



Chinese New Year 春節 Learning Activities



DR. SUN YAT-SEN
CLASSICAL
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Chinese New Year Learning Activities

Chinese New Year 春節



The Chinese New Year festival celebrates the beginning of the new year in the traditional Chinese (or lunisolar) calendar, and is celebrated at the time of the new moon. This happens between 21st January and 20th February. In Chinese, it is known as the Spring Festival, 春節, as it occurs at the start of the Spring season in the traditional Chinese calendar. Preparations begin around 8 days before the new year and festivities last for 15 days afterwards when the Lantern Festival is celebrated when the full moon appears.

In 104 BC, during the Han dynasty, a fixed date on the traditional Chinese calendar was decided upon to mark the start of the year and since then, festivities and celebrations have been held on this day. It is a time of family reunion and feasting, ancestor worship and traditional customs.

Note: The term Lunar New Year is often used, showing this is not just a Chinese festival but one that is celebrated in many Asian countries. As our Garden is rooted in Chinese customs and mythology, we will refer to it here as Chinese New Year.

Here is a selection of learning activities designed to help you understand and enjoy this festival. The Chinese New Year posters on our website will give you more information. You can find them here: <https://vancouverchinesegarden.com/wp-content/uploads/Chinese-New-Year-Festival.pdf>

新年快樂 - *Sun nien fai lok / Xin nian kuai le*
Happy New Year!

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Chinese New Year Learning Activities - Special Days

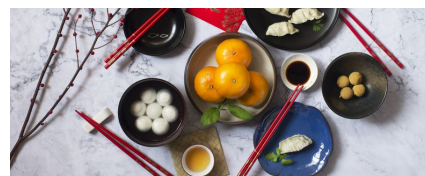
The Spring Festival is a happy time of year when we celebrate with family and friends, eat special food, tell stories, set off firecrackers and do other fun things. We celebrate it in January or February, at the start of the traditional spring season.

Different families have different ways to celebrate the festival. Here are some of the most popular traditions:

Food

The food at this festival has special importance.

The main celebration of Chinese New Year is when families come together, even from far away, to eat. New Year food is meant to bring good luck and has a traditional meaning or symbolism in Chinese culture. Some of the food people eat include fish and dumplings to invite wealth; noodles for long life; sweet rice balls ('tangyuan' or 'yuanxiao') and whole chicken to symbolise the family being together; glutinous rice cakes ('niangao') for increased prosperity; and oranges for good luck.



Decorations

Red decorations look pretty in the home or workplace but also carry symbolic meanings.

Red is the colour of celebration in China. Decorations include lanterns to light the dark and welcome the new year; Spring Couplets (poems) hung around doorways; the 'fu' character which means good luck;

lucky red knots; paper cuttings and flowering plants.

Gifts



People visit their family and bring gifts to wish good luck, good health and prosperity.

The most well known Chinese New Year gift is the red envelopes, or 'lai see'/'hong bao' that are given to children and young people by their elders. They contain money - preferably in crisp, new bills. Other gifts include candies and toys, with gifts such as tea, alcohol and fruit for adults.

Activities

Preparations for the festival start 7 days before and activities go on until the 15th day after New Year's Day.

In the days leading up to New Year, families clean their homes, go shopping and remember their ancestors. During the main two days of celebration -New Year's Eve and New Year's Day - people feast, visit relatives, give gifts, watch lion or dragon dancing and set off fireworks. The celebrations continue until the Lantern Festival on the 15th day, which is when people enjoy lantern displays.

Stories

The stories behind the Spring Festival are very old.

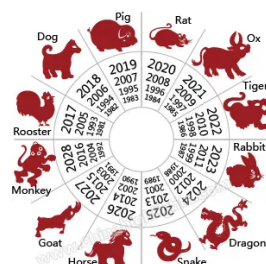
People remember the story of the monster, Nian, who was scared of the colour red and loud noises. This story explains why we have red decorations and why New Year is so noisy! Children also love to hear the story of the Great Race, which tells us about the origin of the Chinese Zodiac.

Good Wishes

People wish good luck, prosperity and happiness to their friends and family!

You can say 新年快樂 - 'Sun nien fai lok' / 'Xin nian kuai le' - Happy New Year!

