

MESSY ROOTS

PUBLICITY & SPEAKING GUIDE





RETIRED POKEMON MASTER,
PICTIONARY CHALLENGER



FISH ENTHUSIAST
LEGEND OF ZELDA FAN ARTIST

LAURA GAO

she/her and they/them

Agent: Brenda Bowen at The Book Group

 lauragao.com

 [@heyauragao](https://twitter.com/heyauragao)

 [@heyauragao](https://www.instagram.com/heyauragao)

 laura.y.gao@gmail.com

Laura Gao (she/they) is a queer author, illustrator, bread vacuum, and everything in between. Gao immigrated from China to Texas, where their career blossomed from doodling on Pokémon cards to being featured on NPR, the Library of Congress, the MoCA, and most notably, their parents' fridge. Their works include the viral webcomic, "The Wuhan I Know", and the bestselling graphic memoir, *Messy Roots*. Their newest book, *Kirby's Lessons on Falling (In Love)*, will be released in 2025.

WEIWEI XU

she/her

Agent: Nicole Cunningham at The Book Group

 theweiweixu.portfoliobox.net

 [@peevishpants](https://twitter.com/peevishpants)

 [@itscoolguylink](https://www.instagram.com/itscoolguylink)

 peevishpantaloons@gmail.com

Weiwei Xu (she/her) is an artist of picture books, comics, concept art, and backgrounds for animation and video games. She loves adding Chinese folklore and casual fantasy in her art. She has a Science degree, which, while not particularly useful, occasionally manifests in her art. When not drawing, she'll be cooking up a storm(-y bowl of noodles), or deep-diving into local forest trails and internet rabbit holes.

MESSY ROOTS

A GRAPHIC MEMOIR OF A WUHANES AMERICAN

After spending her early years in Wuhan, China, riding water buffalos and devouring stinky tofu, Laura immigrates to Texas, where her hometown is as foreign as Mars--at least until 2020, when COVID-19 makes Wuhan a household name.

In *Messy Roots*, Laura illustrates her coming-of-age as the girl who simply wants to make the basketball team, escape Chinese school, and figure out why girls make her heart flutter.

Insightful, original, and hilarious, toggling seamlessly between past and present, China and America, Gao and Xu's debut is a tour de force of graphic storytelling.



ACCOLADES

INDIES NEXT
LIST FINALIST



TEXAS
MAVERICKS LIST
FINALIST



NYPL BEST BOOKS
OF 2022



INDIES INTRODUCE
LIST FINALIST



GOLDEN POPPY
AWARD WINNER



CALA BEST BOOKS
OF 2023 AWARD



RECIPIENT OF THREE
STARRED REVIEWS



HARVEY AWARDS
FINALIST



GREEN MOUNTAIN BOOK
AWARD NOMINEE



GOODREADS
CHOICE AWARDS
FINALIST



CYBIL AWARD
WINNER



BLACK EYED SUSAN
AWARD NOMINEE



IN THE NEWS



NEW YORK TIMES

This funny debut graphic memoir grapples with **queerness, anti-Asian racism and self-discovery as a diaspora kid.**

HUFFPOST

“These negative messages about Wuhan influence how people think about Chinese people... [and] **leads to the type of xenophobia many Asians and Asian Americans, including myself, have faced.**”



NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO (NPR)

"[Gao] wants people to get to know the Wuhan beyond the **headlines.** And while she's been hesitant to speak up in the past, she's ready to stand up and share her city with the world."

INPUT MAGAZINE



"[Gao] wrote the entire 270-page book in a year and a half, even though she had never written any comic longer than a few pages before then. **“It was a lot of heart, soul, sweat, and tears.”**



THE STRAITS TIMES

"By having as many stories... featuring Asian actors and writers, we're able to have this **whole gamut of experiences portrayed.**"

INTERNATIONAL ACCLAIM



FREE RADIO
CHINA



UOL TAB
BRAZIL



WAINAO MEDIA
TAIWAN

CRITICAL ACCLAIM

"In this fresh, frank, and tender debut, author-illustrators Gao and Xu offer a compellingly layered graphic memoir.... A multidimensional, thoroughly entertaining account of growing into queer Asian American identity."

– [Publishers Weekly](#) (★ Starred Review)

"An affecting and candid depiction of the universal search for one's place in the world."

– [The Horn Book](#) (★ Starred Review)

"A tender story of self-acceptance that lifts the story of Wuhan beyond COVID and shines light on a region with a rich culture and history."

– [School & Library Journal](#) (★ Starred Review)

"This funny debut graphic memoir grapples with **queerness, anti-Asian racism and self-discovery** as a diaspora kid."

– [New York Times](#)

"A nuanced representation of being Asian and transnational in the contemporary U.S."

– [Kirkus Reviews](#)

"Debut author/artist Gao does an **excellent job of representing the complexity and challenges** that came with growing up as young Chinese immigrant."

– [Booklist](#)

"*Messy Roots* is a **laugh-out-loud, heartfelt and deeply engaging** story of their journey to find themselves."

– Malaka Gharib, author of *I Was Their American Dream*

"*Messy Roots* is funny, intimate, absorbing, and deeply moving. **What a gift to have this peek into Laura Gao's memories, in all their sweetness and complexity.**"

– Becky Albertalli, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Kate in Waiting*

"Hilarious, heartfelt, and beautifully illustrated, *Messy Roots* **deserves to join the Chinese American canon** right next to Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese*."

– R.F. Kuang, author of *The Poppy War*

"Finding ourselves can be messy, but Laura Gao tells her story of self-discovery with **honest and vulnerable beauty.**"

– Mike Curato, Lambda Award-winning author of *Flamer*

"*Messy Roots* **surprised me in all the best ways.** It's a book that will stay with you for a long time to come."

