

CHINESE NEW YEAR

Chinese New Year is an important annual festival celebrated by Chinese people around the world for over 5000 years. It is also called Spring Festival in China and it marks the first day of the new year in the Chinese calendar. It occurs on the first day of the new moon after the sun enters Aquarius so the date can vary between 21 January and 20 February each year. In China, Chinese New Year signifies the end of winter and the beginning of spring, the sweeping away of misfortunes, and the welcoming of the new year with gifts and symbols of good luck.

Map of the World

Using atlases and the *Map of the World* blackline master downloaded from the Teacher Toolkit, ask students to colour in China and mark up other countries of the world such as Vietnam, Thailand and Singapore where Chinese New Year—or a national version of it—is celebrated (eg, Tet is the Vietnamese version of Chinese New Year).

Before Chinese New Year

Window Flowers

In the days leading up to Chinese New Year, families are engaged in the preparations. Houses are cleaned and swept in order to sweep away the bad luck and misfortune of the past year. Where families practise Buddhism or Taoism, home altars and statues are cleaned. Windows and doors are decorated with red-paper cut-out decorations or ‘window flowers’ and messages of happiness, wealth and long life.

Download the *Make Your Own Window Flowers* blackline master from the Teacher Toolkit for students to make their own papercraft window flowers to hang in your classroom’s windows.

How to Use Chopsticks

The picture of the god of the kitchen, Tsao-Chun, may be hung on the wall and offerings made to him. Then the picture is burnt and sent off with firecrackers to report to heaven on the behaviour of the family over the past year. Cooking preparations are made for the traditional New Year’s Eve feast of pig, duck, fish, chicken and sweets.

Download the *How to Use Chopsticks* blackline master from the teacher Toolkit so that students can practise using chopsticks!

New Year’s Eve

On New Year’s Eve, incense is lit to welcome in the new spirit, offerings are made and a new picture of a kitchen god is hung. After the family feast, fireworks welcome in the new year.

New Year

Lucky Money Envelopes

In the morning, extended families and friends gather to wish each other good fortune and a healthy Bai-Nien or Happy New Year. Children receive gifts of money in red paper envelopes.

Download the *Lucky Money Envelopes* blackline master from the Teacher Toolkit so that students can make some to give to each other.

Felt Chinese Fortune Cookies

Some families invite a lion dance troupe to help them usher in the new year and to evict bad spirits. Po-po—boiled dumplings made from white flour with special messages inside—are eaten.

As a craft activity, download the *Felt Chinese Fortune Cookies* blackline master from the Teacher Toolkit so that students can make felt cookies and write messages to post inside them.

Chinese Proverbs

With more advanced students, you may also wish to incorporate a lesson on proverbs. The Chinese language has a vast array of highly descriptive proverbs such as: ‘Do not make fun of a crocodile until you’ve crossed the river.’ Download the *Chinese Proverbs* blackline master from the Teacher Toolkit and discuss these proverbs and their meanings.

Chinese New Year Scrolls

Make Chinese New Year scrolls for your classroom and wish everyone a happy year!

What you need

- Thick red paper cut into 10 cm x 30 cm lengths
- 2 paddle-pop sticks per scroll
- Black, gold and red paint
- Glue
- Red ribbon and red wool to make tassels

What to do

1. Use the gold or black paint to write the words Bai-Nien (each letter under the previous one) on the scroll. If any of your students has a family member who can help with Chinese script-writing, invite them into the class or download the *Chinese Calligraphy* blackline master from the Teacher Toolkit. Students will love the opportunity to practise writing Chinese messages of good luck, happiness or long life and they can add these symbols to their scrolls.
2. Paint both paddle-pop sticks red.
3. Once the paint has dried, attach a paddle-pop stick to each end of the scroll, roll around once and staple or glue together.
4. Make a ribbon hanger to hang the scroll from the top.
5. Make red tassels and tie to hang from the paddle-pop stick at the bottom.

Second Day—Money Trees

This day is spent on family visits. Every home has pine and cypress branches in a vase decorated with old coins, paper flowers, charms and fruit as a Money Tree to symbolise prosperity.

