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# Henry and the Kite Dragon

Irene Halliday

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Hall, Bruce Edward. *Henry and the Kite Dragon*. Illustrated by Low, William. Philomel Books, 2004. ISBN 0399237275. \$15.99. 40 pp.

Reviewer: Irene Halliday

Reading Level: Primary, Intermediate

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Historical fiction;

Subject: Kites--Juvenile Fiction; Prejudices--Juvenile Fiction; Chinatown (New York, N.Y.)--History--20th century--Juvenile Fiction; Books--Reviews;

Chinatown and Little Italy are side by side in New York City, but the kids from Chinatown never play in the park when the kids from Little Italy are there. Although they've never made any effort to get acquainted, they've decided they don't like each other.

Eight-year-old Henry Chu lives in a tall apartment building in Chinatown, where elderly Mr. Chin also lives. Grandfather Chin made beautiful kites in China when he was a boy. His kites flew the highest, were the biggest and prettiest, and always won first prize in all the contests. Henry and his friends help Grandfather Chin make huge kites out of packing crates, cardboard, rice paper and bright, colorful paints. After finishing, everyone goes up on the roof to watch Grandfather Chin fly their creations and chase the pigeons, who are frightened of the butterfly, caterpillar, and bird shaped kites. The excitement, however, doesn't last because the Italian kids in the park begin throwing rocks at the kites, tearing through the paper and making them sink to the ground. The Chinese kids want to go fight them, but Grandfather Chin has a better idea; they will make an enormous dragon kite that the Italians won't destroy. "Everyone respects dragons," he says. When it is finished, all of the kids help carry the huge dragon to the roof, but before it is even in the air, the Italians begin throwing rocks. Henry and his friends head for the park to fight the Italians, but before a fight begins, the sun is darkened by the giant dragon, launched by Grandfather Chin. All the kids are transfixed by the magnificent kite, which begins to chase a lone, frightened pigeon. To everyone's amazement, the big leader of the Italians screams, "Stop it! That's my pigeon!" and begins to cry. The Chinese kids begin to understand that the Italian kids keep homing pigeons for pets and that is why they throw rocks at the kites, to protect their birds. The children yell for Grandfather Chin to stop the dragon from scaring the pet pigeons. Now that they understand each other, the children can come to a compromise, and everyone can enjoy the pigeons, the park, and the wonderful kites.

Based on true events in the 1920s experienced by the author's father, this well-told story is illustrated with impressive paintings by a first generation Chinese American who grew up in New York. The texture of the canvas adds depth and character to the backgrounds of buildings, streets and sky, the skillfully executed people, and the brilliant colors of the magnificent kites. The plea for inter-cultural understanding grows naturally out of a fine story. Highly recommended!