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TEACHER'S GUIDE

zen pencils **VOLUME TWO**

DREAM THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM



PULL-OUT
POSTER
INSIDE!

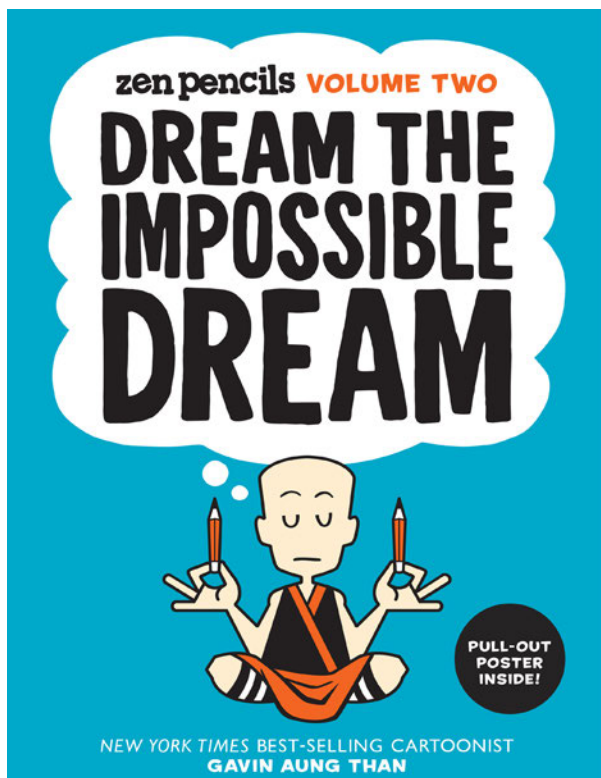
NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLING CARTOONIST
GAVIN AUNG THAN



Zen Pencils: Volume Two—Dream The Impossible Dream Classroom Activity and Discussion Guide

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Reading With Pictures





Zen Pencils: Volume Two— Dream the Impossible Dream

Gavin Aung Than

Andrews McMeel Publishing

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OVERVIEW

High school students are at a critical age. They are deeply engaged in assessing what is important to them, figuring out who they are, and thinking about how they want to live their lives. *Zen Pencils* explores these themes in complex and engaging visual narratives that are great springboards to introspection, conversation, and creation in the classroom. This guide provides discussion questions and activities to help students analyze the comics in *Zen Pencils*, think about how the topics apply to their lives, and then discuss, write, and draw about what they are thinking.

Discussion Questions for Selected Stories

***THE CALLING,* GAVIN AUNG THAN**

- * What do you think Aung Than means when he writes, “The calling chooses you”?
- * Do you feel that you have a calling?
- * What obstacles might you face in following your calling?

***A LIFETIME OF LEARNING,* ISAAC ASIMOV**

- * What do you think the differences are between learning in school and learning outside of school?
- * What interests do you pursue, or think you would like to pursue, outside of school?

***THE GIFT OF LIFE,* CHRIS HARDWICK**

- * Analyze the visual metaphor Aung Than chose for this quote.
- * What do the chains and the guards represent? The ships? The brains?
- * What is the message that Hardwick and Aung Than are sending?
- * How can you use this idea in your own life?

