

My 50+ All-Time Favorite Chinese Books

## 53 Of My All-Time Favorite Books For Chinese New Year

Take a magic carpet ride with me to the land of China and experience their exciting culture through a storybook.

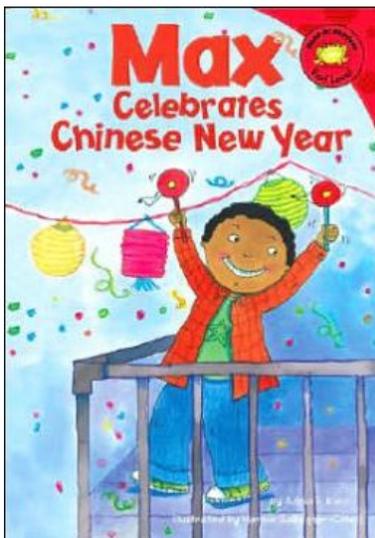
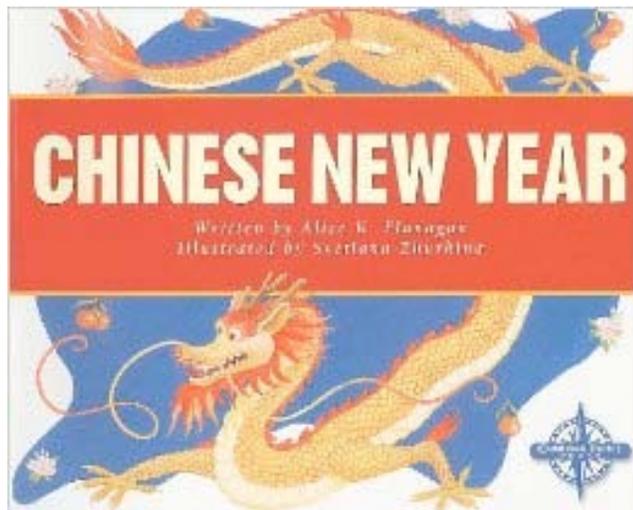
My bibliographies are usually an alphabetical list of my all-time favorites, but because not everyone is familiar with books about China and Chinese New Year, I spent hours making this into an annotated bibliography that would give you some background. Hopefully, it will help you make choices of what you want to share with your children.

Amidst a huge stack of Chinese-themed books, I sorted out my favorites; because they all had their virtues, the pile still remained pretty high.

They are kid-tested and teacher approved, so I think there's something here for everyone.

I've tried to include some excellent non-fiction, which is great to give youngsters a bit of background, along with some wonderful folktales similar to our fairytales.

**Chinese New Year**, by Alice Flanagan, is non-fiction and filled with a simple history of the Chinese New Year and how the holiday is currently celebrated.



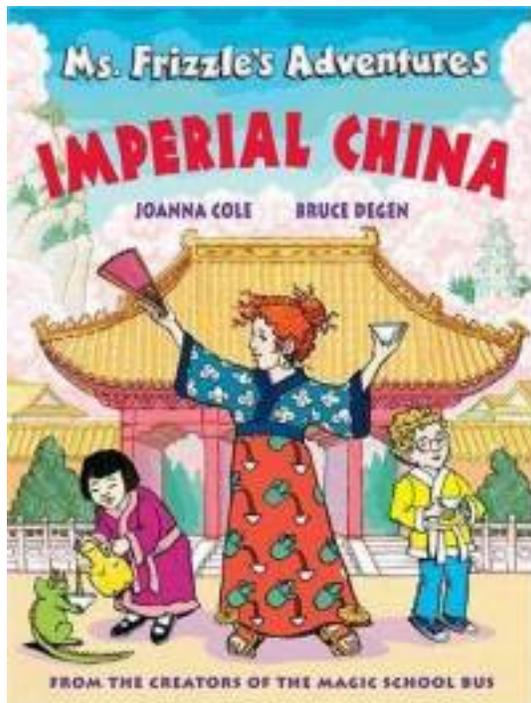
**Max Celebrates Chinese New Year**, by Adria Klein, is a story about Max and his friend Lily. They celebrate Chinese New Year with flowers, oranges and special candy. I like this book because you learn a few more of the traditional customs that are not in other books.

You can hear this book being read on YouTube:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-xAUuCQCKE>



While researching video links for stories, I stumbled upon [The Story Of Nian](#). I don't have this book in my collection, but I found a YouTube video that is quite good.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=guwPTBmuiN8>

