


This Chinese New Year lesson encourages appreciation of Chinese culture through celebration

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Title – Celebrate the Chinese New Year

By – Nan Ray

Primary Subject – Social Studies, Art, Language Arts

Secondary Subjects –

Grade Level – K-3

PURPOSE:

People Holding Hands® encourage children to celebrate the Chinese New Year with relevant props and reading materials that teach children about the celebration of the Chinese New Year.

Encourages appreciation of Chinese culture through celebration.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

For the teacher:

Copy of this lesson plan, the attached activities sheet, and a copy of Connie's Story (below).

OPTIONAL: Portable puppet theater for the presentation. A table at the front will work fine to have a focal point if you do not have a portable theater.

For the students:

Construction paper, one piece for each lantern and various colored sheets for making the dancing dragons.

Scissors and tape or glue; enough tape to close each child's lantern, the dragon loops, and the dragonhead. Glue will work also if you have drying time.

Sticks or string: to hang dragons or lanterns from when the children complete their creative arts projects.

Classroom set of People Holding Hands: TRACE, GAIL, JESSIE, and CONNIE (*or other multi-cultural puppets*) .

ACTIVITY:

BEFORE YOU START THE LESSON:

Take the time to make one paper lantern

and one chain loop dragon

to show the kids what their Chinese arts products may look like.

**Encourage the kids to be creative when designing their dragonheads and decorating the outside of the lanterns. Chinese celebrations and parades incorporate many colors. The brighter the better!

1. Introduce the People Holding Hands® character, Connie Asian-American Girl or comparable puppet.
2. Read aloud *Connie's Story* (below) to the children. After reading the story, discuss the following key points with

the children:

- Connie is from American, yet her ancestors are from China. What does that mean?
- Sometimes it is important to understand other cultures. Why do you think Connie would appreciate you learning about China and enjoying the celebration of the Chinese New Year that her family enjoys?
- If you do learn about another country, and the way the people from that country do things, do you think that it would be easier or harder to visit that country? Why?
- Do you think it is fun to celebrate someone else's cultural festivities? Why or why not?

3. Introduce the art activity:

Making Chinese Lanterns and Dancing Dragons .

a. Show the students your completed art products.

Tell the students that these art projects represent some of the creative projects the Chinese make in anticipation of their Chinese New Year celebration.

b. Allow each student to select to make one or both of the art products.

c. Then, ask the students to take a seat in a semi-circle around the table-booth or puppet theater you set up for them.

4. Ask for 4 volunteers to READ the skit parts: TRACE, GAIL, JESSIE and CONNIE

(NOTE: The readers will be expected to read at a 3rd grade or higher level. If reading is a problem for your age group of children, assign 2 readers per part or ask an older child to assist a younger child with his or her part. You can also allow very young readers to 'act out' the parts with the characters while you read all the parts. Or, simply substitute a scenario about the Chinese New Year without the skit that follows.)

CONNIE CELEBRATES THE CHINESE NEW YEAR...You're Invited!

CONNIE: Hi everyone! Would you all like to celebrate the Chinese New Year with me?

GAIL, TRACE, JESSIE: (All together) YES! We would love to!

GAIL: But hey, Connie, what is the Chinese New Year?

CONNIE: I'm glad you asked me that, Gail.

JESSIE: Well, I want to know too.

TRACE: Yeah Connie, me too!

CONNIE: OK guys. I'm happy to 'tell all.'

Remember, this is a really important celebration for my family. We prepare months in advance for it and really look forward to the celebration each year.

The Chinese New Year starts with the first New Moon of a New Year and ends with the FULL MOON 15 days later. So, we celebrate the Chinese New Year for 2 entire weeks plus one day.

TRACE: You mean, your new year starts with a new moon...like the moon in the sky?

CONNIE: Yes Trace. You know that the moon has complete cycles, right?

TRACE: Well, of course, I knew that!

JESSIE: (whispering) How did you know that!

CONNIE: So, my family celebrates the Chinese New Year according to what is called the Lunar Year which means 'moon year'. This celebration is considered a way to get rid of the old year and celebrate the new one with great thoughts, prayers and happy times.

GAIL: So, Connie, what is it that you do for an entire 15 days to celebrate?

CONNIE: Actually, Gail, that is a good question. It is still a little confusing to me to keep all those days straight. Let me give you an overview:

New Years Eve — We celebrate family and our ancestors on this day. The Chinese believe that it is our ancestors who 'laid-the-foundation' for our family as we know it today.