***FULL BODY EDUCATION,* SIR KEN ROBINSON**

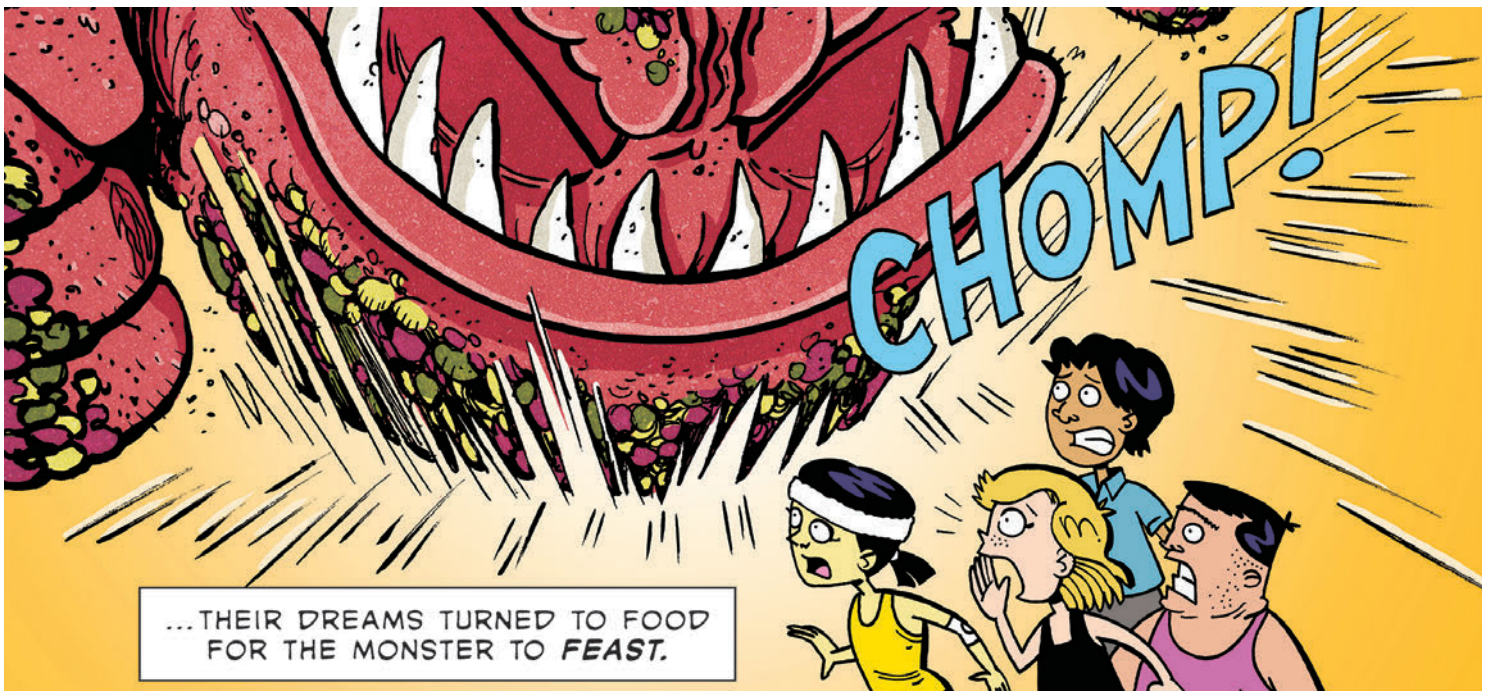
- * What arts do you enjoy?
- * Could you combine the arts with other subjects?
- * How might you be able to make a living that includes the arts?
- * What obstacles might you face?

***GREAT PEOPLE DO THINGS BEFORE THEY’RE READY,* AMY POEHLER**

- * Think of a time when you tried something new. Did you learn anything unexpected from the experience?
- * What new activity or experience would you like to try? Why?

***BECAUSE IT’S THERE,* GEORGE MALLORY**

- * Have you ever done anything just for the challenge or “sheer joy” of it?
- * How did it make you feel (even if you didn’t “succeed”)?
- * What can you take from that experience and apply to the rest of your life?



**A RIPPLE OF HOPE,
ROBERT. F. KENNEDY**

- * Search for an example from history wherein the actions of one individual created a “ripple of hope” that caused change in the world.
- * Write or draw about that individual’s effect on others.

**IT COULDN’T BE DONE,
EDGAR ALBERT GUEST**

- * Read this poem aloud. Do the rhythm and rhyme have an effect on the impact or emotion of the message?
- * Does reading the poem in conjunction with the images change that impact?