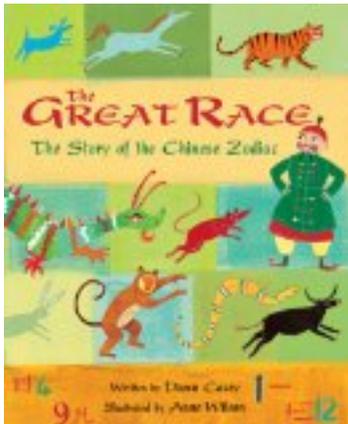
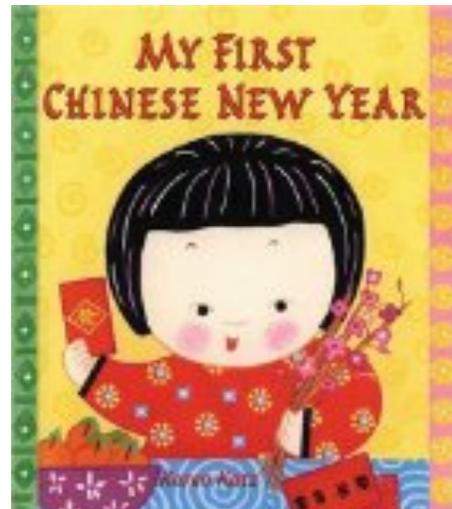


[Ms. Frizzle's Adventures: Imperial China](#) by Joanna Cole, takes readers from a present day Chinese New Year celebration, to the rice fields and palaces of Imperial China.

This adventure starts at a Chinese New Year's festival in Chinatown and walks back in time, so students can experience ancient China as well.

As with all of the Magic School Bus adventures, it's packed with interesting facts, including many about Chinese inventions.

[My First Chinese New Year](#), by Karen Katz, is a simple and sweet story told from a Chinese child's perspective as she prepares for the holiday, describing in more detail the history behind it. There are board book versions appropriate for very young readers.

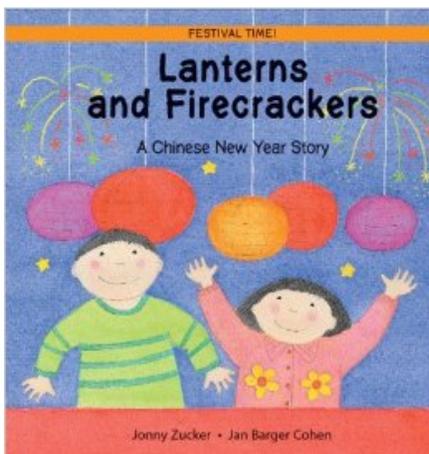
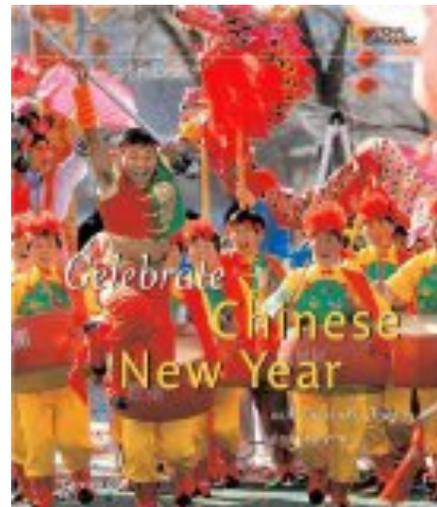


[Great Race: The Story of the Chinese Zodiac](#), by Dawn Casey, is a story about the 13 Chinese animals that come to the river to join in the Emperor's race. The one who wins will have the honor of naming the New Year. Since there are only 12 in the Chinese zodiac, what happened to the last place animal?

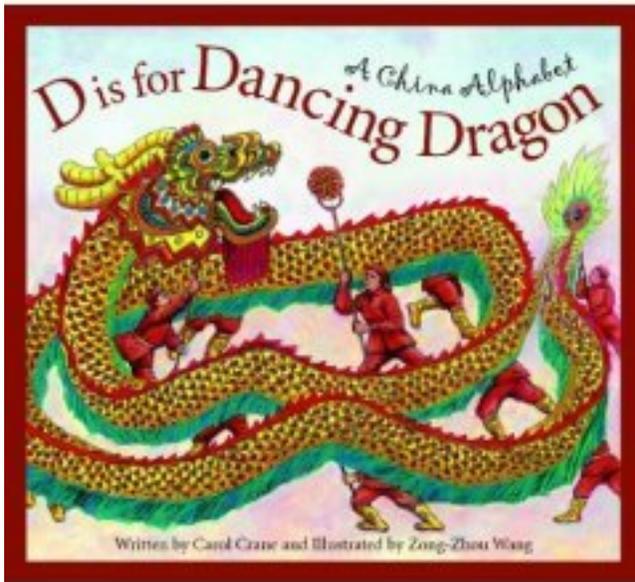
There are quite a few versions of this folktale, but this is one of the best.

[Holidays Around the World](#), by Carolyn Otto, is a non-fiction book, filled with 25 exceptional photographs that National Geographic has become famous for.

The book discusses the historical and cultural aspects of Chinese New Year, which is celebrated by over one billion people in China, as well as others worldwide.