恭喜發財 - 'Gong hey fat choy' / 'Gong shi fa chai' / - Wishing you happiness and prosperity!



Chinese New Year Learning Activities - Special Days

Some families celebrate the Chinese New Year Festival. There are many other special days in the year and every family celebrates differently.

What special days do you and your family celebrate?

How do you celebrate your special days? Write or draw pictures.

Food

For example, In my family, we eat turkey at Christmas

Decorations

For example, In my family, we put up Halloween decorations

Gifts

For example, In my family we give Lai See, or red envelopes at the Lunar New Year,

Stories

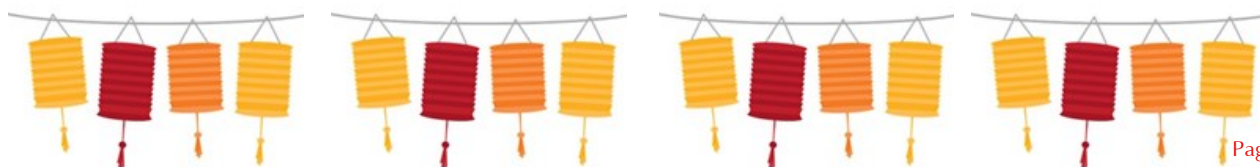
For example, In my family we listen to the story about Ibrahim at Eid al-Adha

Activities

For example, In my family we light fireworks at Diwali

Giving Good Wishes

For example, in my family, we wish people "Happy Hanukkah!"



Chinese New Year Learning Activities - Special Days

Draw a picture of your favourite special day that your family celebrates. Include all the things that people do on that day - the food, games and activities.

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Chinese New Year Learning Activities - Stories

The Story of Nian

This story helps us understand why we see a lot of red around at Chinese New Year, and why it is such a noisy time of year! If you ever go to a Chinese New Year parade, you will hear firecrackers and loud drums and music – traditions dating back to the story of Nian.

A long time ago, deep in the mountains lived a monster called Nian. Legends said that Nian had the frame of a bull and a massive horn, and he roared so loudly everyone could hear. Once a year on New Year's Eve, Nian would go to villages looking for food - this would scare all the villagers. He ate crops... and children! This is why on the night that Nian would visit, families got together, shut their doors, and had a big family dinner so they were together and didn't get scared. More importantly, families prayed for protection to their ancestors.

After dinner, no one dared to sleep. When the day got dark, just as the villagers suspected, Nian came. But because everybody hid in their homes in preparation, everybody was safe. Nian passed through the village each year. When the sun came out, everybody in the village celebrated. And so it was that for many years although the villagers were scared of Nian he never harmed them.

However, as the years passed the villagers began to be less careful. And one New Year's Eve, as usual, Nian came looking for food. To his amazement, he could smell some delicious scents and as he followed his nose, he came upon a village hall which had a wedding party going on inside. Nian decided at once to burst in and steal all the wedding food. But as he did so, he was met with a sea of red clothes, as people were twisting and turning, dancing and enjoying themselves, wearing the colour red for celebration. In confusion and fear, Nian ran out the door as quickly as he possibly could.

Nian was still hungry. Ahead of him, he saw a group of families playing together in the street. Nian slowly approached them, not realising they were having fun setting off firecrackers and fireworks. Suddenly, WHOOSH CLAP CLAP: firecrackers went off! Nian got so scared by the loud noises and the bright flashes the firecrackers made, he ran away, never to be seen again.

When the villagers awoke the next morning, they realised they had not been careful to guard against Nian that year, But they also realised that Nian was afraid of the colour red, firecrackers and loud noises. So, every year after that, a few days before Nian would visit, people decorated their homes with red, set off fireworks and made sure they made loud noises on New Year's Eve, so Nian would not dare to come ever again.



photo from: <https://www.travelchinaguide.com/essential/holidays/new-year/story.htm>

Chinese New Year Learning Activities - Stories

The Story of the Chinese Zodiac / The Great Race

Did you know we honour a different animal each year, according to the Chinese Zodiac? This story explains why.

