



## *Lion Dancer* by Kate Waters

### Discussion Guide

## BEFORE READING

### BUILD BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

1. Ask children to guess the celebration you describe. **Say:**
  - During this celebration people stay up very late. They count down—10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. Sometimes they watch fireworks. In one city, a big, lighted ball drops. What night is it? (*New Year's Eve*)
  - Discuss with children what they know about New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. Explain that each celebration only happens once a year, at the end of the old year and the beginning of the new year. Ask children to tell ways in which their families celebrate New Year's Eve, December 31<sup>st</sup>, and New Year's Day, January 1<sup>st</sup>.
2. Have children look at the cover of the book and read the title aloud. **Say:**
  - The title is *Lion Dancer: Ernie Wan's Chinese New Year*. What do you think this book will be about? What is happening on the cover?
  - Chinese New Year also happens once a year, but it does not occur on January 1<sup>st</sup>. It happens sometime in late January or early February. The Chinese calendar is much older than the calendar we use in the United States. We have marked more than 2000 years on our calendar. The Chinese have marked more than 4000 years!

## DURING READING

Read pages 1-5.

Have children look for things in the pictures that they do themselves and things that are new to them. Ask:

- How is Ernie's family like your family? (*The family has adults and children.*) Where do Ernie and his family live? (*in an apartment in Chinatown*)
- How do the streets of Chinatown look different from streets where you live? How do they look the same? (*Answers will vary.*)
- What do Ernie and Jenny do on Saturdays? (*They go to a special Chinese school.*) Does the Chinese language look like English? (*No.*) How does it look different? (*Answers will vary.*)
- What is Ernie going to do for Chinese New Year? (*dance in the street*)

Read pages 6-13.

Point out the lion head that Ernie practices with and explain that one dancer holds the head and one dancer holds the body as they dance. Then ask:

- What kind of dance are Ernie and Jenny practicing? (*the Lion Dance*) What does the Lion Dance do? (*It scares away evil spirits and brings good luck.*) How can you tell this is an important dance? (*They practice a lot. Ernie's father says doing the dance will bring honor to the family.*)
- What other special traditions do Ernie and his family have for the new year? (*They wear new clothes. They honor their family at the altar. They eat a feast. The children get red envelopes with money.*)
- Why do Ernie and Jenny need to take a nap after they eat? (*The eye-opening ceremony starts at midnight. The children need to rest so they can stay up so late.*) Why do you think Ernie can't sleep? (*He's too excited.*)

Read pages 14-19. Then say:

- Red stands for good luck in Chinese culture. What other things stand for good luck? (*charms, four-leaf clovers, a rabbit's foot*)
- Look at the three lions. Are the lions all the same? How are they different? (*They are not the same. They are different sizes and colors.*) What do the dancers always have to do? (*They always have to keep the lion moving.*)
- What do the dancers do before they go home? (*They watch a tape of their dance to make sure they did the steps right.*) Is that the only time they will do the dance? (*No, they will do it the next day on the streets.*)

Read pages 20-30.

1. Remind children that Ernie and his friends practiced the Lion Dance in the kung fu school.
  - 20-21: The Lions dance in and out of restaurants and stores. What do they bring to the people inside? (*good-luck blessings*) What do the people give them? (*red envelopes*) What is in the red envelopes? (*money*)
  - 22-23: What are the long strings of red tubes? (*firecrackers*) Why do the dancers cover their mouths and ears? (*The firecrackers make a lot of smoke and noise.*)
  - 24-25: What is in the bowl? (*a shark puzzle*) What do the dancers have to find in the bowl? (*the hidden red envelope*)
  - 26-28: How do you think Ernie feels when they get to his neighborhood? (*excited and nervous*) How does he feel after he dances? (*tired and happy*)
2. As you go back through the pages, point out details in the photographs (people, buildings, food, etc.). **Ask children to tell how they know these are pictures of real people and real places. Explain that this is a nonfiction book about a real family, the Wans, in a real city, New York. It tells how they celebrate Chinese New Year.**
3. Read the last two pages about the Chinese lunar calendar. Explain that the word *lunar* means "relating to the moon." The Chinese calendar is related to phases of the moon. Read the paragraph about the calendar on page 29. Name the animals and point to the Chinese symbol

for each animal. Then read the Chinese Horoscope on page 30. Help children find their birth year. Discuss whether they think their horoscope is accurate.

## **AFTER READING**

**Discuss what children have learned about Chinese New Year. Say:**

We have learned that there are lots of traditions that are a part of Chinese New Year. What traditions have we read about?

Why do you think it is important to learn about traditions from other countries and other cultures?

What's the most interesting thing you learned?

What new thing did you learn?

What did you already know that you read in the book?

What was your favorite part of the book?

Would you like to be a Lion Dancer? Why or why not?