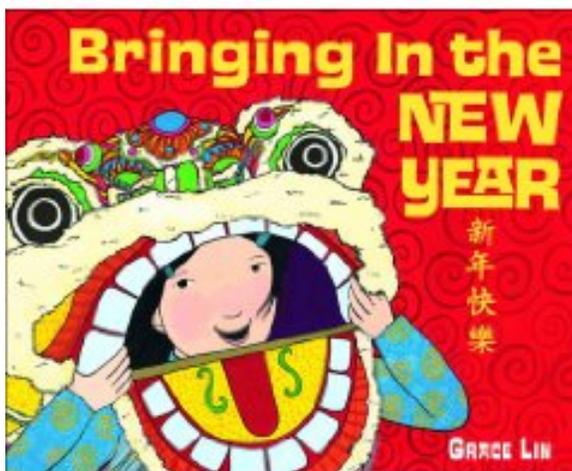
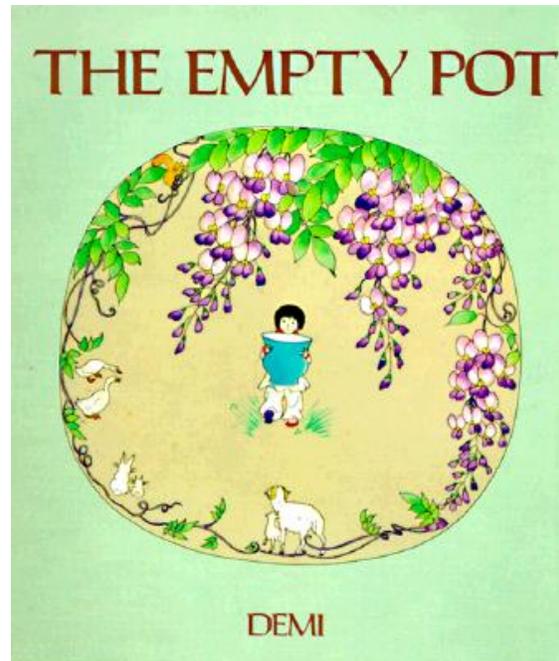


[Lanterns and Firecrackers](#) by Jonny Zucker, is a simply-told story of the holiday's origins and a description of the festivities that are part of it, as seen through the eyes of a Chinese family as they get ready to celebrate.



[D is for Dancing Dragon](#), by Carol Crane, is an excellent alphabet book, with outstanding illustrations by Zong-Zhou Wang. It goes into details about Chinese things like chopsticks, lanterns and pandas.

[The Empty Pot](#) by Demi, with lovely illustrations, is a fable about a young Chinese boy, and a contest to become the next emperor. The intent is to show the importance of honesty.

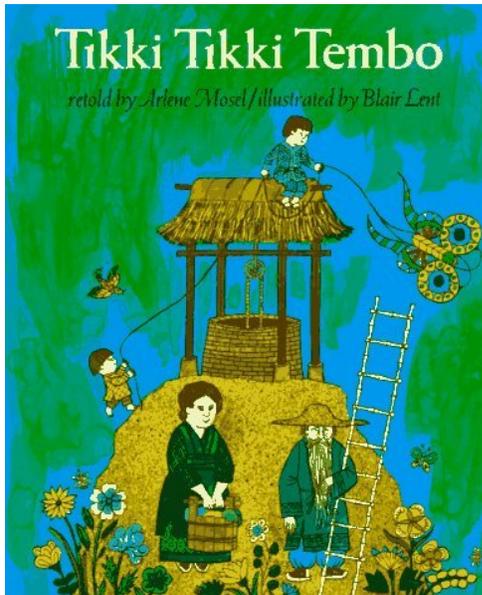


[Bringing in the New Year](#) by Grace Lin explains Chinese New Year and some of the customs.

The illustrations are bright and colorful. My favorite part is the last page that folds out to reveal a huge dragon.



Two pages of facts at the end of the book provide information about symbols and traditions related to the New Year, including the importance of the dragon.

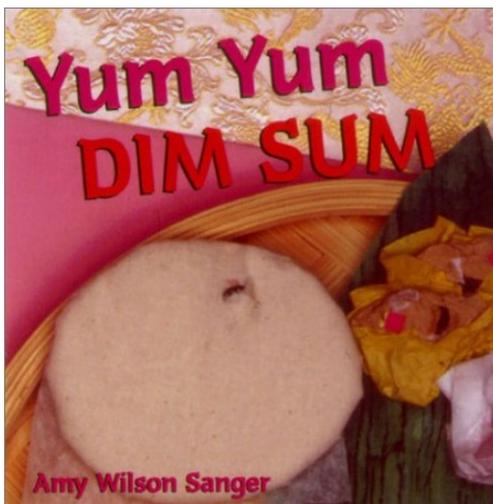


[Tikki Tikki Tembo](#), by Arlene Mosel, is a classic Chinese fable and my personal favorite. My Y5's are delighted when I repeatedly say his very long name as we read the story.

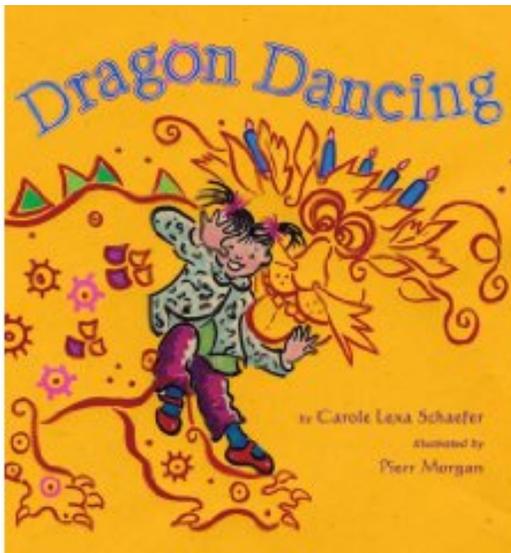
There's an excellent animated version on YouTube that they enjoy as well.

