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TEACHER'S GUIDE

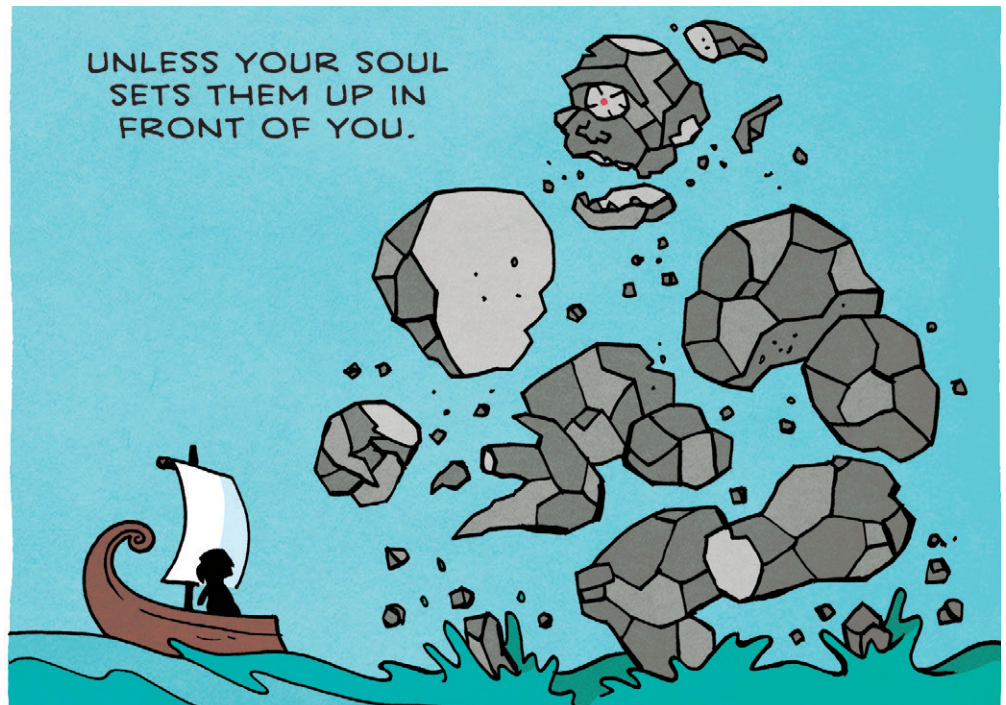
zen pencils

CARTOON QUOTES FROM INSPIRATIONAL FOLKS

GAVIN AUNG THAN



PULL-OUT
POSTER
INSIDE!



Zen Pencils: Cartoon Quotes From Inspirational Folks
Classroom Activity and Discussion Guide

By Tracy Edmunds, M.A. Ed.
Reading With Pictures



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Zen Pencils: Cartoon Quotes From Inspirational Folks

Gavin Aung Than
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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 activity ideas to help students analyze the comics in *Zen Pencils*; think about how they apply to their lives; and then discuss, write, and draw about what they are thinking.

Discussion Questions for Selected Stories

THE MAN IN THE ARENA, THEODORE ROOSEVELT

- * Have you ever known failure?
- * How did you handle it?
- * What did you do about it?
- * How would you feel if you had never tried?

NEVER GIVE UP, CALVIN COOLIDGE

- * What are your “dragons”?
- * How do you fight them?

MAKE GOOD ART, NEIL GAIMAN

- * What is “good” art?
- * Who decides what is good?

ULTIMATE SELF-HELP BOOK, STEPHEN FRY

- * Have you ever felt self-pity?
- * Why do you think people choose to think this way?
- * What do they get out of it?
- * What might happen if they stopped?

ADVICE FOR BEGINNERS, IRA GLASS

- * What is something you want to be good at?
- * What kind of work will you have to do?

