

Enlighten Me

AUTHOR

MINH LÊ

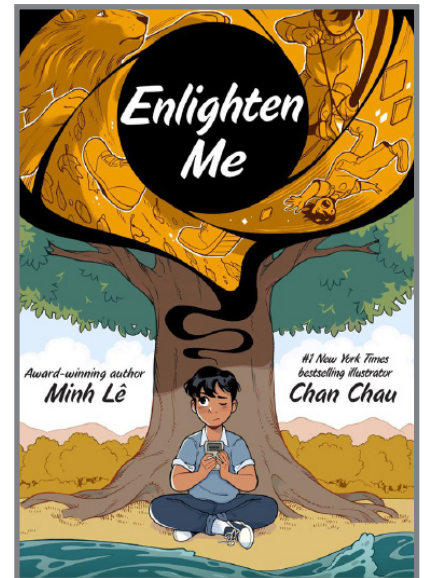
ILLUSTRATOR

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SYNOPSIS

When Bình fights back against a bully who makes fun of his Vietnamese heritage, he expects to be cheered as the hero. He defeated the bad guy, right?

Instead, it gets him a stern warning from his vice principal and worried parents. Now he's stuck on a family trip to a silent meditation retreat. That means no talking—and no video games—for a whole weekend! Could things possibly get any worse?

However, when a nun gathers all the kids to tell them the Jataka tales—the stories of the Buddha's many past lives—Bình takes a fantastical dive into his imagination and starts to see himself in these stories. Will he retreat further into himself, or will he emerge from the weekend open to change?

With any luck, these next few days will prove more enlightening than he thought.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Minh Lê is the author of *The Blur*, the Eisner-nominated *Lift, Drawn Together* (winner of the 2019 Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature), *Green Lantern: Legacy*, and more. He is also on the faculty of the Hamline University MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults, serves on the board of We Need Diverse Books, and has written for a number of national publications, including NPR, *HuffPost*, and the *New York Times*. Minh does not meditate as much as he should, but he does savor every moment of life with his wonderful wife and children at their home in San Diego.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATORS

Chan Chau is a graduate of the Minneapolis College of Art and Design. They are the artist of *New York Times* bestselling *Baby-Sitter's Club* graphic novel adaptations of *Kristy and the Snobs* and *Jessi's Secret Language*. Before this, they worked in animation and were featured in multiple award-winning anthologies. In their free time, they love to play video games, read manga and spend quality time with their found family. They currently reside in Washington state.

STUDY NOTES

- Since Bình can't speak out loud at the retreat we regularly get to hear what's going on in his thoughts, imagination and memories, including what's been happening at school. How did it affect your opinion of Bình as a character?
- Would you like to attend a silent meditation retreat? Why or why not?

- As a class, try a simple meditation together (head to <https://www.headspace.com/meditation/kids> for more information). Afterwards, discuss how it made you feel. Was it challenging? Did you find yourself aware of different things, like Binh?
- Binh loves video games, and often imagines scenarios and events as if they were video game levels. Find one such moment in the novel, and compare it to another section of the story. How are they presented differently? Be sure to consider both the visual and textual elements. How might making things feel like a game help Binh connect with what's happening in the real world?
- “Family doesn't run. You can't push us away,” (p 89). From what we see in the book, what do you think Binh's relationship is like with his sisters? How does the book explore family as a theme?
- How do the stories help Binh learn and understand the foundations of Buddhism? What did you know about Buddhism before reading, and what new things did you learn from *Enlighten Me*? Did anything surprise you?
- The kids at Binh's school say offensive things that make Binh feel upset, then pretend it's a 'joke'. Have a class discussion about the different forms bullying can take and how best to combat it, including other responses and actions Binh could have chosen.
- Binh feels like he doesn't fit in. How does that affect his actions? What could you do for someone in your class who might be feeling like Binh?
- *Enlighten Me* is a graphic novel. How did this format affect your reading experience and enjoyment of the book? How might it have been different if *Enlighten Me* was presented as just prose, without the illustrations?
- How do you think life might be different for Binh after attending this retreat?