

Review Blog

May 22 2017

A fearsome beast and a dumpling feast by Yves Stening and Nigel Buchanan



Dinner Detectives, bk 1. Publish Creative Books, 2017. ISBN 9780648008705

(Age: 5-8) Recommended. Chinese New Year. Dumplings. Detectives. Clementine and Aksel are off to celebrate the Chinese New Year banquet at their cousin Ying's house in Chinatown. When their father is uncertain about the origins of the Chinese New Year, Clementine decides it is a case for the Dinner Detectives to solve and Ying gives them the history of the brave little girl in a red dress who scared away the fearsome Nian. From that day on, people wore red every New Year in honour of the little girl. The children then watch the dragon dance

and find out that the dragon is what brings good luck for the New Year. Then they are off to Ying's house where they eat dumplings and discover that Dr Zhang Zhongjing first made them to keep the villagers warm and stop their ears from freezing off.

Children will be fascinated by the two stories centering on Chinese New Year and will love to try the recipes for Aunt Lily's dumplings that is at the end of the story. There is also an opportunity for readers to put their own dumpling recipes up [here](#) and perhaps they could think of some white food other than white bread, white rice and potatoes that Aksel could eat. The illustrations by Nigel Buchanan are bright and cheerful, giving a clear picture of the decorations for Chinese New Year with the red lanterns, fire crackers and the red dragon. The Nian is a fearsome creature with large white teeth and a huge yellow eye but readers will be reassured by the brave confident look on the face of the little girl in red, who is able to scare the beast away by staring it down. The domesticity of the New Year banquet, with the little bowls, chopsticks, large fish and steaming dumplings adds to the narrative.

This is the first in the *Dinner Detectives* series, and readers will want to follow their future adventures to uncover the origins of pasta and sandwiches.

Pat Pledger

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