WHAT IF MONEY WAS NO OBJECT? ALAN WATTS

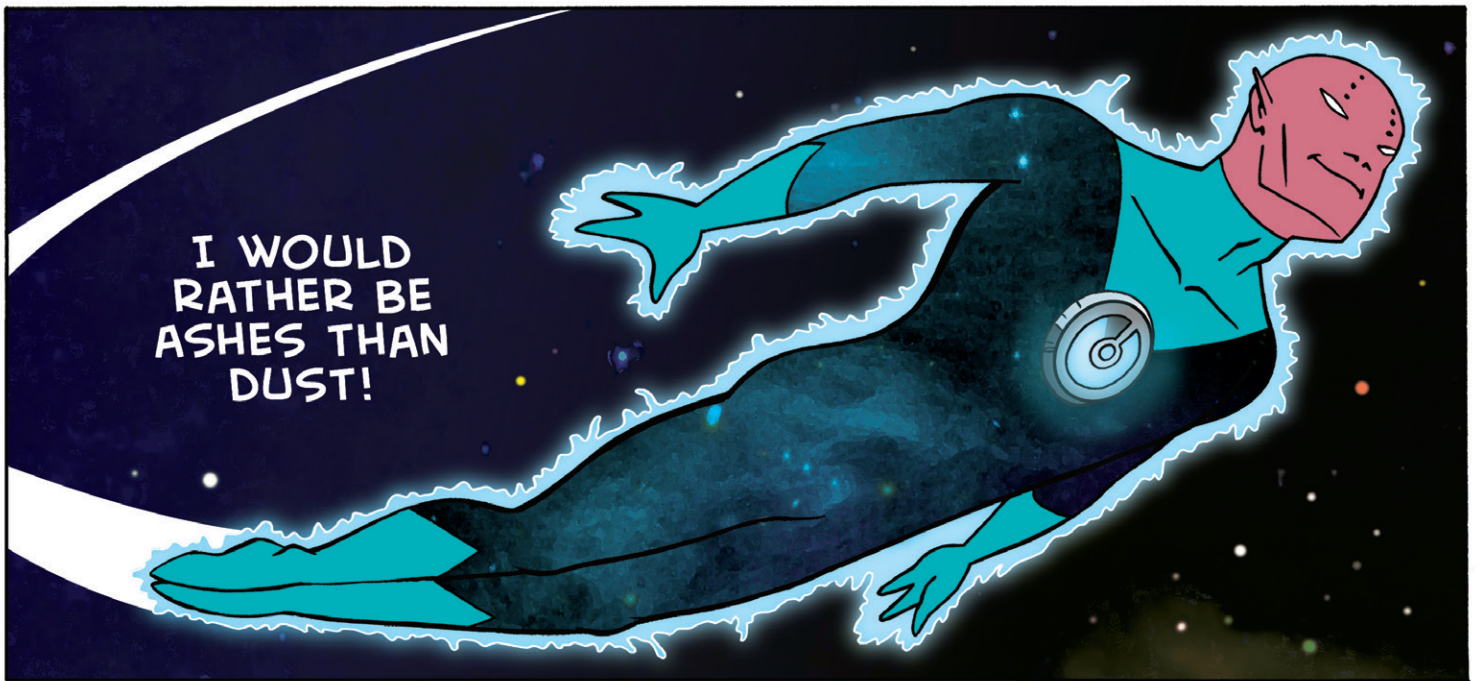
- * How do this story and *Advice for Beginners* relate to each other?

THE TWO WOLVES

- * Think about how you feel the “two wolves” inside yourself.
- * Identify particular instances in which you felt one or the other strongly.
- * What can you do when you feel the “bad wolf” taking control?
- * How can you “feed” the “good wolf”?

YOU AREN'T LIKE THEM, TIMOTHY LEARY

- * What is the risk that people must take to “find the others”?
- * Why do you think more people don't take that risk?



AN ASTRONAUT'S ADVICE, CHRIS HADFIELD

- * Even if you don't know yet what you want to do for a living, how can you put Commander Hadfield's advice to use?

DON'T COMPARE YOURSELF TO OTHERS, JIDDU KRISHNAMURTI

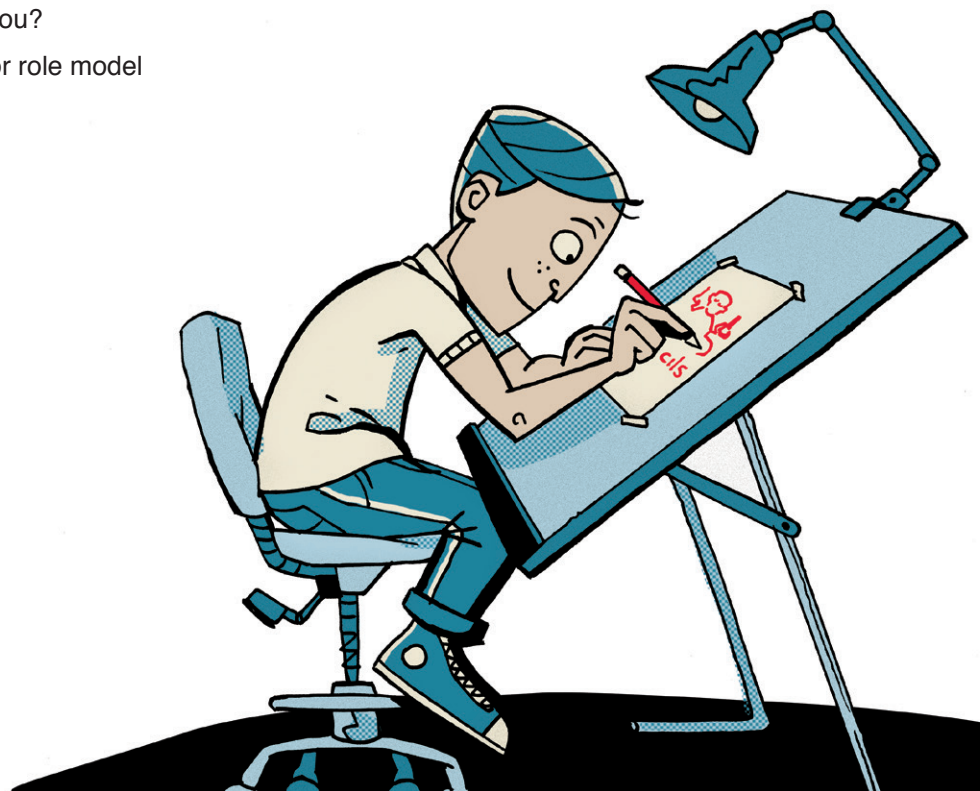
- * What comparisons do you make about yourself relative to others?
- * What comparisons do you make about yourself relative to social "norms" or expectations?
- * How do those comparisons affect you?
- * Is comparing yourself to a mentor or role model different?

