

Chinese New Year

15 days in January and/or February (15 days starting the first day of the Chinese Calendar)

- Chinese worldwide



The Chinese New Year is the most important festival of the year in China and for many Chinese around the world. Learning about the captivating traditions of this 15-day festival gives students a flavor of Chinese culture.

Fast Fact

What's the date of the Chinese New Year? Look up in the sky. The Chinese New Year starts at the second new moon after the beginning of winter in the northern hemisphere—which is some time in January or February.

Holiday History ★Read Aloud★

The legend behind Chinese New Year is about a dragon called Nian, which means “year” in Chinese. Nian attacked a village at the end of every winter. When the winter moon came, the villagers hid inside their homes because they knew Nian would return. But one year, the villagers built a bonfire. The fire's red light and its crackle and hiss scared away the dragon. That's why people hang red signs, blow noisemakers, and set off firecrackers on this holiday.

Fast Fact ★Read Aloud★

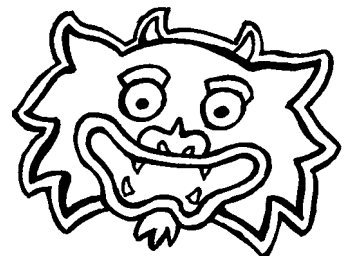
The Chinese New Year parade is best known for the Dragon Dance, performed by dancers who move under a giant paper or silk dragon puppet stretched over bamboo poles. The dragon symbolizes long life and prosperity. Many dancers are needed to carry the dragon puppet, which can be more than 50 feet long! The dragon dancers twist and turn the puppet to chase a yellow globe that represents the sun. It is said that if the dragon catches the sun, the sun will go out. Of course, the dragon never catches it!

Dragon Tag Social Studies

Play this Chinese game in which students become the dancing dragon!

- ★ Have players line up to form the dragon. The first person in line is the dragon's head, the last person is its tail. To connect the head, tail, and body, each player should place his or her hands on the shoulders of the player directly in front.
- ★ To start the game, the tail player shouts out, “3, 2, 1 dragon!” With the head player leading and everyone else holding on, the dragon starts to walk quickly—twisting and turning, trying to catch its tail. As the head player darts after the tail player, all players must be careful not to let the body break (not to have any student's hands let go of the shoulders in front of him or her).
- ★ If its body breaks, the turn is over, and the head player moves to the end of the line to become the tail. The next player in line becomes the new head.
- ★ One point is scored each time the head player tags the tail player. The player with the most points wins.

—adapted from *The Multicultural Game Book*



★ Book Link

The Dancing Dragon by Marcia Vaughan (Mondo Publishing, 1996). Picture book, easy. A simple poem explains the rituals of the Chinese New Year parade. The book unfolds to reveal a long and colorful dragon.

★ Teacher Resource

The Multicultural Game Book by Louise Orlando (Scholastic, 1993). For grades 1–6. More than 70 traditional games from 30 countries.



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Chinese New Year Festival

Social Studies

Enjoy some traditions of Chinese New Year with students. Prepare for a festival by doing some of these activities the day before.

★ Good Luck Banners

Chinese families decorate their doors with banners that have good luck phrases written in gold ink. Have students draw one of the following lucky phrases on a piece of red construction paper with a gold-colored marker or crayon:

Fooh! (May you have happiness and great fortune!)

Huang-chin wan-liang! (May you have ten thousand pieces of gold!)

Gung hay fat choy! (Prosperous and happy new year!)

★ Lantern Festival

On the fifteenth and final day of the celebration, the famous Lantern Festival is held. Thousands of lanterns in the shapes of important Chinese symbols hang in the streets, lighting up the night sky. Make your own lanterns with a string of multicolored Christmas lights. Have students cut out birds, fish, stars, and other important symbols from heat-resistant paper.

Tape each shape over a light and hang the lights around your classroom door.

★ “Lucky Money”

A traditional Chinese New Year gift to children is “lucky money”—a red envelope with a few coins inside. The day before your celebration, have each student make a design and write their own good luck message on a white envelope with a red marker or crayon. After class, you can fill envelopes with a few pennies for the next day’s festivities.

★ Festival Snacks

Share favorite New Year’s snacks like dumplings, almond cookies, chestnuts, and tangerines (which symbolize good luck).

★ Tet Tradition

Vietnam calls its New Year celebration Tet Nguyen Dan (“first day” in Vietnamese). During this seven-day festival, people return to their former schools to visit and honor their past teachers. Let students take turns visiting their teachers from previous years and giving them special cards and Chinese New Year snacks.