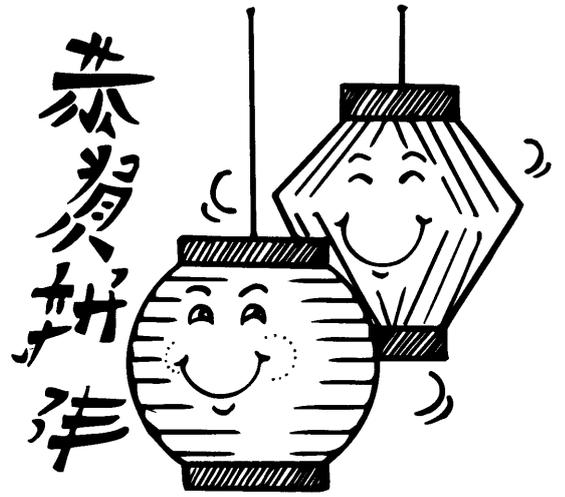


Chinese New Year!

For the Chinese, the Chinese New Year is perhaps the most colorful and joyous event of the year. It marks the beginning of a new cycle of life and symbolizes both the end of winter and the coming of spring. This holiday is celebrated for about three weeks, beginning with the new moon of the lunar calendar. The New Year may fall anywhere between the middle of January and early March.



The last days of the old year are very busy for Chinese families. All of the food for the festive celebrations must be prepared in advance. It is considered bad luck to use a knife or sharp tool during the first few days of the New Year, for fear of "cutting" the New Year's luck. All debts must be paid and accounting books brought up to date before the end of the year.

Cleaning the house is especially important during this time. Evil spirits must be dusted and swept out of the house. After all of the evil spirits are chased away, it is time to say goodbye to the Kitchen God, Tsao Chuen, whose spirit has been residing in the home during the past year. He takes notes on the family and reports his finding to the Jade Emperor. On the twenty-third day of the twelfth month, the family honors the Kitchen God with a farewell dinner. The meal usually consists of sweet foods in hopes of encouraging him to report only kind things to the Emperor. After the ceremonial feast, children light firecrackers to keep evil spirits away until Tsao Chuen's return on New Year's Eve.

On the eve of the New Year after all preparations are ready, the outer door to the house is sealed with red paper to prevent good luck from leaving the house.

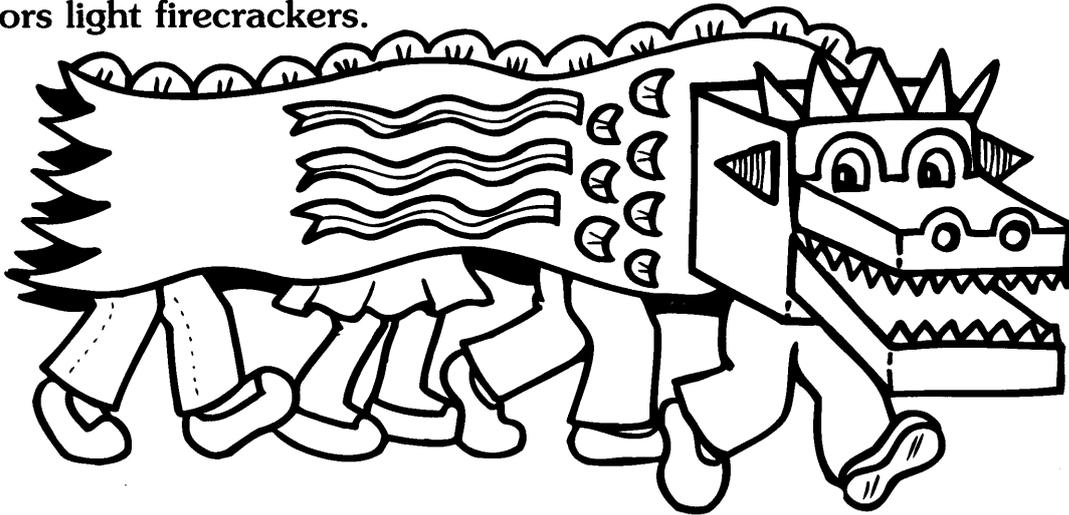
New Year's Day is a time for the entire family to gather for a feast of rice pudding, vegetarian dishes and pastries. The New Year marks the birthday of every family member. Before midnight, children receive good luck money in even-numbered amounts, wrapped in small red envelopes. Everyone wears their newest clothes. Only kind words must be thought or spoken.

The Feast of the Lanterns is celebrated on the third day of the New Year. Lanterns of all shapes, sizes and colors decorate the streets and homes. Many cities hold fantastic parades led by a huge dragon, the symbol of good luck. The dragon is made of bamboo and covered with silk and paper. More than fifty people have been known to support dragon as it weaves up and down the streets. Musicians, dancers and acrobats accompany the dragon in the parade. The festive celebration ends with a great fireworks display.

New Year's Dragon!

On the third day of the New Year, the Feast of Lanterns is held throughout China. Lanterns of all shapes, colors and sizes are hung along the streets and in the homes of families. The New Year's Dragon leads a wonderful parade down the city's busiest street.

According to Chinese legend, the Dragon is not a horrible monster but rather a protector against evil spirits. He is the symbol of goodness and strength. This great New Year's Dragon is made of silk and paper and is brightly painted. The head is a large mask, made of papier-mache and bamboo. The men of the town put on the Dragon costume and weave up and down the street, puffing smoke as spectators light firecrackers.



Your students can make their own New Year's Dragon with imagination and a few simple materials.

Cover a large cardboard box with brightly colored paper. Cut another box or two box halves in half and cover them with paper as well. Insert the two halves into an open end of the first box and glue in place, as shown in the illustration. Decorate with colored paper, glitter, tempera paint, etc.

Long sections of colored butcher paper can be used for the Dragon's tail. Staple the top edge of two sections of butcher paper and add a spiny paper ridge or fringe. Glue the tail to the back of the Dragon's head. (The Dragon's tail can be made as long as you like, depending on how many children will be inside the costume.) Decorate the tail in the same way as the head.

Children ringing bells and tapping tambourines can provide the music for your parade. Other children can hold class-made paper lanterns during the procession. No doubt about it, your Chinese New Year parade will be the hit of the school.