



Soho comes Alive with the Sounds of Drums by Fatima Najm

Eight-year-old Andrew Lee could feel the excitement as people poured into the streets of Soho.

He had just taken his first train from Brighton to London with his mother to celebrate the Chinese New Year.

“Tell me again why we celebrate Chinese New Year with a dragon dance?”

His mother smiled.

“In the old days, when people couldn’t explain bad luck or earthquakes, they blamed bad spirits for anything that went wrong. They used the dragon dance to chase away the bad spirits and start a new year without worries.”

“Are there really bad spirits?”

“Bad spirits aren’t real, but people thought they were real in the old days, so they used songs, dragons and drumming to scare them away. The dragon brings good luck and chases away our worries.” said his mother.

“How can a dragon chase away our worries?”

“In Chinese tradition, dragons are powerful. As the dragon dances, we will be filled with the dragon’s spirit, and we will feel the power to make positive changes in our lives.”

Andrew and his mother stopped to take photographs in a street full of red and golden lanterns.

He looked around and said, “There is a lot of **red** everywhere.”



“That is a good observation. **Red** is the colour that makes bad luck go away, just like the dragon dance. When people became sick, they thought hanging red lanterns might help.”

“Didn’t they have doctors?” asked Andrew.

“These are traditions used hundreds of years ago, before doctors and medicine. People blamed bad luck, sickness, floods or storms on evil spirits. When they felt bad, they stitched red and gold cloth into dragon costume, and then danced and drummed to cheer everyone up.”

The sound of drums filled the air as they turned a street corner and came out onto Trafalgar square. The Dragon Dance had begun. The team of dancers moved together in a sea of colour. The crowd clapped, and the dancers swirled, twisted and turned with the dragon flying along. It looked magical to little Andrew. He clapped till his hands became **red** and sore.

As they walked back to the underground station, Andrew said, “But mummy, if this is Chinatown in Soho, then where is the place grandpa was born? Wasn’t it called Limehouse?” Andrew asked.

“You remember that?” His mother asked. “That is where the city’s first Chinese migrants lived, because that is where the first trade ships arrived from Shanghai. After the war, most of your grandfather’s community moved to Soho.

Andrew and his mother walked to her favourite bakery for some dim-sum buns before taking the train home. The owner of the bakery heard how excited Andrew was about celebrating the Chinese New Year, and gave Andrew a lantern that hung outside his bakery to take home as a souvenir.



Questions:

When did you visit Trafalgar square. Can you name the buildings in the area?

How does singing and dancing make you feel?

Which traditions do you celebrate or observe from your culture?

Why do people in London celebrate the Chinese New Year?

Why is the dragon used in the celebrations? Which colour brings good luck in Chinese tradition?



Lovingly crafted by Kal, Monika, Kevin and Fatima at Creatives Against Poverty for
Speak Street at the Islington Centre for Migrants and Refugees