A long time ago, the Jade Emperor in a palace in the sky decided to give people on Earth a gift: a way to measure time, so people could know what year it is. He decided to name every year after an animal. But which animals to choose? He invited all the animals to participate in a race. The first 12 animals to cross the river to reach the finishing line would be the winners and would win a spot in the Chinese zodiac cycle.

The Jade Emperor gathered the animals and told them about the race. They would have to first climb a great mountain, go down into a deep valley and then cross a wide, deep and fast-flowing river. On the other side of the river was the Jade Emperor's palace – the finish line.

The cat and rat arrived at the river together. They wondered how they would get across, being such bad swimmers. At the same time, ox, who has poor eyesight, arrived and wondered how he would get across. The rat suggested that he and the cat could jump onto the ox's back and guide him across, all working together. As the three animals got closer to the other side of the river, the cat started to brag about being the first to finish the race. Wanting to be the first to win, the rat pushed the cat into the water. Just as the ox came closer to the finish line, the rat jumped off and raced over the finishing line first, closely followed by the ox. The cat was not a good swimmer, so she could only cling to a rock and watch as the race continued.

After the ox came the tiger, out of breath. The river had fast currents but because she was very strong, she made it to shore and was named the third animal in the cycle. Then came the dragon, flapping his great wings. As the dragon approached the finish line, he saw the poor helpless rabbit clinging to a log that was being washed downstream. The dragon was a friendly animal, so he stopped and gave a mighty puff of breath, blowing the rabbit to shore. Thus the rabbit finished fourth, followed by the dragon in fifth.

Next the horse found himself at the edge of the river. Being a good swimmer, he swam across the river without any problems and when he got out on the other side, he shook himself to dry off. At that moment, the snake appeared! She had hidden herself in the horse's mane and that is how she got across the river. The snake was animal number six and the horse, number seven.

Not long after that, the sheep, monkey, and rooster arrived at the edge of the river together. Seeing that they would not be able to cross the river alone, the three animals worked together to make a raft. Because of their combined efforts, they were able to finish the race. The 11th animal to arrive at the Jade Emperor's palace was the dog. Dogs are great swimmers, but it was his love of the water that delayed him – he couldn't resist playing around in the river for a while. Just as the sun was setting and the Jade Emperor was about to close the doors of the palace, an oink was heard. Pig became the twelfth and the last animal of the zodiac cycle.

Eventually, the cat huffed and puffed her way onto shore, climbed the steps to the palace and knocked on the doors. The Jade Emperor came out and told the cat the all 12 winners had been crowned. This made the cat very angry! And because it was the rat who pushed the cat into the stream, the cat promised that she would be the enemy of the rat forever.

Does your cat chase rats? Now you know why!






Chinese New Year Learning Activities - Stories

The Story of the Chinese Zodiac

What animal are you?

(Note: If you are born in January or February, you will need to check when New Year's Day was in your birth year! For example, someone born in January in 2021 will be a Rat, because the year of the Ox does not start until February 12th.)

What Is Your Chinese Zodiac Sign? (Chinese Zodiac Chart)											
											
Rat	Ox	Tiger	Rabbit	Dragon	Snake	Horse	Sheep	Monkey	Rooster	Dog	Pig
1912	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923
1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935
1936	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947
1948	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959
1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971
1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
2032	2033	2034	2035	2036	2037	2038	2039	2040	2041	2042	2043

from: <https://www.travelchinaguide.com/>

**People born under a certain animal in the Chinese Zodiac are said to have certain characteristics.
Read about your animal and see if this is true for you!**

Rat 鼠 (shu): Clever, curious and funny but greedy and motivated by money. Best friends with dragon and monkey.

Ox 牛 (niu): Loyal, hard working, trusting and serious but sometimes not sure of themselves. Best friends with rooster and snake.

Tiger 虎 (hu): Brave, intelligent and generous but stubborn and intense. Best friends with horse or dog.

Rabbit 兔 (tu): Gentle, friendly and considerate but timid and indecisive. Best friends with goat and pig.

Dragon 龍 (long): confident, romantic, generous and strong leaders but short tempered. Best friends with monkey and rat.

Snake 蛇 (she): sociable, graceful and determined but jealous and suspicious. Best friends with rooster and ox.

Horse 馬 (ma): Active, positive and easy-going but impatient and outspoken. Best friends with dog or tiger.

