

PAPERSON

THE INSPIRING STORY OF TYRUS WONG, IMMIGRANT AND ARTIST

JULIE
JEUNG
CHRIS
SASAKI



PAPER SON

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About the Book

Before he became an artist named Tyrus Wong, he was a boy named Wong Geng Yeo. He traveled across a vast ocean from China to America with only a suitcase and a few papers. Not papers for drawing—which he loved to do—but immigration papers to start a new life. Once in America, Tyrus seized every opportunity to make art, eventually enrolling at an art institute in Los Angeles. Working as a janitor at night, he twirled his mop like a paintbrush in his hands. Eventually, he was given the opportunity of a lifetime—and using sparse brushstrokes and soft watercolors, Tyrus created the iconic backgrounds of Disney’s *Bambi*.

Grades: PreK–3
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About the Author

Julie Leung is the author of the Mice of the Round Table series, including *A Tail of Camelot*, *Voyage to Avalon*, and most recently, *Merlin’s Last Quest*. *Paper Son* is her first picture book. In her free time, she enjoys furtively sniffing books at bookstores and winning obscure board games. Originally from Atlanta, she now lives in New York City, where she works as a marketing director at Del Rey Books. Visit her on the web at jleungbooks.com and follow her on Twitter at [@jleungbooks](https://twitter.com/jleungbooks).

About the Illustrator

Chris Sasaki is a former character designer and illustrator for Pixar Animation Studios, where he has designed characters for *Monsters University* and *Inside Out*. His work has been featured at Gallery Nucleus, on *Cartoon Brew*, in the *New York Times*, and in the *Society of Illustrators Annual*. He lives in Oakland, California. Visit him on the web at csasaki.com.



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Classroom Activities

Angel Island Poetry

At Angel Island, the immigration center where Tyrus was separated from his father, many immigrants wrote poetry on the walls, much of it can still be seen. Share with your students some of the history of Angel Island and Chinese immigrants found at the public radio website listed below. Talk about the concept of “paper sons” and how Tyrus Wong must have felt during his time on Angel Island. Watch and discuss the first three and a half minutes of the *Discovering Angel Island* video. Then have each student write an “I Wish” poem from Tyrus’s point of view, using the reproducible provided.

Angel Island information:
kqed.org/w/pacificlink/history/angelisland/

Link for the video:
youtube.com/watch?v=f_EQY-0ThOM

Filling In the Blank Paper

Tyrus’s father had a good education in China, but as a Chinese immigrant, he could only get jobs as “a servant, a laundryman, a waiter,” often far from Tyrus. “Still, his father believed life in America could be like a blank paper.” Ask students to think about the disadvantages Tyrus faced as an immigrant and about how he filled the “blank paper” during his life in America. Have each student research another immigrant in American history who, like Tyrus, contributed to their new country despite hardships. Students should write a paper about Tyrus and the other immigrant, the difficulties they faced, and their accomplishments. Have students share their findings with the class.



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Storytelling with Pictures

In Tyrus Wong’s work as an animator, he helped tell stories through his pictures. Picture-book biographies like *Paper Son* also tell a story with pictures and words. Have students work in pairs to look closely at the book’s illustrations and discuss how the pictures convey Wong’s life. Students should consider all places where art appears, including the cover, flaps, endpapers, copyright and title pages, and endnotes, as well as the body of the book. How does each part help tell the story? How does the wide shape of the book work with the pictures? Illustrator Chris Sasaki explains in his note that Tyrus Wong has been a “huge influence” on him. Have students research Wong’s work and discuss ways the book’s illustrations reflect his artistic style.



Kites as Art

Tyrus Wong used his artistic skills not only on the job but also to make the world around him more beautiful. One way he did this was by making amazing kites. Share some photographs of his kites from the Malibu Arts & Culture exhibit about them. Then have students talk about the elements of the kites that make them works of art, such as color, shape, line, and texture. Ask them how kite making is related to science and why people like to fly kites. Then have each student draw and color a design for a kite inspired by those of Tyrus Wong, using the reproducible provided.

The Kites of Tyrus Wong Exhibit:
malibuartsandculture.org/265/The-Kites-of-Tyrus-Wong-Exhibit

This guide was prepared by Kathleen Odean, a former school librarian. Kathleen gives workshops on new children’s and young adult books. She chaired the 2002 Newbery Award Committee and served on earlier Newbery and Caldecott Award committees.

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Angel Island “I Wish” Poem



Put yourself in Tyrus’s shoes by writing a poem from his point of view about his time at Angel Island. Jot down thoughts about what he sees and hears, what emotions and memories he might have, what he misses, and what he hopes for. Then shape those thoughts into a poem in which the first two words of each line are “I wish.”

I wish _____

I wish _____

I wish _____

I wish _____

I wish _____

I wish _____

I wish _____

I wish _____

I wish _____

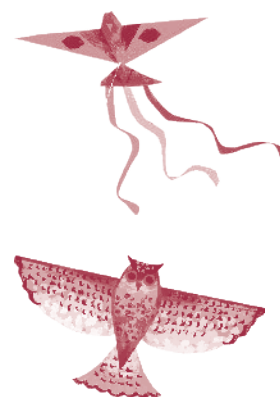
I wish _____

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Kites as Art



In the space below, draw and color a kite based on the ones Tyrus Wong created. Use the following questions to help plan your kite:

1. What will the subject be (for example, an animal, a bird, a dragon)?
2. What colors will you use? What designs or patterns?
3. Where will the strings attach? What will the tail look like?
4. How is your kite inspired by Tyrus Wong? What do you like about his kites?

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