**OZYMANDIAS,
PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY**

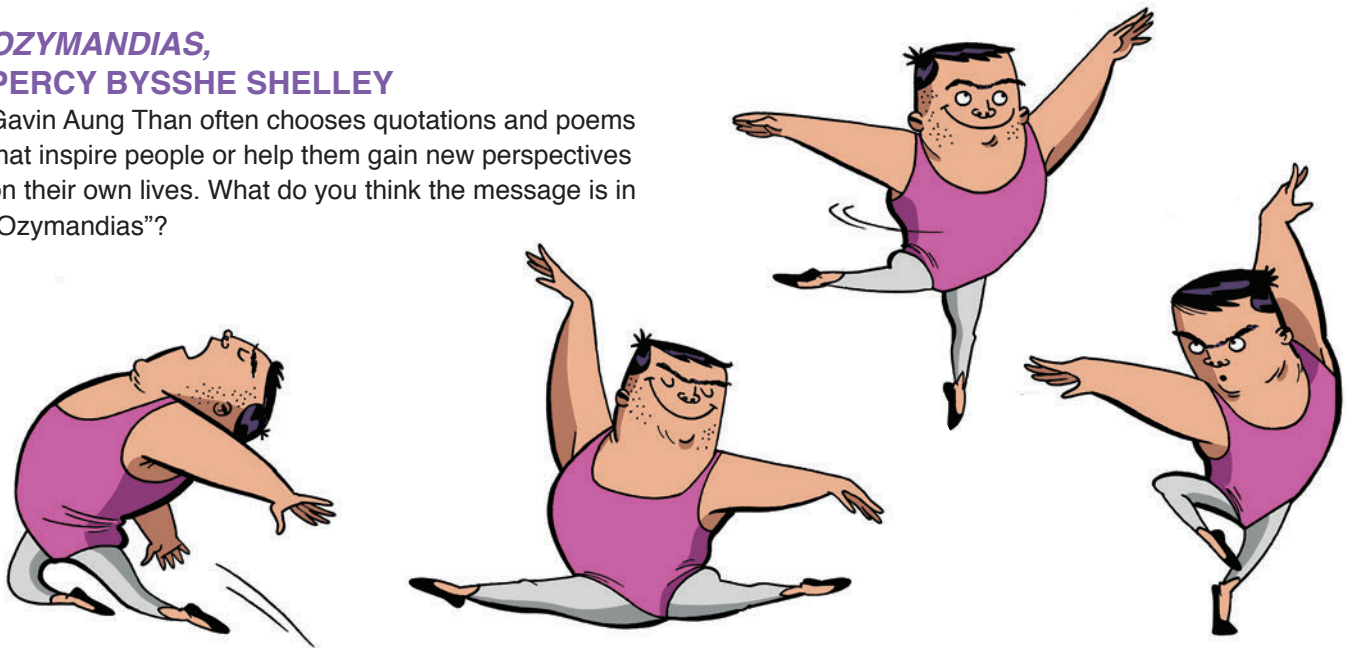
Gavin Aung Than often chooses quotations and poems that inspire people or help them gain new perspectives on their own lives. What do you think the message is in “Ozymandias”?

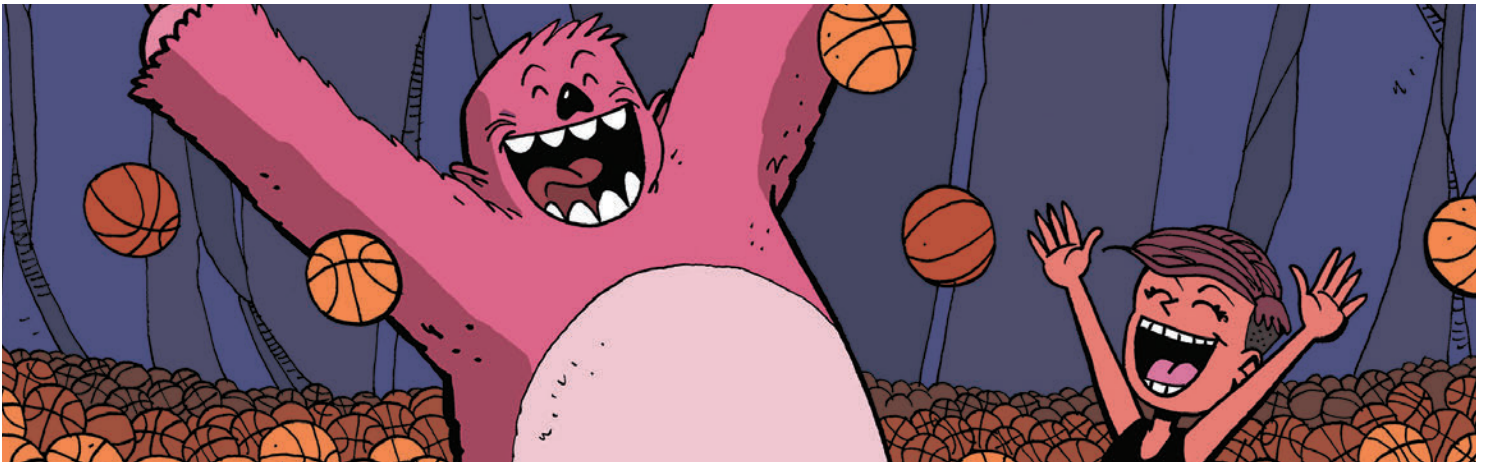
**IT IS ONLY FOLLOWING OUT NATURE,
MARGARET E. KNIGHT**

- * Do you ever feel constrained or held back by the expectations of others? How?
- * What could you do to move beyond those expectations? What *might* happen if you did?