Sheep 羊 (yang): Creative, soft-hearted and kind but shy and pessimistic. Best friends with pig and rabbit.

Monkey 猴 (hou): Sociable, energetic and enthusiastic but jealous and arrogant. Best friends with rat and dragon.

Rooster 雞 (ji): Ambitious, honest, observant but want to be the centre of attention. Best friends with ox and snake.

Dog 狗 (gou): Brave, loyal and responsible but impatient and emotional. Best friends with tiger and horse.

Pig 豬 (zhu): Good-mannered, outgoing and popular but easily taken advantage of. Best friends with rabbit and goat.

Chinese New Year Learning Activities - Stories

Now you have read the new year stories, here are some ideas to have fun with them!



Make a play

Act out the stories as if they were a play. Decide who gets the different roles: Nian, the villagers, the Jade Emperor and so on. Collect props to help you.

Make a picture book

Write out the stories and create illustrations. Perhaps write the stories as if they were for young children.

Make a comic

Try making a comic strip of the stories.

Make a stop-motion movie

You can use free apps on a phone or tablet to do that. Try using Lego or other figures you might have at home!

Re-write it in your own words

Try re-writing the stories in your own words, or tell them to another person.

Tell the same story from another point of view

For example, What did it feel like to be Nian? What did it feel like to be the cat?

Translate them

Do you know another language? Try telling the stories in that language!

Use this space to plan your work.



Chinese New Year Learning Activities - Crafts and Activities

Getting ready for New Year - It's time to clean the house!

Many families get ready for the new year by cleaning the house from top to bottom before New Year's eve. Dusting, scrubbing, washing, sweeping—no corner is left untouched—because a clean house represents a fresh start and it symbolizes cleaning out bad luck. Never clean the house on New Year's Day! It would be like sweeping the good luck away!

Why not try cleaning your house! To make it more fun, try this craft:

Make a broom out of recycled plastic bottles

Put up some decorations

You will see lots of red and gold decorations around at Chinese New Year. Decorations are a traditional part of Chinese New Year and include posters and signs, lanterns, lucky knots, beautiful flowers and more.

Make a Chinese Lantern

Red lanterns, particularly circular ones, are seen everywhere at New Year as they symbolize good luck, family reunion, prosperity and blessings.

Materials:

- Red construction paper, cardstock or Chinese red envelopes
- Scissors
- Tape or stapler

1/Fold the construction paper in half lengthways.

2/With the folded side on the bottom, make cuts up to the other edge as shown:



3/Open up the paper and roll it round so the two shorter sides meet. Stick the sides with the tape or use the stapler.

4/Create a handle by attaching a smaller length of paper across the top from one side to the other.

Create Spring Couplets

These are 2 lines of poetry traditionally written in black ink on red paper. They give good wishes for the coming year and are usually taped on either side of a doorway with a horizontal one above the door.

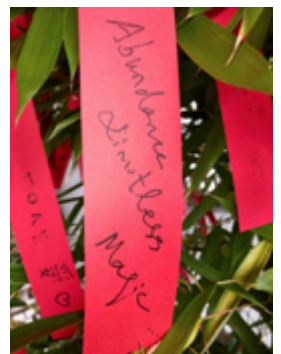
Try making some New Year wishes of your own:

Materials:

- Red paper cut into rectangles
- Black markers
- Optional: tape or string for displaying
- Optional: Chinese characters to copy or trace (available online)

1.Think of wishes, dreams or messages of goodwill you would like to express on your spring couplet.

2.Write on your red paper. Hang them around a doorway, or on bamboo branches or on other trees.



Chinese New Year Learning Activities - Crafts and Activities

Give cards and gifts

People like to send New Year cards to send greetings to people especially if they are not going to see them during the festive season.

Make a New Year card

Try decorating your card with a picture of the zodiac animal of the year! Is it an Ox year, or a Tiger year?

Here is a link to some animal colouring templates: [Animal colouring template](#)

There are many ideas and templates online. We like this one: [Pop-up card template](#)

You can print out and use the New Year card on page 12 to send to your family and friends. Fold the page at the dotted line and write your message inside. (Note the dotted line may not be at the half-way point, depending on your printer margin settings)

Make and give Red Envelopes

During Chinese New Year, red envelopes are typically given to young or unmarried children as gifts by elders. There's money inside! The red symbolizes good luck and fends off the bad.