I've listed the link below.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wOHngXg6Fts&list=PLdnSJLAgYSJOop4-punH8olYWfbvzf0hG&index=1>



[Yum Yum Dim Sum](#), by Amy Wilson Sanger, includes the bright color red with splashes of pink, that are sure to be a hit with little girls. Further appeal is in the quick rhyming text as the story explains Dim Sum. Another plus is a list of Chinese words for all the items mentioned in the book like rice, tarts and tea.

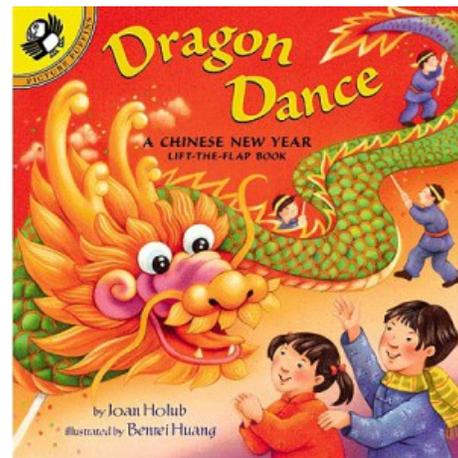


[Dragon Dancing](#) by Carole Lexa Schaefer, highlights the imagination of preschoolers. Part of the charm of this book, is that it takes place in a school setting.

After reading a book about dragons with their teacher, the kids decide to make their own dragon out of colored paper, yarn, feathers, and themselves.

Out the door and onto the playground, their imaginations take them over snowy mountains, tall forests and lovely meadows. They finally return to school for a special birthday treat.

Another Dragon Dance book that has its own special charm, is [Dragon Dance](#), by Joan Holub. My Y5's especially enjoy it, because it is a lift-the-flap book that explains Chinese customs such as the Dragon Dance. The rhyming text makes a great read aloud.



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[Legend of the Chinese Dragon \(English and Mandarin Chinese Edition\)](#), by Marie Sellier, Catherine Louis and Wang Fei, is a story where the Chinese children desire to end all of the tribal fighting, so they create a dragon that incorporates all of the tribes different animals. The book is unusual, in that it includes traditional Chinese characters.

[This Next New Year](#), by Janet Wong, is a story of hope and the excitement of a new year.

Wong presents the reasons behind Chinese rituals in a way that young children can understand. Her simple rhyming couplets make the text lyrical.

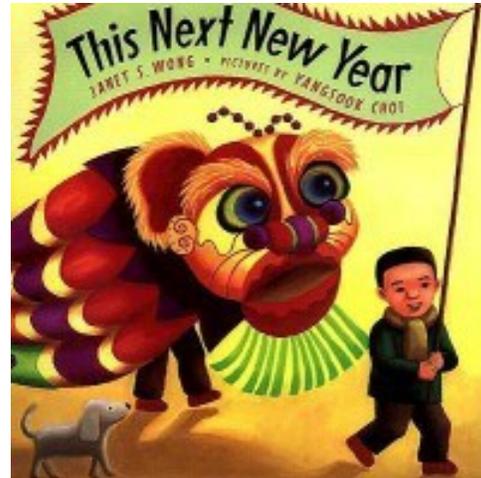
Coming on the heels of my unit on Martin Luther King, this book also celebrates diversity, so my students can make comparisons.

Even though we all come from different ethnic backgrounds, everyone can celebrate Chinese New Year.

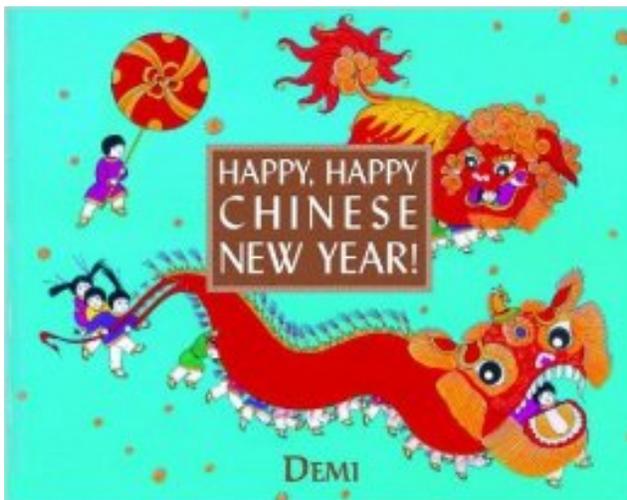
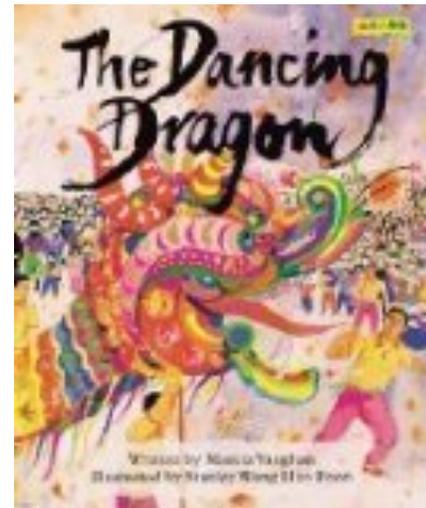
Here's what I mean: The main character is half Chinese and half Korean. His best friend Glen is French and German; he celebrates Chinese New Year with Thai food takeout. His other friend Evelyn, is part Hopi and Mexican. She enjoys celebrating the holiday with her neighbor who came from Singapore.