**A PUPPETEER’S ADVICE,
JIM HENSON
THE MONSTER NAMED FEAR,
GAVIN AUNG THAN**

- * Compare and contrast the two stories.
- * Would you recommend reading them in a particular order? Why?





Activities

STICKY TEXT CONNECTIONS

As you read, be aware of your intellectual and emotional reactions to the content. Which stories speak to you and relate to your life right now? Why? Which stories do you think might be helpful to you in the future? Why? Use sticky notes to jot down your reactions and place them in the book.

STATE THE CASE

Choose five *Zen Pencils* comics and write what you think the moral, meaning, advice, or inspiration is for each story. Then, write about how you could apply each story's meaning to your own life.

ILLUSTRATIVE APPROACHES

A few of Gavin Aung Than's comics are fairly direct translations of the chosen quotes; others are separate narratives (stories) illustrating the meaning or lesson of the quote. Choose three stories and identify and analyze which approach Aung Than uses for each and how his visual story and the text work together.

TRANSLATE TO WORDS

Choose a *Zen Pencils* comic and translate the story that the images tell into a prose story or poem. Pay careful attention to the visual storytelling and try to translate the nuance and emotion into words.

ROLL-A-TOPIC PARTNER WRITING

Find a partner. Together, select a *Zen Pencils* comic and then roll a die to select a discussion topic from the list below. Share your thoughts on the discussion point and work together to write a paragraph summarizing your ideas. If you disagree, include both partners' ideas in the summary and explain how they differ.

1. Describe (What does the comic look like? Describe line, color, layout, style, etc.)

2. Compare (What is the comic similar to? What is it different from? How?)
3. Analyze (Break the comic down into smaller parts and explain each part. How do the parts work together?)
4. Associate (What does the comic make you think of? Why?)
5. Apply (How does the comic's story fit into your experience? How can you use it?)
6. Evaluate (Give your opinion. Discuss the story's strengths and weaknesses.)

ANALYZE VISUAL STORYTELLING TECHNIQUES

Great cartoonists like Gavin Aung Than have big bags of tricks—visual storytelling techniques that they use to get their messages across to their readers. Use the handout *A Cartoonist's Bag of Tricks* to analyze and discuss examples of visual narrative techniques from *Zen Pencils: Volume Two*. Think about how you might use these techniques in your own comics. For more on the language of comics, check out Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* and *Making Comics*.

CREATE YOUR OWN COMIC

Find a quote that you feel applies to your own life and create a comic that tells a story illustrating your chosen quote. It could be a true story or one that you make up. Don't worry if you don't have a lot of drawing experience; one of the most popular comics in the world is drawn using only stick figures! Animals or inanimate objects can stand in for people if drawing humans feels intimidating. Think about how you can use some of the visual storytelling techniques you analyzed earlier, but don't try to use them all! Choose just one or two.

CARTOONIST'S BAG OF TRICKS

Great cartoonists like Gavin Aung Than have big bags of tricks—visual storytelling techniques that they use to get their messages across to their readers. As you read and discuss the examples of visual narrative techniques listed below, think about how you might use them in your own comics.

Think about Panel Size and Placement

Use panel size to convey importance or speed. Smaller panels feel quicker; larger panels feel slower or more important. A full-page panel (called a “splash” panel) can create surprise or emotion for the reader. Examples: *The Gift of Life* (34), *If You Love Someone* (66), *Because It's There* (74), *All The World's A Stage* (146)

Use “zoom” or distance to create emotion or reveal detail. Close-up images feel more intimate and can be used to direct attention. Examples: *Ozymandias* (107–109), *Phenomenal Woman* (116–120), *It Is Only Following Out Nature* (128)

The farther away the viewer gets, the more he sees, so distance panels can convey setting or situation quickly. Examples: *The Calling* (10), *A Lifetime of Learning* (20), *Full Body Education* (35), *It Costs Nothing to Encourage an Artist* (45), *A Ripple of Hope* (95)



Get creative with panels; they don't have to be square or rectangular—you don't even have to use them at all! Just make sure that your placement of the images leads the reader's eye in the sequence that you intend. Examples: *It Costs Nothing to Encourage an Artist* (49), *Great People Do Things Before They're Ready* (50), *The Fears Are Paper Tigers* (83), *The Work Is Love Made Visible* (132)

Using a static panel size and setting can be effective as well, as in *All the World's A Stage* (138). Note that the reader's view remains the same in every panel, while the details of the scene change over time. Aung Than used the same technique for a short sequence in *The Middle of Winter* (57).