THE WOMAN IN THE ARENA, BRENÉ BROWN

- * What arenas do you want to enter?
- * What is holding you back?
- * How can you move forward?

GRADUATION SPEECH, ERICA GOLDSON

- * Is Goldson saying that education is a bad thing?
- * Think about the balance of your life. What would you like more of?
- * What would you like less of?
- * What adjustments and sacrifices would you have to make?
- * What might the consequences be?





Activities

STICKY TEXT CONNECTIONS

As you read, be aware of your intellectual and emotional reactions to what you are reading. Which story or stories speak to you about your life right now? Why? Which stories do you think may 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 the meaning behind each story to your own life.

WORD CLOUD

Brainstorm a list of words that describe the messages in *Zen Pencils*. Then, use a word-cloud generator such as Wordle or Word It Out to create a word cloud. Words that are repeated are displayed in a larger size, so repeat words in your list that you feel are most important.

ANALYZE VISUAL STORYTELLING TECHNIQUES

Great cartoonists such as Gavin Aung Than have a big bag of tricks—visual storytelling techniques that they use to get their message across to their readers. Use the handout *A Cartoonist's Bag of Tricks* to analyze and discuss *Zen Pencils'* examples of visual narrative techniques and think about how you might use them in your own comics. For more on the language of comics, check out Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* and *Making Comics*.

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.

THE POWER OF COMICS

"It's easy to get tired of all the 'anything is possible' and 'follow your dreams' mantras that saturate today's social media world, but Zen Pencils is proof that it worked for me, and if it only does one thing, I hope that this book shows that it can work for you, too."

—Gavin Aung Than

How are Aung Than's pieces different from the memes and quotes you see every day on social media? Do they have more of an impact? Why do you think that is? Choose one comic from the book and write about the impact the visual elements of the story had on you, citing specific examples of images or visual storytelling techniques and how they made you feel or how they impacted your thinking.

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 story from your life or a story 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!

Look to *Don't Compare Yourself to Others* (pages 133–137) as an example of using simple shapes to create images. Animals or inanimate objects can stand in for people if you feel intimidated by drawing humans. 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.

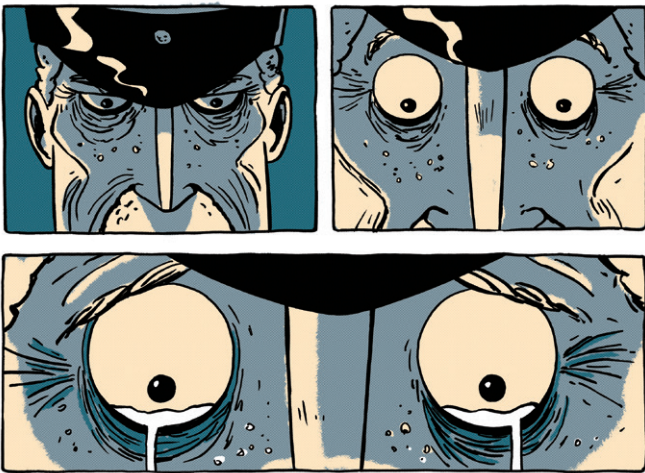


CARTOONIST'S BAG OF TRICKS

Great cartoonists such as Gavin Aung Than have a big bag of tricks—visual storytelling techniques that they use to get their message 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

