

And the Winner is Ke Huy Quan, a Historic Comeback Story at the Oscars

This lesson can be presented over 1-2 sessions. Instructors should feel free to use whichever discussion questions and activities you think best for your class or group. We advise giving students the sheet with the definitions of the virtues before the discussion questions.

Lesson Goals

Help students...

- appreciate the power of perseverance over an extended period of time in striving towards our goals
- appreciate the value of patience with ourselves, others and within trying situations
- realize the importance of supporting each other as we strive towards our goals
- become more knowledgeable of the story of immigrants fleeing Vietnam in the 1970s
- consider and discuss the idea of the "The American Dream"
- see the importance of giving people from all segments of our country the opportunity to contribute and to succeed

Highlighted Virtues / Themes

Perseverance: trying hard and continuously in spite of obstacles and difficulties

Patience: the ability to wait out or endure a delay, annoyance or suffering without getting angry or upset

Family Dedication / Support: complete dedication for the well-being of other members of our family, physically, emotionally and spiritually, motivated by love

Inclusivity: the practice and mindset of including all people; making sure that everyone is valued and respected

Leader Introduction:

Each year, The Academy Awards presents its famous golden statue, the "Oscar," to honor the best films, actors, directors, screenwriters and other aspects of filmmaking. This year's awards are historic because for the first time Asian Americans received the Oscar for best actress (Michelle Yeoh) and for best supporting actor (Ke Huy Quan). Both Yeoh and Quan won Oscars for their roles in the movie "Everything, Everywhere, All at Once" that also won the Oscar for best film. We can't recommend that you see this movie as it's rated R and is meant for adults, but we can learn about the amazing true-life story of Ke Huy Quan.

Quan was born in Vietnam during a long war that ended in 1975 with a communist government taking over his country. In a communist system, the government controls almost every aspect of life. Vietnam was very poor at that time and the people lacked basic freedoms such as freedom of the press, freedom of speech & religion, and the right to elect their leaders. Quan's family decided to flee Vietnam, hoping to make it to America for a better life. Quan's parents knew the journey for their 8 children would be difficult and dangerous. Hundreds of thousands of people fled Vietnam by boat in the 1970s on a dangerous journey across the South China Sea. Thousands died from drowning and were attacked and kidnapped by pirates.

Quan was only seven years old when his dad woke him up in the middle of the night to escape. He, his father, and five siblings boarded a boat to Hong Kong, then controlled by the United Kingdom and now China. His mother and three other siblings fled separately to Malaysia. Once they arrived in Hong Kong, the government would not allow them to remain, so they had to live in a refugee camp. A refugee camp is a place where people fleeing their home countries settle together for a temporary period of time. Refugees often are unable to bring their belongings with them and lack basic necessities like food and clothing. Most refugee camps provide basic necessities but little else and the living conditions are difficult. After a year at the camp, Quan's family was allowed to leave and came to Los Angeles, California. At that time America was allowing many refugees fleeing Vietnam to come to America as we had supported economically and militarily the government that was defeated in the war.

Quan and his family decided that he should audition for roles in movies and he had amazing early childhood success, working as a child actor in two of Steven Spielberg's hit movies that you may have seen, "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom" and "The Goonies." But after that, his acting career came to an abrupt halt. For 30 years, Quan suffered through countless failed auditions, commenting that there weren't many roles at that time in Hollywood films for adult Asian actors. Quan finally decided to attend USC film school to learn more about the craft of film making and he was able to find work as a stunt coordinator and assistant director, but not as an actor. He met his wife Echo while working for a production company, and she became his biggest supporter. During their 20 years of marriage, Quan was often ready to give up and stop auditioning for new roles; however, Echo encouraged him to not lose faith in his dream of acting, reminding him "your time will come."

After 40 years, his opportunity finally came as he landed the lead male role in "Everything, Everywhere, All at Once" and won the Oscar for best supporting actor. Now let's watch Quan's acceptance speech.

Lesson Videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFRlu7ehZl0>

Leader Summary:

Quan's comeback not only made Hollywood history, but also serves as an inspiration to all of us in being patient, rising above unfortunate circumstances, and never giving up on our dreams. Let's discuss Quan's story along with some of his own statements about his experiences as a refugee, an immigrant to America and his newly restored success in Hollywood.

Discussion Question Options: *(discussion prompts / answers are in parentheses)*

Before beginning our discussion, let's read over the virtues and their definitions, found in the online lesson as a separate document.

1. Why and how did Quan and his family leave Vietnam when he was a little boy?
(The family wanted better opportunities for their children and to live in a country where they could be free. They fled Vietnam on a boat to Hong Kong, lived in a refugee camp for a year and then came to America)

What were some of the struggles Quan and his family faced in fleeing Vietnam and then afterwards?