Don't show everything. Create moments in time and let the reader fill in what happens between the panels. Look at the action sequence in *The Fears Are Paper Tigers* (89). You don't actually see the characters land in the ball pit: You see the moment they jump; a motion line and bouncing balls; and their joy after their landing. Why do you think Aung Than chose to show these particular moments? Additionally, in *All The World's a Stage* (138), Aung Than shows isolated moments separated by long stretches of time, which requires the reader to interpret the changes from panel to panel.



Show the Passage of Time

A sequence of images can show the passage of time. In *The Middle of Winter* (57), the sequence shows time moving slowly for the girl. And in *If You Love Someone* . . . the characters go through some difficult time apart (62–63). Finally, the growth of a young girl into an adult artist is shown over three panels in *It Costs Nothing to Encourage an Artist* (44).



CARTOONIST'S BAG OF TRICKS

Show Motion

In the language of comics, lines and repeated images are used to show motion. Motion lines are lines around or behind a character or object to show movement.

Examples: *The Gift of Life* (31), *The Fears Are Paper Tigers* (83), *It Is Only Following Out Nature* (124)

Show movement with a sequence of images within the same panel. Examples: *The Gift of Life* (31), *Full Body Education* (38), *Great People Do Things Before They're Ready* (52), *We Are All Human Beings* (79), *It Couldn't Be Done* (105)

Use Color

Use color alongside black and white to highlight joy or positivity. Example: *Because It's There* (73–74)

Use a limited color palette to create a mood or feel.

Examples: *The Middle of Winter* (56), *If You Love Someone* (61), *Because It's There* (67), *We Are All Human Beings* (75), *Ozymandias* (107)



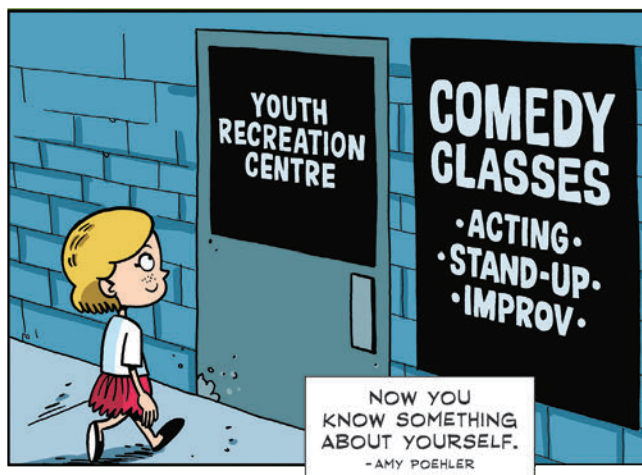
Use color to show flashbacks in time. Examples: *Full Body Education* (39–41)

Use color to make a character stand out from the background. Example: *A Puppeteer's Advice* (147–148)

Use Text

Use unusual fonts and colors or hand-drawn text to draw attention and give emotion to text. Examples: *The Middle of Winter* (59), *Phenomenal Woman* (121–123), *The Monster Named Fear* (154)

Add sound effects using font, size, and color for emphasis. Examples: *The Gift of Life* (24), *A Ripple of Hope* (91)



Incorporate text into images as environmental text (signs, T-shirts, televisions, etc.). Examples: *The Calling* (10), *A Lifetime of Learning* (17), *Full Body Education* (35), *Great People Do Things Before They're Ready* (50), *It Couldn't Be Done* (99)

Create Visual Symbolism

Create visual metaphors that stand for abstract concepts. What do the following represent?

- * The brains and chains/guards in *The Gift of Life* (24)
- * The heart-shape balloons in *The Middle of Winter* (56) and *If You Love Someone . . .* (61)
- * The dragon in *A Ripple of Hope* (90)
- * The sketchbook in *A Puppeteer's Advice* (147)

