



Yum Cha at the Emperor's Garden Restaurant in Chinatown

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Large circular tables covered in crisp, clean white cloths filled the dimly-lit space at the far end of the Emperor's Garden restaurant. Clear-glass jugs filled with icy-cold refreshing water stood on the lazy susans waiting to quench thirsty, hot, worn-out customers. Tiny white cups, small round plates, dipping sauces and pairs of smooth chopsticks completed the table setting.

Hungry, chatting children bounded up the stairs and quickly occupied the twelve comfy seats around each table. Nimble fingers continuously spun the lazy susans at top speed; splashes of chilled water overflowed from the jugs as the tiny cups were filled. Chopsticks were pointed, crossed, jabbed and tapped impatiently. Overloaded plates of clattering forks and spoons arrived at the table.

Steaming hot, appetising, mouth-watering food followed. Platters of freshly cooked, brown, crisp springrolls were eagerly devoured by hungry mouths. Small, round, woven-bamboo baskets piled high were wheeled out on creaking, stainless-steel trolleys. Efficient, neatly-dressed, reserved waiters manoeuvred the trolleys between the crowded tables, speedily placing several baskets on each table at a time.

Removing the lids from the baskets revealed an interesting range of delectable dim sum morsels, white crescent-shaped prawn dumplings, large, almost tennisball-sized meatballs, dotted with chunks of carrot and peas, savoury, sticky rice wrapped in drab green lotus leaves and soft, springy pork buns. Plates of vivid green, crunchy choy sum and long, white, flat slippery noodles complemented the bamboo basket treats.

As fast as one dish was gobbled down, baskets and plates were removed and replaced by more! Gasps of delight and horror rumbled through the group as each lid was removed from the baskets. Chopsticks, spoons, forks and fingers were used awkwardly, efficiently and successfully by wide-eyed children trying so hard to transfer food from the lazy susan to their own small bowls without slopping all over the oh-so-clean tablecloths. A balancing act for many!

Sighs of relief from satisfied tummies could be heard as the ninth and last dish arrived at its destination-delicious, steaming, crunchy pig bones seasoned with mild red chilli challenged some but was the favourite for others.

How different the tables looked at the end of the meal! The once oh-so-white cloths were smeared with splashes of dark brown soy or purplish plum sauce that hadn't quite made it to bowls; chunks of food including one large beefball littered the lazy susans and individual plates were piled high with partly-eaten dim sum; evidence of a satisfying eating experience enjoyed by all!

Bustling, buzzing, chatting children gathered their belongings, cheerfully bade farewell to the waiters and meandered down the stairs. Weary smiles stretched across the faces of the waiters as they thanked the children for coming, then skilfully tackled the remains of the Yum Cha feast. Quietness again returned to the dimly-lit space at the far end of the restaurant.

Responding to the text - some suggestions

- Read the story aloud, using an expressive voice.
- Talk about what is happening in this story. Use where, what and how words to describe the story. Extend student thinking about the story using when and why to ponder possibilities. Identify words or phrases from the text to support possibilities.
- Describe the mood and atmosphere created by the author in this piece of writing. Identify and discuss some writing techniques used to help create the atmosphere.
- Imagine you are sitting at one of the round tables with the other children. What would be enjoyable, funny or entertaining about being part of the group? Support your opinions with words and phrases from the text.
- Select your favourite paragraph in this piece of writing; read it through and
 - underline the nouns;
 - highlight the adjectives;
 - circle the verbs;
 - draw a rectangle around the adverbs.
- Read your favourite paragraph to a partner, leaving out the adjectives and adverbs. Read it again, including the adjectives and adverbs. Talk about the effect the adjectives and adverbs have on the writing and the reader.
- Illustrate your favourite paragraph in cartoon style and add some dialogue that you think could be used by the children in this story enjoying yum cha.
- Create a class chart of all the nouns and adjectives and verbs and adverbs in this story. Select 2 of each and illustrate. Talk about the images created through the use of adjectives and adverbs.
- Explain how this story would give someone an idea of what it could be like to go to yum cha at a restaurant from the text. Identify the customs, or 'the way' of having yum cha. Dramatise this story in small groups based on the information given.
- Use two different-coloured highlighters-using one to highlight each word that begins a sentence and the other colour to highlight the full-stops (or exclamation marks) at the end of the sentence. Scan through the text noting the sentence beginnings -talk about your observations with a partner and discuss the effect of the sentence beginnings.
- Write separate sentences from the text onto large strips of paper. Students work in pairs to discuss the structure and features of the sentences. Locate the verb, subject and 'the rest' (predicate) and other things about the sentence such as the use of a hyphen, semi-colon, alliteration and phrases.
- Cut up the sentences and rearrange the order of the nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs. Talk about the effect on the reader. Take out the describing words and talk about the effect on the reader.
- Turn the information and feelings about yum cha in this narrative into a POEM.
- How do you think the author felt when writing this story? Why?
- What is it about this text that makes you want to immediately go out and have Yum

Going further

- Research the meaning of the word 'yum cha' and find other words that refer to the same style of eating.
- Find out some interesting facts about the development of yum cha over time in China, Hong Kong and Shanghai.
- Investigate opportunities for eating yum cha in the Chinatowns in Australian cities.
- Experience yum cha for yourself! If you are not able to get to a yum cha restaurant, talk with the owner of a local Chinese restaurant in your community and see what can be organised!