An informational author's note at the end gives more insight.

[The Dancing Dragon](#), by Marcia Vaughan, goes through all sorts of Chinese traditions. It's unusual in that it unfolds to reveal the parade, complete with a Chinese dragon.



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[Happy, Happy Chinese New Year](#), by Demi, explains the traditions behind the Spring Festival, as well as the origins and significance of each Chinese New Year tradition, including the

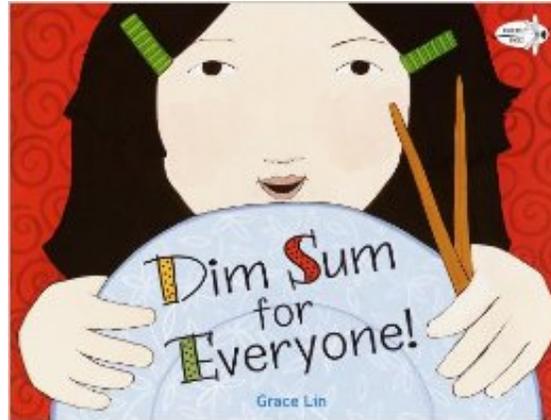
symbolism behind the food, firecrackers etc.

The Chinese start by cleaning (sweeping out the old) and preparing themselves (getting a hair cut, paying and collecting debts etc.)

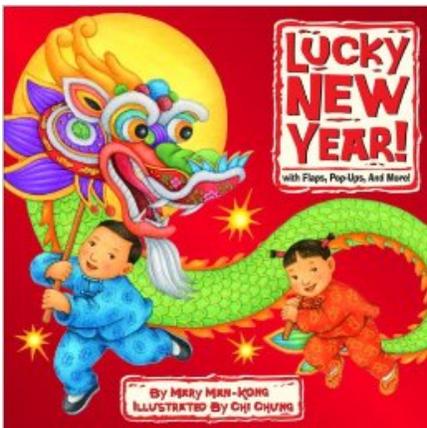
On the eve of the new moon, they have a special feast. It's time to celebrate with fireworks, parades, lion dances, and lanterns. The illustrations include small, labeled pictures that identify things associated with the holiday.

**Dim Sum For Everyone**, by Grace Lin, celebrates cultural customs and the delight of eating.

In English, dim sum means *“little hearts,”* or *“touches the heart,”* but to the main character, (a young girl) dim sum means delicious!



Her family visits a restaurant, and chooses a few of their favorite dishes: dumplings, cakes, buns, and tarts. A fun tradition is to share their food with each other, so that everyone gets a taste of everything.



**Lucky New Year**, by Mary Man-Kong, shows the traditions of how children celebrate.

The book features especially fun things: Children can scratch and sniff oranges, turn the wheel to find their Chinese animal year, and lift the flap to reveal some lucky money.

They'll also enjoy the last page where a big colorful dragon pops up to wish them a Happy New Year that's filled with wisdom, wealth, and happiness.

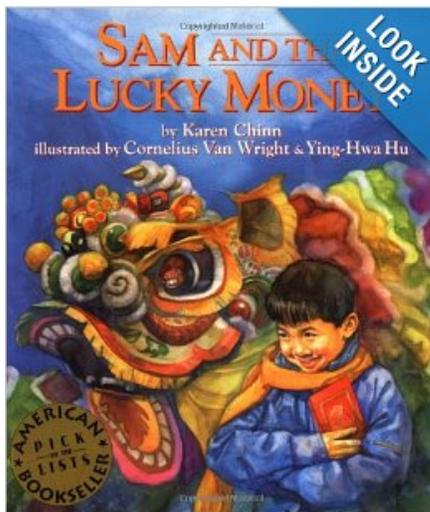
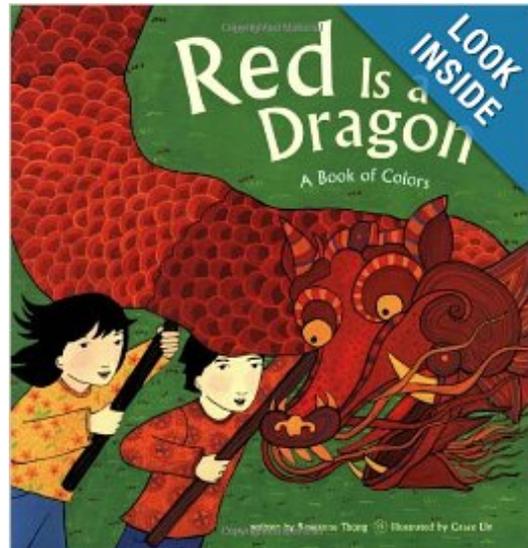
**Fortune Cookie Fortunes**, by Grace Lin includes a brief history of fortune cookies. *“Crack, crack, crack! The cookies snap open and the family's fortunes are*