There are rules for receiving them: Red envelopes are always given and received with both hands, and should never be opened in the presence of the giver. Always say thank you or give New Year greetings to the giver.

Red envelopes are easily available in Asian supermarkets and online. You could also make your own!

At the Garden we like this version of the craft. In their version the artists use gold glitter glue to make decorations on the red packets but you can also use black marker.

[Red envelope craft](#)



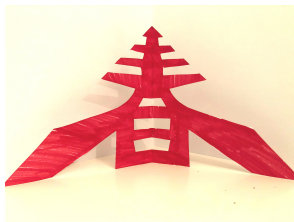
Create your own paper cutting

The ancient folk art of paper cutting involves creating designs and cutting them out of red paper to display on windows. At New Year, designs usually include the good luck 'fu' symbol or other characters and pictures to represent the festive time of year.

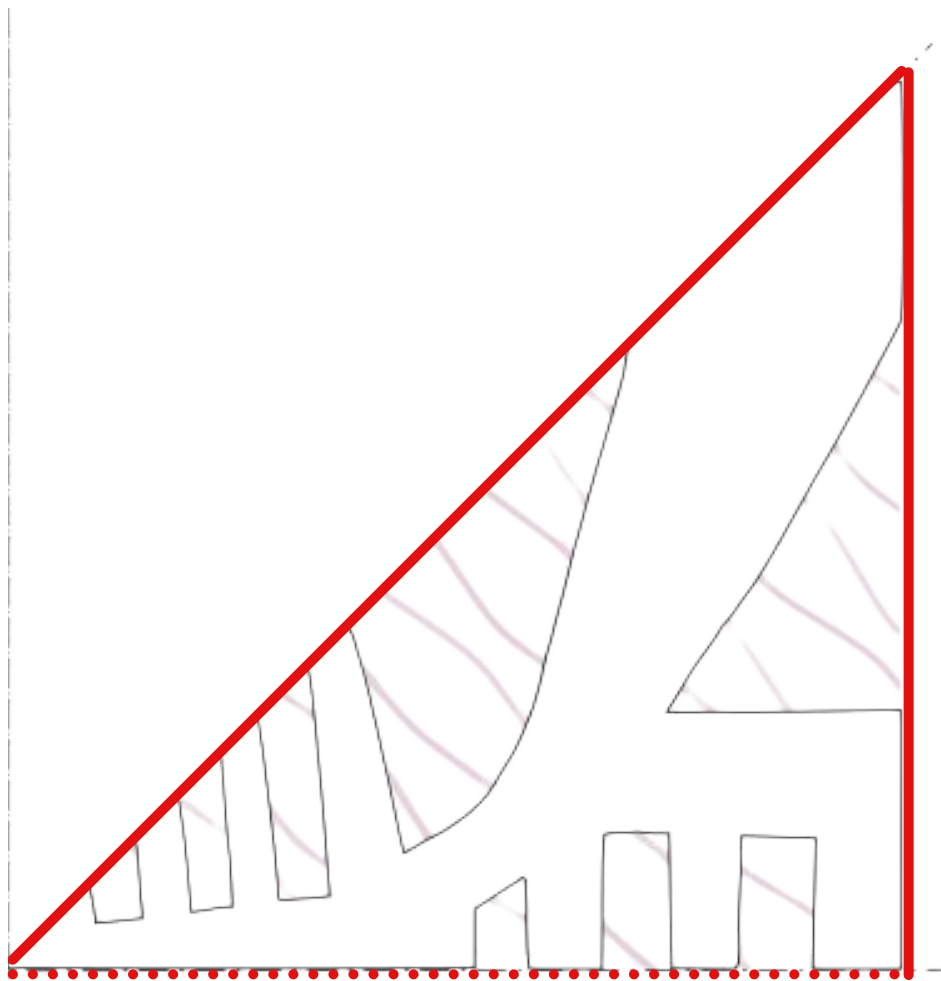


In China, the New Year festival is known as the Spring festival. You will find a template for the Chinese character for Spring on page 11. This looks best if cut out on red paper.

