Activities

Chinese New Year

Grades: PreK–K, 1–2, 3–5, 6–8

Overview
Children make dragon puppets, play games that originated in China, study Chinese currency and design a new currency, practice calligraphy and make a festival lantern.

Materials
Chinese Calligraphy (Attachment)
Chinese Symbolism (Attachment)
Dragon Symbolism

The Chinese dragon represents wisdom, strength, benevolence, and good fortune. Invite your students to learn more about this symbol by creating a miniature version and by reading stories about dragons. Begin by passing out the accompanying pattern. Have students decorate their dragons with bright colors and glitter. Next help kids fold a piece of 8" x 11" paper in half vertically and cut along the fold. Accordion-fold each piece and join together to create the animal's body. Attach the head at one end and the tail at the other. Tape chopsticks to the head and tail. Use your puppets as props for a read aloud of *A Time of Golden Dragons*, by Song Nan Zhang (Tundra, 2000).

New Year's Eve Games

On New Year's Eve, Chinese children stay up late playing games. Host your own celebration with these mini-activities.

- **Dominoes.** Ask kids to create patterns with dominoes, first invented in China 1,000 years ago. Then have them remove a domino, challenging a partner to fill in the hole.
- **Cards.** Have students draw a playing card (a 9th-century Chinese invention) and write a story starring that card's number or figure.
- **Jianzi.** Ancient *jianzi* is similar to today's hacky sack. Challenge kids to keep a beanbag “jianzi” in the air, no hands allowed.
Chinese Currency

With this activity, children will learn about Chinese currency, the yuan, and make a red packet, a traditional New Year's gift of money. First have students visit the website (http://www.chinatoday.com/fin/mon/) to see what Chinese currency looks like. They will find that most notes show farmers and workers from different ethnic groups, which symbolizes the union of different Chinese cultures. Next challenge small groups to design their own bills using symbols to represent your class. When finished, have each child fold a piece of red construction paper into an envelope shape. Photocopy the groups’ bills to put into students' red packets. Use the packets to practice counting, making change, and other math skills!

Chinese Calligraphy (Using the Reproducible)

Invite children to try their hands at Chinese calligraphy and create chun lian, special New Year's decorations. Begin by passing out the Reproducible below. Then give each child a square of red paper. Have kids fleck their papers with gold crayon, then use black paint to copy one of the characters from the Reproducible on their chun lian. (The squares of paper should be turned to be diamond-shaped.) Post the messages around your classroom door to greet visitors.

Lantern Festival

Fifteen days after the Chines Lunar New Year, Chinese families traditionally parade to a public place with lanterns in hand for a feast and riddle-guessing games. Another tradition during the Lantern Festival is the Dragon Dance performed by young men carrying a large cloth or paper dragon and dancing through the streets to the cheers of onlookers.
To mark the end of your unit, students can make their own lanterns and write riddles about China for review. To make a lantern, roll a piece of lightweight yellow paper into a long cylinder and tape it. Then fold a piece of red paper that is the same size in half. Draw a line about 1" from the unfolded edge and make cuts about 1/2" apart from the folded edge to the line. Open the paper, wrap the uncut ends around the yellow cylinder, and then glue it on. Cut one more strip of red paper and attach it to the top as a handle. Next, have students brainstorm one fact they have learned about China and on a note card write a riddle based on that fact. Then invite children to parade through the school with their lanterns and gather back in your classroom for a riddle-review game with their questions.

- Subjects:
  Geography, Games and Recreation, History, Writing, Money, Cultures, Festivals
Chinese New Year!

Directions: In Chinese, these words mean good wishes for the New Year. Trace the words. Then write them by yourself.

春 (chūn) spring
寿 (shòu) longevity
财富 (fù chéng) wealth