(Enduring a dangerous journey by boat across the South China Sea, being separated from his mother and other siblings, living in a refugee camp, coming to a brand new country and having to learn a new language and culture)

2. How did Quan live out perseverance?

(Making it through the challenges he faced moving to America, continuing to audition for new roles even as he was rejected many times for over 20 years, attending school to learn new skills that would enable him to remain in film making while he continued to audition for new roles.)

3. How did Quan's family help him strive for his goals?

(His brother called him daily to make sure that he was taking care of himself, his wife encouraged him to not give up on his dream of acting and reminding him that his "time would come," and his parents made the difficult decision to flee for freedom knowing that it would be dangerous and extremely difficult. They did all of this so their children could have a better future in America.)

Quan's story of immigration to the US may be similar to some of our own stories of how our family in recent or past generations came to America. Let's share some of our stories, both the factors that motivated our family to come to America and the journey itself.

4. Let's look at the definition of the virtue "patience" a little. Patience is "the ability to wait out or endure a delay, annoyance, or suffering without getting angry or upset." Patience and perseverance are similar, but patience is more about being able to wait without allowing our feelings to get the best of us while we persevere and keep trying.

Let's share some stories from our own life about when we choose to be patient to help someone else, or when being patient helped us in a difficult situation or in working towards a goal.

In an interview with Variety magazine, Quan shared that when his wife would tell him his time would eventually come, he became frustrated with her. He said, "I told her, 'You keep saying that, and it's never going to happen.' I didn't believe it. Twenty years isn't a short time."

It can be difficult at times to be patient and to persevere. Do you think that Quan would have kept trying and eventually won the Oscar if he didn't have the support of his wife and other family members?

5. Quan spoke of achieving "The American Dream," What do you think the American Dream is? Is the American Dream one idea, or is it a number of ideas or goals? Let's list on the board some of the things that may make up the American Dream.

(Potential points to consider are: the opportunity to freely pursue one's dreams and goals, the opportunity to live in a country where we have the freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom to protest peacefully, freedom to contribute to the betterment of our community and nation through voting and other activities, and the opportunity to be a part of a society that strives for equal treatment under the law.)

Do you think that "The American Dream" is a reality for most Americans? Why or why not?

If you believe we as a nation or community are falling short of the American Dream in some ways? If yes, how can we specifically address those issues?

6. The Academy Awards started the Oscars to honor the best actors and films in 1929 – almost 100 years ago! 2023 was the first year that an Asian American won best actress or the supporting actor award. Some people might suggest that it's because Asian Americans were not given enough roles in films, and that could be why Huy Quan struggled to find a job for so long.

When he was asked about this by Variety magazine, he said, "I was taught to never blame anybody... I don't like to look at the past and say...'how bad it was.' I'd rather focus on...moving forward. Look where we are now... We [Asian Americans] have a seat at the table. Our voices are being heard. Our faces are being seen, and it feels amazing."

Why do you think it's important for people of all backgrounds to be given opportunities to pursue their dreams, in entertainment and in all areas of our lives?

(TV and films influence how we see others and ourselves, can help to make us more accepting of people different than us and to connect to stories that make us more open minded.)

In all careers, it's important to have role models for children from a variety of backgrounds so they can more directly connect with and be inspired to consider careers and pursuits in all areas of our life.)

7. A theme of Quan's story is "inclusivity", which means "the practice and mindset of including all people; making sure that everyone is valued and respected." Now let's consider our own school. Our school might be diverse and have a lot of different students, but is it inclusive where all students are welcome and valued? Are there specific ways our school can be more inclusive?

(Standing up for others who are being bullied, spending time with others who are excluded and including them in our group of friends, making a point of having a diverse group of friends from different backgrounds, having respectful discussions on different perspectives and ideas)

America, though diverse, has not always been inclusive. Should Quan's story give us hope that we have improved and can continue to improve?

(Quan's parents and family being allowed to move to America and create a life for themselves, Steven Spielberg giving him an opportunity, The Academy Awards honoring Quan with an Oscar)

Journal Writing Options

1. Quan credited Steven Spielberg and some of his fellow actors from the first two movies that he did for giving him his big break and being "the first one to put an Asian face in a Hollywood movie." Think of someone in your life who you think goes above and beyond to make those around them feel included, supported, and enables them to be the best that they can be. Write about the actions they take to make others feel that way, and how can you use that person as a role model to practice being inclusive and a positive influence on others?
2. Write about any regularly occurring things in your life that you can be more patient about. This could be about a sibling who might pester you, or even having more patience with ourselves when trying something new or difficult. Write out specific ways you can be more patient in that situation, and how that situation may improve because of your patience.

Extended Activity:

Pair students in groups of 3-4. Have students discuss and write a definition of what inclusiveness means in their own words. Then give students the options of either drawing comic strips or writing/acting out a short play showing at least one example of what inclusion looks like and what inclusion does not look like.

Information and Quotes from:

<https://variety.com/2023/awards/features/ke-huy-quan-oscar-winner-everything-everywhere-all-at-once-1235554491/>

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