1. Print the page and cut out around the outer red lines to make a triangle shape. This is your template and is HALF of the character.
2. Fold a piece of paper (red origami paper works well) and line up the dotted line along the fold.
3. Holding your template firmly on the red paper, cut out the shaded areas.
4. Take away the template and unfold the paper. It should look the same on both sides, and just like the picture on the left. The paper cutting may be able to stand up if you use strong paper, or you can tape it on to a window.



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Happy New Year! 新年快樂

Chinese New Year Learning Activities - Crafts and Activities

Make a Dragon

You often see Dragon dances at New Year. Dragons bring good luck and represent wisdom, power and wealth.

Dragon dances involve many people who move the long body of the dragon. Moves are flowing and sinuous to echo the snake-like movements of a dragon

Try making this dragon from the Crayola website

Watch a dragon dance in the Vancouver Chinese New Year parade. The dragon dance is around the 1:22 min mark.

Dragon Dance



Put on a Lion Dance parade!

You will see many lion dances at New Year! Lions are considered to be protectors and lion dances and loud noises are believed to scare away monsters, like Nian, and other bad things. Some stories about Nian even say that the lion dance was invented by the villagers to scare away Nian when he visited each year.

Traditional lion dances involve two people, one person moving the head and one person forming the body of the lion. Moves come from Chinese martial arts. Why not make a lion dance parade of your own! You will need a lion head to wave around and some noisy toys to make loud sounds to scare the bad luck away.

Chinese lion craft

Traditional Chinese rattle drum craft

Maracas using paper cups

Watch a traditional Lion Dance group



Celebrate with food and family!

Food and family are central to Chinese New Year celebrations.

Here are some ideas that you can do to make food and family a part of your celebration:

- Order Chinese food. Note that many Chinese restaurants close around the New Year holiday.
- Try making some simple Chinese New Year noodles!
- Eat a special meal with your family. Wear your best clothes (new, red silk clothes are traditional) and decorate the room or the table with Chinese New Year decorations.
- Visit your relatives and friends and take some treats and snacks with you. Try bringing oranges for happiness and wealth; flowers such as narcissus for good luck; Chinese tea in a beautiful package or, for children, red envelopes with money inside!
- If you can't visit relatives, call them or send a card. It is also a nice time of year to remember family members who are no longer with us.

