

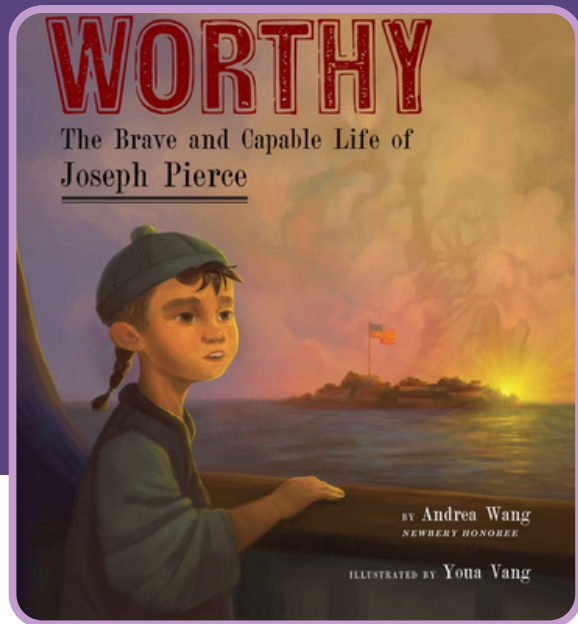
Educator Guide

Worthy

The Brave and Capable

Life of Joseph Pierce

by Andrea Wang



Synopsis

Discover the incredible true story of Joseph Pierce, a lesser-known yet pivotal figure of the American Civil War, in this inspiring picture book biography.

Born in Canton, China, Joseph Pierce's journey began when he was traded for six silver coins as a child. He embarked on a months-long voyage to Connecticut, where he was raised by a ship captain and his family in the 1850s. Despite facing discrimination and racism, Joseph was determined to prove his worth. He enlisted in the Union Army, fighting bravely in key battles such as Gettysburg, Antietam, and Appomattox, and ultimately became an American citizen and a true American hero.

Award-winning author Andrea Wang's meticulous research, combined with Youa Vang's stunning and cinematic illustrations, illuminates Pierce's life as an inspirational testament to the enduring struggle for human dignity and worth. This powerful story weaves together history, representation, and resilience, offering a unique perspective on the Civil War and the challenges faced by Chinese Americans in the 19th century.

About the Author



Andrea Wang is an acclaimed author of children's books. Her picture book *Watercress* was awarded the Caldecott Medal, a Newbery Honor, the Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature, and a Boston Globe-Horn Book Honor, among other accolades. Her other books have also received multiple awards and starred reviews. She loves bringing bits of hidden history to light. For more information about Andrea and her books, visit www.andreaywang.com.

About the Educator Guide Creator

Sarah Park Dahlen 박사라 is an Associate Professor at the School of Information Sciences at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, where she is also affiliate faculty in the Department of Asian American Studies and Center for East Asian & Pacific Studies. Her research is on Asian American youth literature and transracial Korean adoption. She co-edits *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature* with Sonia Alejandra Rodríguez, co-wrote *Asian Americans in Story* with Paul Lai, and co-adapted *Asian American Histories of the United States: Young Readers Edition* with Sun Yung Shin. She is a board member of the International Research Society for Children's Literature and is represented by Tricia Toney Lawrence of Aevitas Creative Management. Find her at sarahpark.com.

Discussion Questions and Activities

1. With students, examine the cover of *Worthy: The Brave and Capable Life of Joseph Pierce*.
 - a. Describe what you see on the cover.
 - b. What do you think this book will be about?
 - c. Who do you think Pierce is? What is his story?
2. The book opens by asking the question, “What makes a person ‘worthy’?”
 - a. What do you think it means to be “worthy”?
 - b. Who are some people—either those you know in real life or see from a distance—you think of when you hear or read the word “worthy”?
3. Give the students a brief history of the American Civil War (1861-1865), including a history of enslavement and resistance in the United States.
 - a. Ask students what images come to mind when they think about the Civil War. Who do they imagine to be the main heroes and villains involved in the War?
 - b. Ask students what they already know about the history of enslavement and resistance. Ask them what other stories they’ve read, what they’ve learned, and what they can do to make sure people are never enslaved again.
 - c. Ask students if they have heard about Asians and other people of color who fought in the American Civil War. Ask them why they think they haven’t heard more stories about these people. Talk to them about the concept of “hidden history” and the erasure of people of color from history books.
4. Read some resources from author Andrea Wang’s select bibliography. Explain to your students the history of anti-Asian exclusion and hate. Ask them what they can do to make sure people are not excluded because of who they are or what they look like.
5. Talk to your students about the idea of a free press and its role in a democratic society.
6. Read the newspaper headlines in the illustrations throughout the book. Ask your students what role those articles may have had in shaping society’s perceptions of Chinese people. Ask your students to explain why those headlines are wrong.

Discussion Questions and Activities (continued)

7. Have students design and write a newspaper article about Joseph Pierce, based on what they learned about him by reading *Worthy*.
8. Read the timeline at the back of the book to students. Provide students with a little more information about each event: the Emancipation Proclamation, Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Hart-Cellar Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, etc.
 - a. Who are the people affiliated with such events?
 - b. What were the major events or actions of each date? What happened because of those speeches or laws?
9. Explain anti-miscegenation to students and provide a timeline of legislation, including the *Loving v. Virginia* Supreme Court case. Talk about a few famous couples who are from different backgrounds: Richard and Mildred Loving; Grace Lee Boggs and James Boggs; Barack and Michelle Obama; Serena Williams and Alexis Ohanian; Kamala Harris and Doug Emhoff; Mellody Hobson & George Lucas. Share some of their contributions to society. Have students draw pictures of the couples (taking care that they do not draw them with stereotypes).
10. Find the names and stories of other Asians who served in the Civil War. Share their names and stories with your students. Have each student create a trading card based on those people.
11. Recreate the timeline from the back of the book and hang it on your classroom wall. Add the stories of other lesser known heroes or events along the timeline.
12. Ask your students if they have ever been in a situation where they had to try over and over again to convince someone of a truth.
 - a. How did it feel to have others not believe you?
 - b. How do you think it felt for Pierce?
13. Now that you have read the book together, ask students to look at the cover and title again.
 - a. In what ways is Joseph Pierce “worthy,” “brave,” and “capable”?
 - b. What other words would you use to describe him?
14. Ask students: What will you do to make sure more people remember the name and story of Joseph Pierce?