Third Day—Dragon and Lion Dance

This day is celebrated with firecrackers and a dragon dance. A paper dragon is carried by as many as 40 people in a street procession to the sound of drumming, cymbals, firecrackers and music. A person holding a white ball, called the pearl of fire, runs ahead of the dragon.

The Lion Dance also starts on the third day and continues until the fifth day. A young boy runs ahead of the lion to tease him. Firecrackers are thrown at the lion’s feet to help the lion scare away evil spirits. The street parade includes acrobats, jugglers and stilt-walkers. The lion is believed to bring good fortune and ward off evil spirits.

Make a Class Dragon

Make a class dragon from material. Cut out two sides of a dragon body from a long roll of colourful, shimmery material, curtain or sheet. Sew the two sides together at the top, leaving the bottom of the dragon open for students to get under. Decorate the dragon with sequins, felt, beads, tassels and ribbons. Make a head for your dragon using a lightweight box and cardboard and cutting out holes for

the eyes and mouth. Cover and decorate the box head and attach it to the body. Make a tail for the dragon using a red stocking filled with crumpled newspaper. Attach this to the body also.

Practise walking the dragon around the classroom, with one student as a dragon leader to help guide as many students who comfortably fit under the box head and material body of the dragon.

The Dragon Dance is a slow rhythmic dance so ask students to perfect the dance by moving forward slowly side-to-side in a swaying, rhythmic movement. Using percussion instruments, such as cymbals, drums and triangles, the other class members provide the accompanying music.

Chinese New Year Legend

According to Chinese legend, the beginning of Chinese New Year started with the fight against a mythical beast called the Nian that would come on the first day of a new year to eat livestock, crops, and even villagers, especially children. To protect themselves, villagers would put food in front of their doors until people noticed that the Nian was scared away by a little child wearing red, so the villagers would then hang red lanterns and red cut-outs on windows and doors. People also used firecrackers to frighten away the Nian.

Discuss with your class what myths and legends are and how they come to be handed down through generations. Research other Chinese legends to tell to your class. Do we have our own legends? Ask students to find and recount to the class one legend that they have learnt about either through their own family’s culture, Aboriginal Dreaming stories, or legends they have read in picture books.

The Festival of the Lanterns

Chinese New Year ends with a Lantern Festival on the 15th day after the New Year or the first full moon of the New Year. This celebration lasts three days. Paper lanterns with candles lit inside them are hung in and outside homes and shop windows. Families walk the streets carrying lighted lanterns. Doorways are decorated with glass beads and coloured lamps, and women wear white clothes and pearls to honour the full moon. Moon cakes or little white pastries and rice dumplings are eaten in celebration.

Chinese Paper Lanterns

Download the *Make Your Own Chinese Paper Lanterns* blackline master from the Teacher Toolkit and ask students to make, colour and decorate their own paper lanterns to hang in the classroom.

Chinese Zodiac

Explain simply the concept of the Chinese horoscope or zodiac. Legend has it that in the new year before he died, Buddha invited all the animals in his kingdom to see him but only twelve animals arrived: the rat came first, followed by the ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat, monkey, rooster, dog and pig. Buddha decided to name a year after each of the animals and those born during that year would inherit some of that animal’s personality.

Ask students in your class to find out which animal year they were born under in the Chinese zodiac.

Then set them the task of finding out the animal signs of their brothers and sisters!

Resources available in the 2012 *School Essentials* catalogue

- *Illustrated Stories from Around the World* (p 206)
- *Global Village Craft Paper* (p 206)
- *Festival Fun* (p 206)
- *Around the World Kids* (p 206)
- *Around the World Paper Collection* (p 227)
- *Asian Textile Paper* (p 228)
- *Travel Through Time Complete Collection* (p 207)
- *Fortune Cookies Kit* (p 216)
- *Sparkle Sequin Pack* (p 219)
- *Big Box of Art Supplies* (p 221)
- *Creative Kits: Dragons* (p 224)

Free Teacher Toolkit Resources available at www.scholastic.co.nz/schools/bookclub

- *Map of the World* blackline master
- *Make Your Own Window Flowers* blackline master
- *How to Use Chopsticks* blackline master
- *Lucky Money Envelopes* blackline master
- *Felt Chinese Fortune Cookies* blackline master
- *Chinese Proverbs* blackline master
- *Make Your Own Chinese Paper Lanterns* blackline master



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