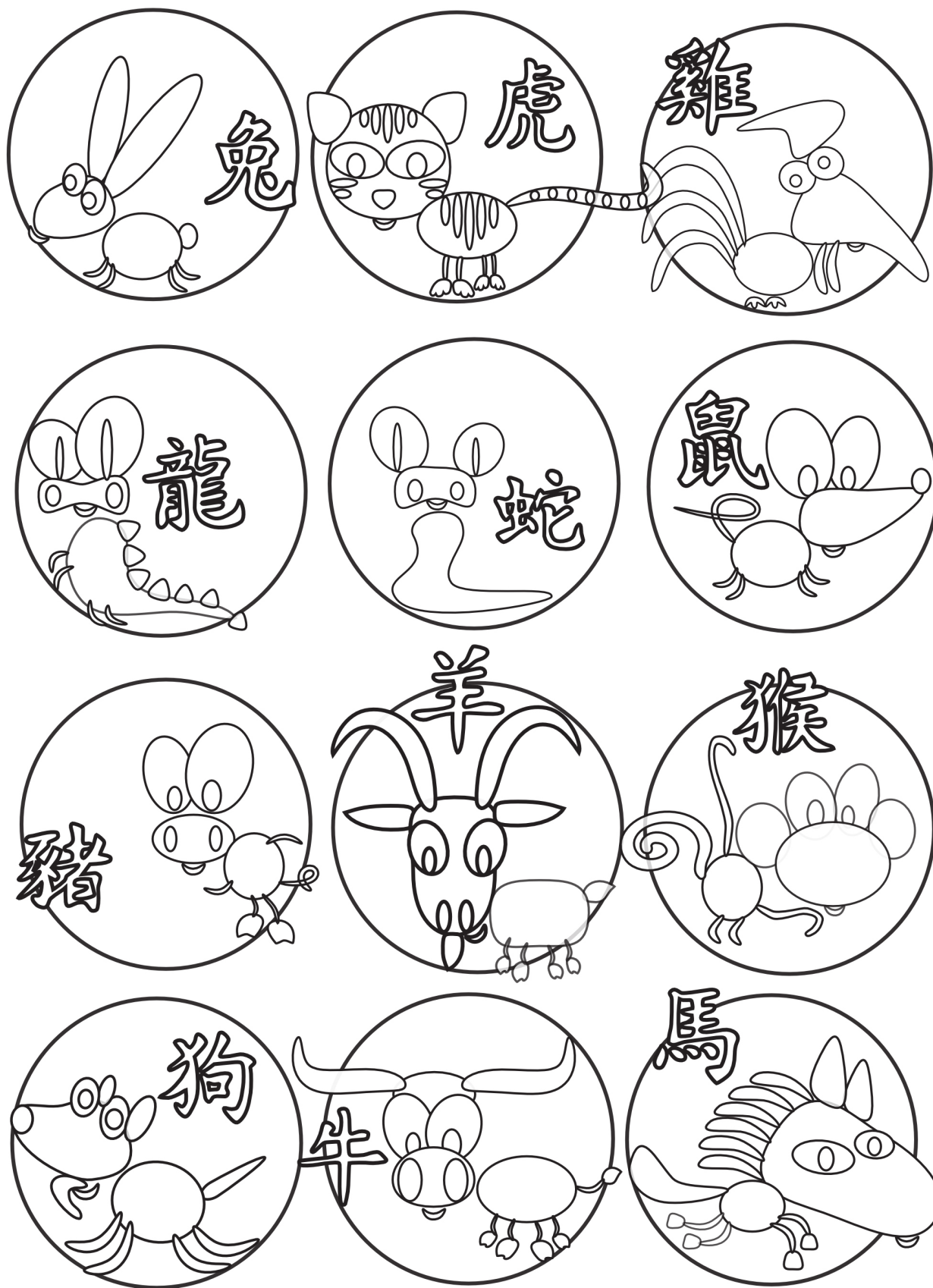


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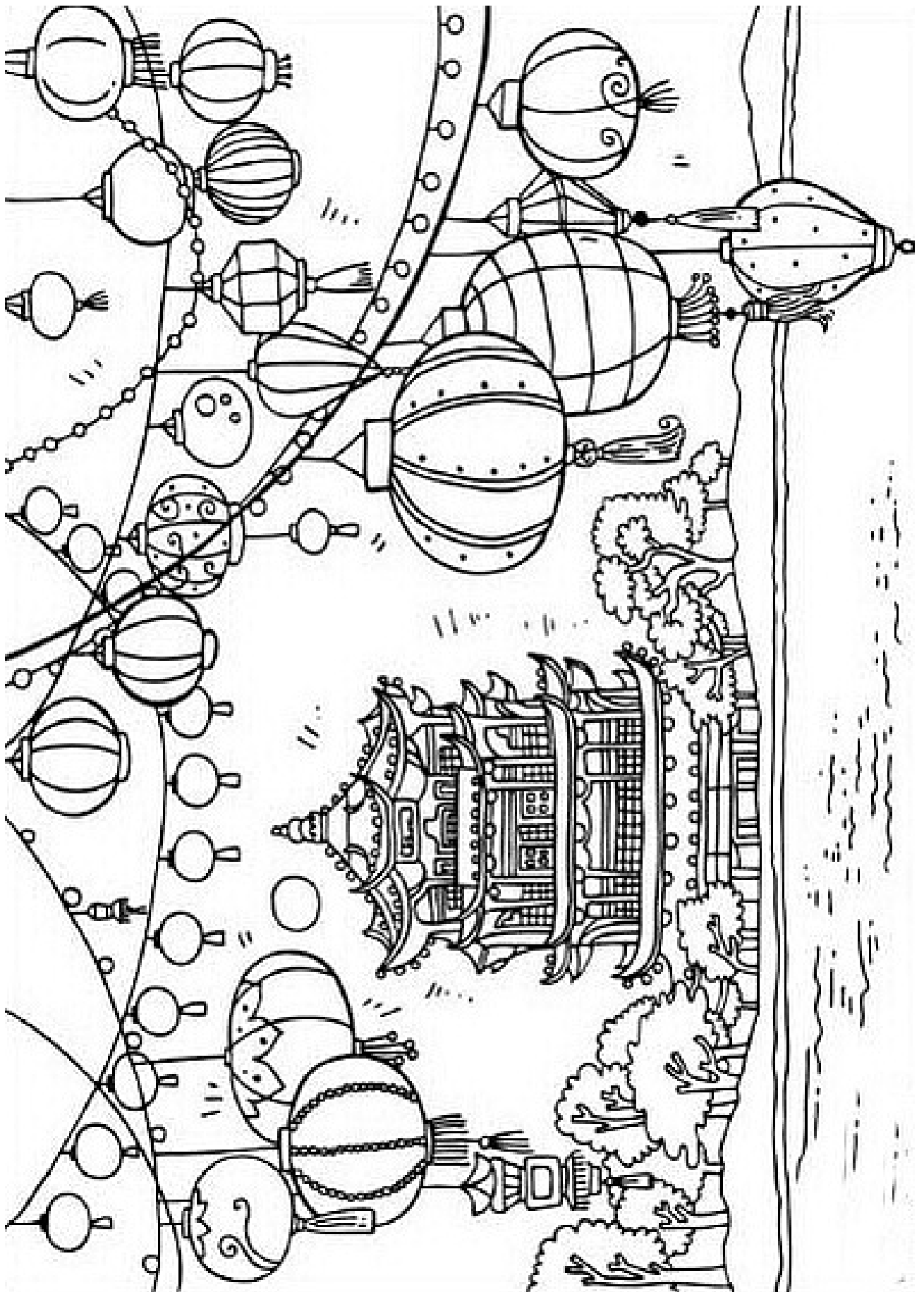