*revealed. Mei Mei wants to know how hers will come true. Jie Jie scoffs—they never come true. But Pacy isn't so sure.”* I follow this story up by giving each one of my Y5's their own fortune cookie. I help them read their fortunes and we discuss our opinions about such things, as well as graph whether we like them or not.

**Red is a Dragon**, by Roseanne Thong, is an excellent book for reviewing colors. The illustrations are brilliant.

The story is told through the eyes of a little girl in Chinatown. Dragons and firecrackers are red; the taxis are yellow; jade bracelets are green etc. Many of the featured items are Asian in origin, but have universal appeal.



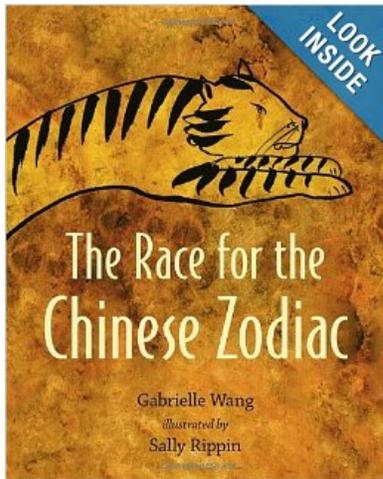
**Sam and the Lucky Money**, by Karen Chinn, featuring lovely illustrations by Cornelius Van Wright, is a tale about a Chinese boy growing up in Chinatown.

It is a New Year tradition, that children receive gifts of money that are given in red envelopes.

This year, Sam can spend it however he wishes, but when he visits a variety of stores, he's disappointed to find that everything he wants is too expensive.

He decides to forego getting something for himself, and instead gives his money to a homeless man.

**Chinese New Year**, by Donald Marx, is another non-fiction book packed with interesting information and great photographs.



**The Race For The Chinese Zodiac**, by Gabrielle Wang, is a story about the 13 animals that raced in

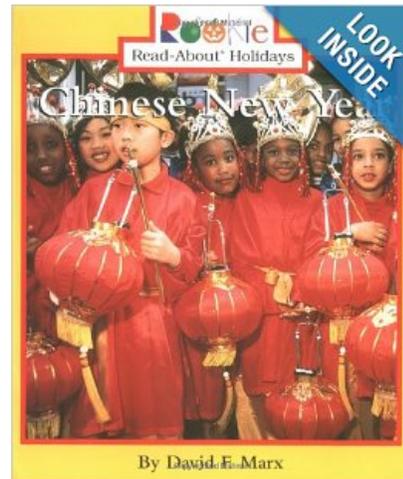
a contest that was set up by the Jade Emperor.

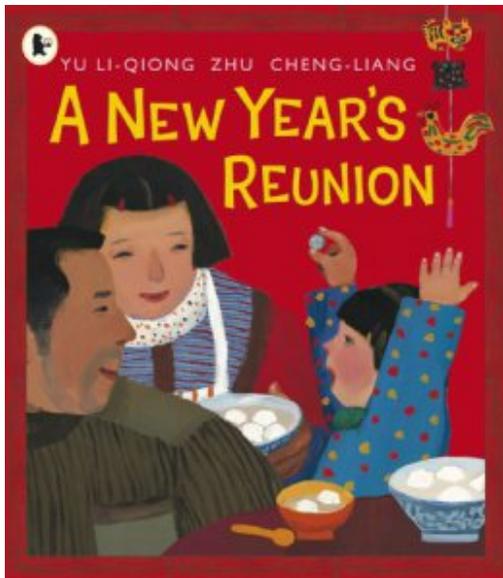
The first 12 animals that crossed the river would have a year named after them. A gong sounds and the race begins.

The order, in which the animals placed in the race, is the order that they appear on the Chinese Zodiac. The Chinese base time on a Lunar Calendar. Each year features one of these animals.