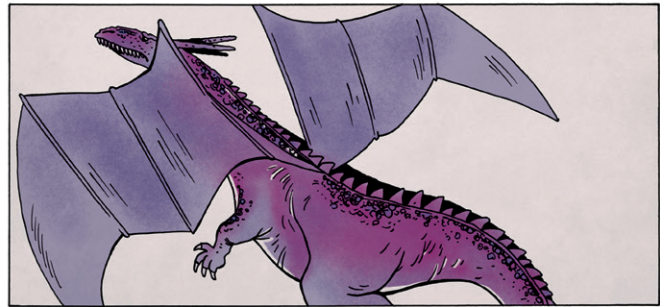
Use panel size to convey importance or speed. Smaller panels feel quicker; a large panel feels slower or more important. Examples: *In Spite of Everything* (20), *Ask Yourself* (78–79), *Graduation Speech* (169)



Use “zoom” or distance to create emotion or reveal detail. Close-up images feel more intimate and can be used to direct attention. The farther away the viewer gets, the more he or she sees, so distance panels can convey setting or situation quickly. Examples: *The Most Astounding Fact* (34), *Invictus* (158–165)

Get creative with panels; they don't have to be square or rectangular, and 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: *Never Give Up* (32), *Make Gifts for People* (65–71), *The Two Wolves* (97–99), *An Astronaut's Advice* (119–122)

Don't show everything. Create moments in time and let the reader fill in what happens between the panels. What happens between the last two panels on page 23?



Look at the sequence of images on page 53. Describe what happens in between each panel. Why do you think Aung chose to show these particular moments?



Show the Passage of Time

A sequence of images can show the passage of time.

Aung Than used photos in frames to show changes in the main character over time in *The Man in the Arena* (15).

He used color to show the change of seasons in *On Kindness* (62).

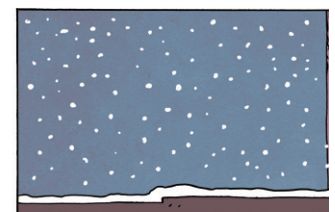
And he showed the history of the Earth in just 13 panels in *The Most Astounding Fact* (36–37)! Why do you think Aung Than chose to show these particular moments?



Use color to separate characters from the background. Examples: *11 Ways to Be Average* (90–92), *Around the Corner* (93–96)



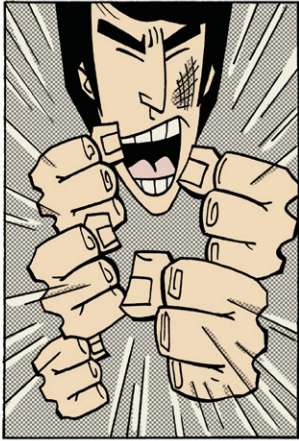
Use a limited color palette to create a mood or feel. Examples: *Always Be Prepared* (9), *There Are No Limits* (26), *Make Gifts for People* (65), *To Love at All* (115), *Invictus* (158)



CARTOONIST'S BAG OF TRICKS

Show Motion

In the language of comics, lines and repeated images are used to show motion.



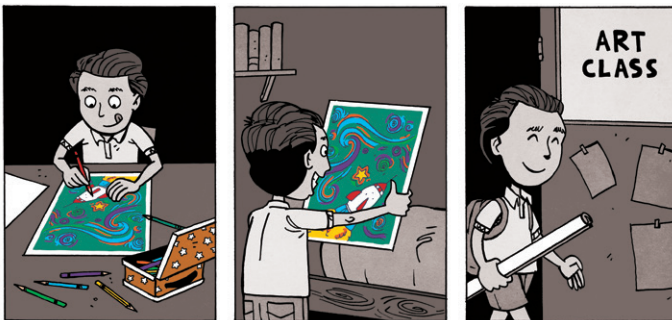
Motion lines are lines around or behind a character or object to show movement.

Examples: *Always Be Prepared* (11–12), *Ask Yourself* (79–80)

Multiple images of the same object can imply movement, such as the flying fists in *There Are No Limits* (27) or the girl's flapping arm in *To Love at All* (118).

Use Color

Use color against black and white to highlight joy or positivity. Examples: *In Spite of Everything* (19), *Ask Yourself* (77), *You Aren't Like Them* (110), *Life Is Not Easy* (123)



Use Text

Use unusual fonts and colors to draw attention and give emotion to text. Examples: *Make Good Art* (45), *Who's the Crazier Man* (52), *You Aren't Like Them* (111–113), *The Woman in the Arena* (141)

Create hand-drawn, colored text as part of an image for emphasis. Examples: *No Regrets* (18), *Never Give Up* (30)



Incorporate text into images as environmental text (signs, T-shirts, televisions, etc.). Examples: *The Man in the Arena* (15), *Nature Loves Courage* (72), *Around the Corner* (93), *The Fire Within* (127–132)

Create Visual Symbolism

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

- * The dragon in *Never Give Up* (30–33)
- * The monsters and animals in *Nature Loves Courage* (72–76)
- * The heart-shaped balloons in *To Love at All* (115–118)
- * The gremlin in *The Woman in the Arena* (140–142)
- * The robot in *Graduation Speech* (166–169)