Chinese New Year Learning Activities - Colouring Pages

Chinese New Year 春節



Chinese New Year 春節



Chinese New Year Learning Activities - Websites and Resources

Like festivals and celebrations all over the world, Chinese New Year is celebrated differently from family to family, region to region, even country to country.

Chinese New Year in French:

<https://www.ccc-paris.org/decouverte-de-la-chine/la-fete-du-printemps-2/>

<https://www.travelchinaguide.com/essential/holidays/chinese-new-year.htm>

<https://chinesenewyear.net/>

<https://www.cbc.ca/kidsnews/post/chinese-new-year-kids-style>

Great Race Story video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lw0adpGLldk>

Nian story video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EZM5l-g4Kng>

Books

Chinese New Year by Jen Sookfong Lee

Vancouver author and broadcaster Jen Sookfong Lee recalls her childhood and weaves family stories into the history, traditions and evolution of Chinese New Year.

Chinese Zodiac Animals by Sanmu Tang and Zhu Jingwen

This colourful, small format book teaches readers about the characteristics of their Chinese zodiac signs, conveyed by fun cartoon illustrations.

Nian the Chinese new Year Dragon by Virginia Loh-Hagan

A beautifully illustrated re-telling of the Nian story

Po Po's Lucky Chinese New Year by Virginia Loh-Hagan

A story of two children who learn about the traditions of Chinese New Year from their Grandmother who comes from China to teach them.

Other book ideas:

<https://vancouverchinesegarden.com/product-category/books/>

<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/6-beautiful-kids-books-to-celebrate-lunar-new-year>



Chinese New Year Learning Activities - Websites and Resources

Craft Ideas

<https://www.chineseamericanfamily.com/chinese-new-year/>

Crafts, stories, book recommendations, recipes and more in this comprehensive guide.

<https://www.china-family-adventure.com/chinese-new-year-crafts.html>

Craft ideas, including lanterns, red envelopes and dragons

Dragon craft:

<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/play/view/printable-dragon-craft-for-lunar-new-year>

<https://artsycraftsymom.com/the-best-60-chinese-new-year-crafts-and-activities-for-kids/#60> Chinese New Year Art Crafts for kids

Buying Guide

<https://www.chinasprout.com/shop>

<https://vancouverchinesegarden.com/gift-shop/>

<https://bamboovillage.ca/>

A favourite Vancouver Chinatown store.

<https://www.tntsupermarket.com/>

T&T supermarket is a good place for food and decorations.

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