Here is a little synopsis from a book review: *Tiger leaps in the river, followed by peaceful Rabbit clutching a log. Rat and Cat climb on Ox's back, and Dog splashes in the shallows while Rooster finds a raft and takes clever Monkey and gentle Goat on board. Snake hitches a ride in Horse's mane, powerful Dragonflies over the river, and Pig plays happily in the mud. But thirteen animals are racing for only twelve places on the Zodiac. Who will be honest, and who devious? Who will help friends along the way? Who will come first — and who will miss out?*

I really like this book as an introduction to a variety of animal activities I have for my students, to help them learn about Chinese culture. I found an excellent less than 3-minute video on YouTube that animates and tells this folktale: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5aY11MpsvI>



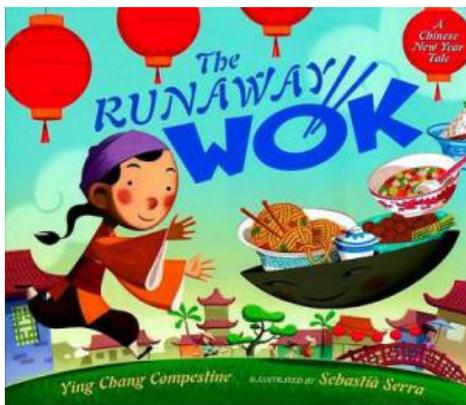


[A New Year's Reunion](#) by Yu Li-Qiong and Zhu Cheng-Liang, is about Maomao's family.

Chinese New Year is a bit like our traditional Thanksgiving celebration, in that it is the #1 holiday for people traveling to be with their families.

Christmas is a close second, but according to statistics, more people are on the road and in the air, traveling for this holiday than for any other one.

Maomao's father works far away building houses. He can only come once a year for Chinese New Year. The story tells of love, family, preparation and celebration. I usually have at least one child whose dad is in the military, so we discuss how sometimes parents have to leave their family for various reasons.

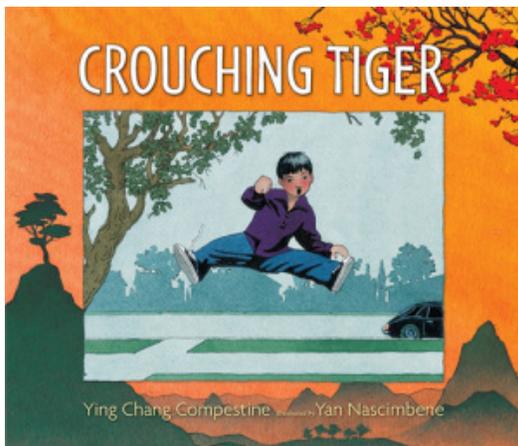
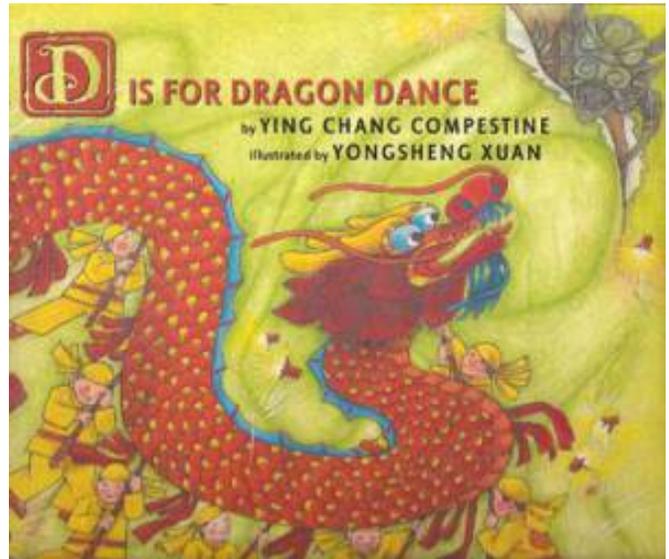


[The Runaway Wok](#) by Ying Chang Compestine is a funny story much like our fairytales Jack and the Beanstalk and The Gingerbread Man. I've also listed another similar story [The Run Away Rice Cake](#).

Here the poor family sends their son to the market to trade their last few eggs for a bag of rice. Instead, he brings back a rusty old wok.

It turns out that this was a good investment, as the wok springs to life, singing and hopping out the door returning with enough goodies for everyone to enjoy. The book includes information about the Chinese New Year plus the significance of the wok, and a recipe for stir-fried rice! If you've read *The Gingerbread Man* to your students they will quickly see the similarities and enjoy discussing them.

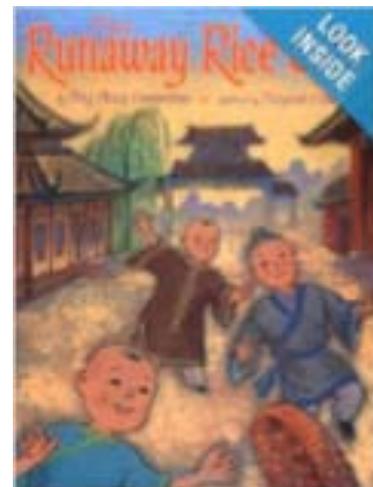
**D Is for Dragon Dance** is also by Ying Chang Compestine and is an alphabet book that features Chinese things: *F is for firecrackers, H is for haircut, L is for lanterns, all the way to Z for zodiac!* The textured, full-page illustrations are stunning. Like his other book, this one also includes a recipe. This one is for New Year's dumplings.



