

True School

True School (PTS, Taiwan) tells the story of Yi-cheng (cf. screenshot 1), a “bad student” struggling in both the classroom and within the conventions of his upper-crust school. Mr. Liu, an iconoclastic substitute teacher, reaches out to Yi-cheng and helps him perform like a normal student again (cf. screenshot 2).

Just as the two establish trust, Yi-cheng sees Ying – a bully – picking on another student named Stinky Cat (cf. screenshot 3). Yi-cheng steps in to defend him, and Yi-cheng and Ying end up fighting (cf. screenshot 4). The next day, Ying’s father, the wealthy and well-respected Mr. Chen, arrives at the school and demands Yi-cheng to apologize to his son (cf. screenshot 5). Yi-cheng refuses to apologize because he believes Ying was in the wrong. Later that evening, the substitute teacher, Mr. Liu, advises Yi-cheng that sometimes one must have to compromise, even though he didn’t do anything wrong, in order to settle a dispute. Yi-cheng finds this advice frustrating. On the way home, Ying and his gang corner Yi-cheng in an alley. Yi-cheng gets punched in the face. The following day, Yi-cheng is confronted by Ying’s father as well as some of the school faculty (cf. screenshot 6). Ying, with a bandaged face, accuses Yi-cheng of beating *him* up the previous night (cf. screenshot 7). Mr. Chen demands Yi-cheng to apologize to his son. To Ying’s surprise, Yi-cheng does apologize. Right after he does, Mr. Liu arrives with Stinky Cat, who explains what really happened that week and how Yi-cheng defended him. However, Mr. Chen still wants Yi-cheng reprimanded for his actions. A defeated – but, perhaps, morally victorious – Yi-cheng walks off, leaving the school, and leaving the viewer wondering what he’ll do next (cf. screenshot 8).

True School was one of the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONALE 2012 finalists in the 12-15 Fiction & Non-Fiction category.

International expert’s opinions

International experts shared their opinions about *True School* during the discussion sessions at the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONALE 2012. Many international experts liked *True School* as it depicted the generational differences in Taiwan and had an ambiguous ending that left them wondering what would happen next. The experts discussed the appropriateness of a scene in which the substitute teacher invites Yi-cheng over to his house. *True School* also propelled experts into a discussion about the depiction of authority figures in children’s entertainment.

One scene in *True School* raised concerns among experts. Plenty of feedback was given when the substitute teacher, Mr. Liu, invited Yi-cheng to study at his house. When this happened, one expert immediately thought, “Oh, god, where is this going?”, adding that she felt that a substitute teacher inviting students home was “maybe a cultural thing we wouldn’t expect.” (female expert, Australia)

Another outrightly objected to this scene: “Teacher assistance should be in the classroom – it shouldn’t be the opposite.” (male expert, Pakistan)

An expert from Ghana saw the invitation as normal: “Ghanaian students or children can go to teacher’s homes. To us, there is nothing wrong with it. It is a Western way of thinking that something can happen to you. For us, if a teacher likes a child, you don’t immediately think that he is abusing the child.”



Ill. 1: Yi-cheng is a struggling student who gets reprimanded by his teacher often



Ill. 2: The substitute teacher, Mr. Liu, reaches out to Yi-cheng

Many experts who showed discomfort during this scene indicated that this was cultural and they were projecting their own countries' response to it.

Not only did a few moments in *True School* clash with the viewers' own cultures, but many experts noticed that the show itself depicted two opposing cultures clashing with each other: the traditional Chinese culture and a growing presence of Western culture: "At first, you have these traditional educational values in the Chinese thinking, Chinese families, and the Chinese educational system; then, you have the Western civilisation that comes in – this teacher that loves blues music, who's fond of all that is British, and an internet café, where he plays games and he's on the internet. This is something that shakes up and shatters the old traditional values." (female expert, Germany)

Some experts wondered whether it was appropriate to show children rebelling against authority figures in TV shows: "I think rebelliousness is something that is kind of accepted and not questioned in programs." (female expert, Indonesia)

However, an expert from Taiwan argued: "the young of Taiwan are facing so much pressure at schools. We've had many dramas in the last two years about the rebellion of the young adult – like this one – where they have a fight with the homework, the teacher, and the bully. Some fight with other boundaries that the society gives them. At school, we teach children: you don't have to be excellent in your homework, but you have to be honest with yourself." (female expert, Taiwan)

Experts liked *True School's* open-ended ending because it raised even more questions. Overall, they agreed that the story and message "projects beyond the end of the actual story. You remain thinking about it, 'Now, what's this all about?'" (male expert, Norway), "perhaps there are no simple solutions" (female expert, Germany). Another interpreted the ending as saying, "you lost this battle, but there is a bigger struggle ahead." (female expert, East Timor)

Target Audience 7.14	Idea 6.98	Script 6.68	Realization 6.98
Average Score per Category by experts' voters at PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2012			



Ill. 3: Yi-cheng finds Ying picking on a boy named Stinky Cat



Ill. 4: As a result of sticking up for Stinky Cat, Ying and Yi-cheng get into a fight



Ill. 5: Mr. Chen wants Yi-cheng to apologize to his son

Opinions from teenagers in 7 countries

The PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2012 included the votes of an international youth jury, which was organized in co-operation with broadcasters worldwide. Teens between 12 and 15 in seven countries discussed and judged 12 programs in the category 12 to 15. Here is a summary of their discussions on the program *True School*.

Jury members from **Australia** addressed a variety of issues. One did not think that the title fit with the story because it didn't tell him anything about the show. Others thought that show was "interesting" and had "really good effects". Another did not think they were the target audience because the individuals in *True School* were living a very different lifestyle.

The youth jury from **Cuba** all seemed like to like *True School*. Many reflected on its message. One mentioned that the show revealed "the different ways students and teachers can relate", while another thought that the show was a good reminder that "someone always appears to help you".

The youth jury from **Egypt** had mixed opinions. They disliked "the bad words" and the scene in which the boy got hit by the teacher. One liked the theme of the show, "you can change yourself", while another thought that there were – on the whole – both "good things and bad things in the film".

The youth jury from **Nigeria** also thought through the theme of the show, describing it as "interesting" and mentioning that it is sometimes important to "suck in your pride and apologize". However, a couple jury members commented on the intensity of the show, describing how "the realization

was a little violent” and how 12-year-olds should not be allowed to watch it “because of some of the words they use”.

Jury members from the **Philippines** liked *True School* and discussed its theme, too. One or two were able to relate to it and drew out similar situations from their own lives. One jury member concluded that the show’s message was to “do what you think is right”. Another thought the show’s theme was about forgiveness: “Sometimes it helps to just let it be even if you know you are right, just to avoid further trouble.”

The youth jury from the **USA** liked *True School*, describing it as relatable and “refreshing”. The only concern was that the show seemed incomplete, with one jury member commenting that the show confusingly started “at the beginning of a fight” and another commenting that the show would be “a great transition into a second season”.

Ben Kempf (Centennial College, Toronto, Canada)



Ill. 6: Yi-cheng is confronted by Mr. Chen and members of the school faculty



Ill. 7: Ying falsely claims he was attacked Yi-cheng



Ill. 8: Yi-cheng apologizes to Mr. Chen and walks off, leaving the school

Youth Jury 2012	Score	Rank
Australia	6.4	6
Cuba	7.9	9
Egypt	5.1	7
Macedonia	7.6	5
Nigeria	7.6	2
Philippines	8.9	2
United States	7.8	2