New Years Day — We usually have a feast. You may call it a Thanksgiving feast that includes our family and what we are thankful for. On this day, many Chinese do not eat meat because they believe it will make them live longer and be healthy to do without it.

JESSIE: In America, on New Years day, many people eat black-eyed peas for good luck. Isn't that strange? Well, at least we all have that no-meat thing in common so far...

CONNIE: I never thought of that...you're right. Ok, let me go on.

2nd day — Dog day. I know, this sounds strange but we do lots of praying and are thankful for dogs, because the Chinese believe that the 2nd day is all dog's birthday. Don't ask.....

TRACE: Can I laugh out loud?

GAIL: Don't be rude, Trace. I think all dogs should have a day too!

CONNIE: OK.

3rd Day and 4th Day — These days are the days all sons-in-law pay respect to their wives families.

5th Day — This day is called, "Po Woo." This is the day everyone stays home in anticipation of welcoming wealth into their house. No one visits each other or leaves their house because this will bring bad luck to both people. I call it a day of rest!

6th Day through 10th Day — This is the time of family feasting and fun. We go to temples, get together with lots of relatives and celebrate by enjoying our family.

11th Day through 12th Day — We invite friends to dinner and share our wealth.

13th Day — We spend time eating very simple food because all those dinners have become too much.

14th Day — We plan for our last big day by making lanterns and parade floats, streamers and dragons. We really look forward to this final day of celebration.

15th Day — This is Lantern Festival day. It is a festival with singing, lantern shows and dancing.

JESSIE: Wow, Connie. That is some celebration!

CONNIE: Yes. And we spend a lot of time getting ready for it.

GAIL: Well, what do you eat?

CONNIE: Another good question, Gail.

As you have probably realized, we believe most of the things you eat and serve, as well as what you do each day, will have special meaning at this time of year and all year long. So, here are a few things we always have to eat during the New Year festivities:

- Oranges and tangerines — for good fortune.
- Candy tray — arranged with eight sides for prosperity.
- Noodles — uncut, which symbolize a long life.

And there are many other things. I cannot keep it all straight myself.

I know that my favorite is the New Year's Cake, called, 'Nian gao.' It is believed that the higher the cake rises the better the year will be.

TRACE: Thanks Connie. I really enjoyed learning about your Chinese New Year Festival. Do you think your family would mind if I moved in for those 15 days this year?

CONNIE: Trace, you are very funny. But, yes, my Mother would go crazy if I told her you would be joining us for the 15 days. Don't take it personally! I even drive her crazy because she is so busy and devoted to being sure we all have a good time and understand the traditions.

GAIL: Thanks Connie. I, too, appreciate all the information.

JESSIE: Me too! Can I get your recipe for Nian gao? I'm going to see if my Grandmother will help me make it.

CONNIE: Yes, Jessie. I will ask my Mom how to make the Nian gao cake. And, thank you all for being so interested in the New Year's Festival. It means a lot to me that you all understand my culture and are willing to participate in the celebrations that I know and love.

Trace, Gail and Jessie; You all really are my good friends! Now, let's make some paper lanterns to hang around our classroom...they will help light the way into the new year.

5. Finally, discuss all the things you learned about the Chinese New Year.

6. Take time to hang the lanterns and put the dragons around the room.

OPTIONAL:

Ask the students to take time to look up the symbolism of many of the chinese characters, i.e. lions, dragons, rabbits, etc.

Ask the students what they would do to have a parade in celebration of the Chinese New Year.

Look up the date that the Chinese New Year begins this year.

ALWAYS, give much gratitude and appreciation for the history of this tradition that is now celebrated around the world.

My name is Connie.

I am an Asian American girl.

According to the most recent United States Census Report, there are over 10 million Asians in the United States. Being Asian-American means that my family's ancestors came from one of the countries on the continent of Asia. Some of these countries include China, Korea, Japan and Thailand.

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One thing that people notice about me is the shape of my eyes.

Instead of being round, they are more oval in shape.

Many Asians have eyes the same shape as mine. I love my eyes,
and they are very special because they are unique to me.

My eyes see many wonderful things.

I have lived in several cities across the United States because my dad is in the military. That means he
has a job that helps protect our country. If there is ever a war or crisis, my dad would help protect us and
all of America.

I think my dad is brave. We move around a lot.

That's okay with me because I really like making new friends and having new adventures all over the
United States.

I like to read and ride my bicycle.

I also play the piano and sing every chance I get.

I am learning a new song that I want to play for my aunt who is
coming to visit all the way from China.

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