– Tillie Walden, Eisner-winning author of *On a Sunbeam*

"*Messy Roots* is about the hardship of identity and the **beautiful but messy journey to find it.**"

– Aminder Dhaliwal, author of *Cyclopedia Exotica*

SPEAKING EVENTS

PREVIEW PAST
EVENT RECORDINGS

Schools, Libraries and Bookstores

- Talks, Q&A, Pictionary Draw-offs (with prizes), and comics workshops for all ages
- Tired of authors talking your students to sleep? Choose an [interactive hands-on activity!](#)
- 1 hour, half-day, and full-day virtual or in-person visits
- Previous talks: [Queensborough Community College Talk](#), [MoCA Kids' Dragon Boat Workshop](#)

Festivals and Trade Conferences

- Panels and workshops on graphic novels and industry topics. Open to moderating roles.
- Previous talks: [Pride in Panels Festival All-Ages Comics Panel](#), San Diego Comic Con, [CALIBA Author Speed-Dating](#), [ABA Children's Institute Talk](#)

Companies and DEI Organizations

- Talks, Q&A, and comic workshops tailored to your company's interests
- Previous talks: [APAPI Author Talk with Asana](#), [Doodle Therapy with Adobe](#), [Drawing Your Life Workshop with Google LGBTQ+ Group](#)

POPULAR TOPICS AND Q&A

Bridging Two Cultures and Queerness as a Young Adult in Today's Climate

- What was it like growing up in a small, conservative town in Texas as a queer, Asian immigrant?
- What can young adults today take away from reading MESSY ROOTS?

Taking the Leap to Pursue Art Full-Time from a Traditional Tech Job

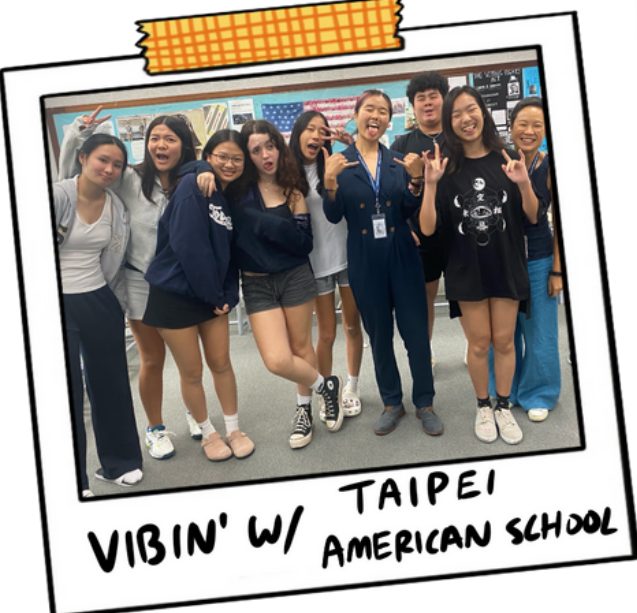
- What motivated you to quit a secure job to become an artist-writer in the middle of a pandemic?
- What advice do you have for people trying to pursue their own creative interests?

Completing a 270-Page Graphic Novel without an Arts Education

- What's the process of collaboration with two artists like? What were the biggest challenges and surprises?
- How has social media unlocked possibilities for underrepresented artists?

Miscellaneous Fun Topics

- What media are you binge-watching? What's your favorite Wuhanese street food?
- Tell me your coolest adventures drawing and writing in Asia and Europe as a nomadic creative.



VIBIN' W/ TAIPEI AMERICAN SCHOOL



SDCC EISNER AWARDS



EASTWIND BOOK IN BERKELEY



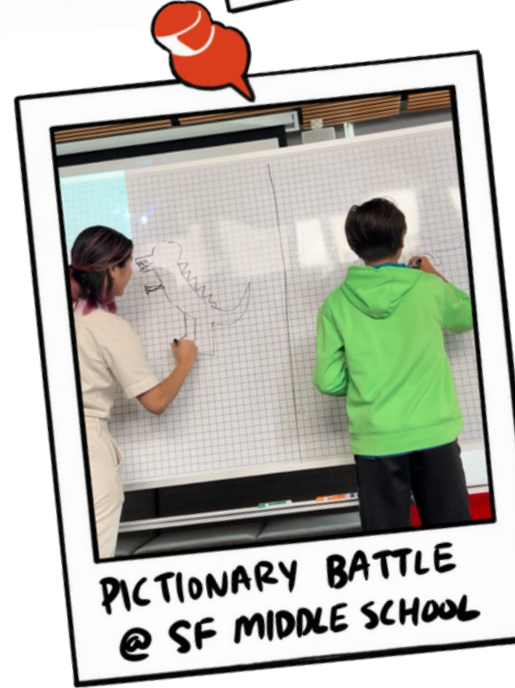
DRAW-OFF @ SAN ANTONIO BOOK FEST



EMAIL TO BOOK

Rates will differ based on travel, length of event, and books purchased.

Pro-bono visits can be offered on need-basis.



PICTIONARY BATTLE @ SF MIDDLE SCHOOL




TLA CONFERENCE!



HOMETOWN TALK @ COPPELL PUBLIC LIBRARY



COMIC WORKSHOP @ UNIS HANOI

The background of the entire page is a stylized illustration. On the left, there are white, sketchy lines representing tree trunks and branches against a black background. On the right, a character with long, messy hair is depicted in a dynamic, almost dancing or running pose. The character is rendered in black and white, with a yellow glow around their lower body and feet. The overall aesthetic is graphic and artistic.

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Graphic Novels

Recommended Age: 12+

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MESSY ROOTS**

**EDUCATOR AND
BOOK CLUB GUIDES**

**CONTACT
LAURA GAO**