He is forced to demonstrate each of them to the gods, and they summon Tze-Yo-Tzuh to stop him. At first, the Great Sage tries to escape him, but he discovers that it was Tze-Yo-Tzuh who created him and that he cannot. He tells Tze-Yo-Tzuh he is no longer a monkey and instead a powerful sage, but Tze-Yo-Tzuh says he will always be a monkey. Tze-Yo-Tzuh buries him under a mountain of rock to prevent him from exercising his powers, and he stays there for five hundred years.

Jin Wang (pp. 87–106): In the present day, Jin begins to have feelings for Amelia Harris, a white American girl in his class. He frets over whether Amelia likes their classmate Greg, Wei-Chen, and his girlfriend, Suzy Nakamura, who tease him. However, Jin is too ashamed to ask Amelia out and acts really foolish in her presence. While Wei-Chen and Amelia are taking care of the class pets at school, they get locked in a closet. Wei-Chen tells her about how kind Jin was to him when they first met. Jin rescues them from the locked closet, and he gathers the courage to ask Amelia out on a date. She says yes.

"Everyone Ruvs Chin-Kee" (pp. 109–130): Danny intentionally arrives late to school with Chin-Kee to avoid being seen. He is embarrassed by how much he participates in class in his thick, exaggerated accent. At lunch, Chin-Kee brings cat gizzards with noodles, disgusting his classmates. Danny tries to ask out his friend Melanie after school, but she turns him down and prefers to remain friends. Danny assumes it is because of how embarrassing Chin-Kee has been. Danny needs to serve detention for being late to school and misses his basketball practice as a result. After his detention, Danny talks to his teammate and tells him how he always has to leave other schools because Chin-Kee is so embarrassing. At first, his teammate tells him that that wouldn't happen at their school, but Danny lets it slip that Chin-Kee peed in his Coke, and his teammate is disgusted.

The Monkey King (pp. 130–160): Only four monks have ever achieved legendary status: Chi Dao, for his focused meditation; Jing Sze, for his fasting; Jiang Tao, for his sermons; and Wong Lai-Tsao, who is rather unremarkable. However, every day, Wong Lai-Tsao shares fruits with vagrants outside of town and dresses their wounds. He discovers that they are emissaries of

Tze-Yo-Tzuh, and he chooses him for a mission to deliver three packages to the West. Wong Lai-Tsao is directed to release the Monkey King so that he can accompany and protect him. However, the Monkey King refuses to help him because of his self-pride and stubbornness. In the process, Wong Lai-Tsao is gravely injured by demons. Finally, the Monkey King decides to help Wong Lai-Tsao, returns to his true form, and escapes the mountain of rock, defeating the demons and saving Wong Lai-Tsao. He removes his shoes and faithfully serves Wong Lai-Tsao on his journey.

Jin Wang (pp. 163–198): Jin asks Wei-Chen to cover for him and tell his parents that they are together so Jin can go on a date with Amelia. Wei-Chen reluctantly agrees. While at the movies with Amelia, Jin puts his arm around her, and Greg notices them. Later at school, Greg asks Jin not to ask out Amelia anymore because he isn't right for her. Jin agrees, but he immediately regrets it. He finds Suzy outside, and she tells him that a classmate called her a "chink" and that she feels like an outsider. Jin kisses her, but she pushes him away and hits him. When Wei-Chen arrives at Jin's house, hurt and angry to confront him, Jin tells him that Suzy deserves someone who isn't "FOB" ("Fresh Off the Boat") and says other hurtful things to his friend. Wei-Chen hits him too, but Jin doesn't change his mind. When Jin wakes the next day, he has transformed into Danny, and he seems thrilled by his new appearance.

"Everyone Ruvs Chin-Kee" (pp. 201–233): At school, Chin-Kee continues to embarrass Danny, and he pulls him outside to hit him. The two fight, and Chin-Kee eventually transforms into the Monkey King. He reveals that he is an emissary of Tze-Yo-Tzuh, and Danny returns to his true form: Jin. The Monkey King tells Jin that Wei-Chen is his son. He turned into a human to live in the mortal world to test his virtue. The Monkey King tells Jin that he has served as his conscience since Wei-Chen lost his faith in humanity and decided to live selfishly. The Monkey King leaves as Jin becomes more comfortable with his true self. He begins to spend time at a Chinese café to look for Wei-Chen. When he runs into a changed Wei-Chen, Jin apologizes for his behavior. Wei-Chen shows that he forgives Jin by telling him that there is a different café with better pearl milk tea down the road. He agrees to take Jin there one day, and they become close once more.