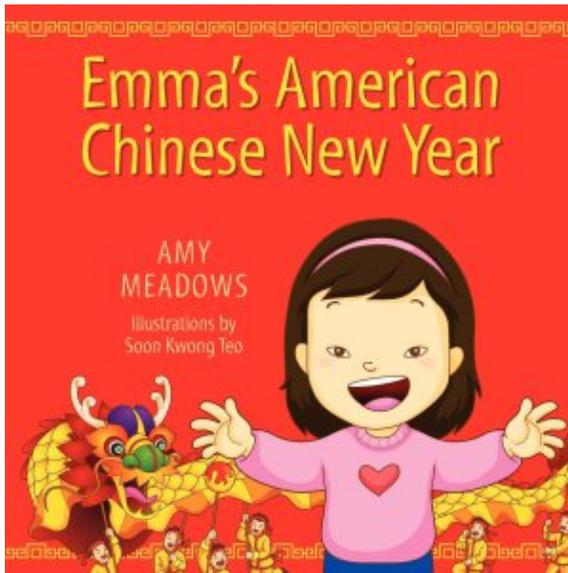
Another wonderful book by this author is **Crouching Tiger**. It's about Vinson (Ming Da) a Chinese-American boy and his grandfather who knows tai-chi. It's especially appealing to children who are interested in martial arts.

Because I did a huge unit on Gingerbread in December, where my students enjoyed all sorts of versions of The Gingerbread Man, I like to read Ying Chang Compestine's story the **Runaway Rice Cake**, at the same time I read **The Run Away Wok** listed above.

Right away your students will notice the familiar similarities, as nián-gāo runs out the door saying: *"Ai yo! I don't think so!"* Ming, Cong and Dar along with their parents chase the rice cake all over the village.



This heartwarming story conveys the importance of compassion and sharing. Tungwai Chau's soft and colorful illustrations complement the tale.

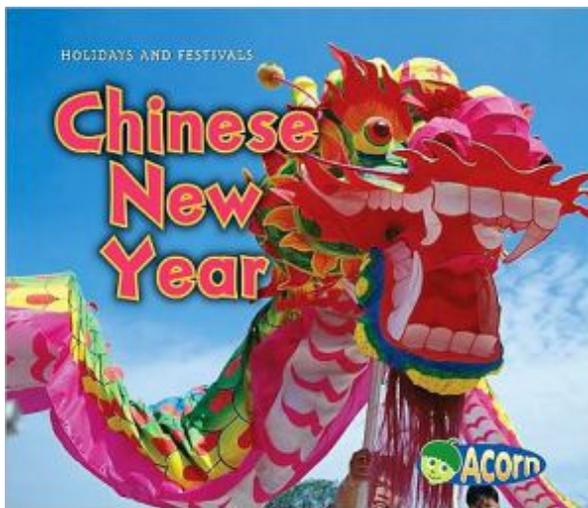


[Emma's American Chinese New Year](#), by Amy Meadows, is a story of Emma; an American family adopted her.

Every year they celebrate her heritage during Chinese New Year.

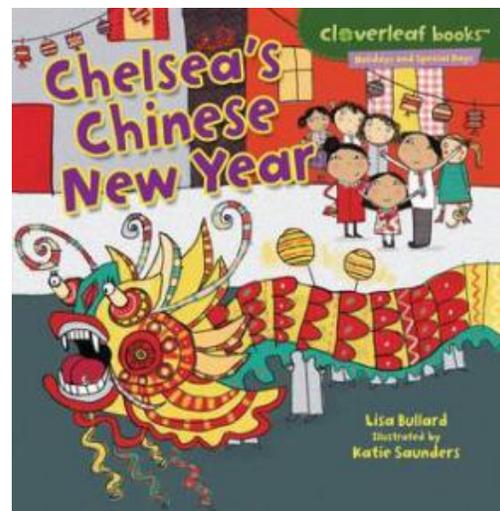
Emma happily narrates the story, and readers learn about making paper lanterns and baking moon cakes.

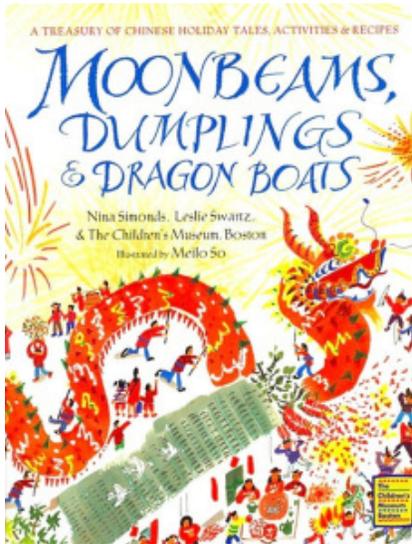
I especially enjoy the simple rhyming text, which makes it a wonderful read aloud.



[Chinese New Year](#), by Nancy Dickmann, has colorful photographs with simple captions perfect for young children. This easy read provides a great introduction to what Chinese New Year is all about.

[Chelsea's Chinese New Year](#), by Lisa Bullard, takes place the night before Chinese New Year. Chelsea's family have all gathered to talk, laugh, feast, and play games. Simple text, with colorful illustrations, makes it a fun read aloud.

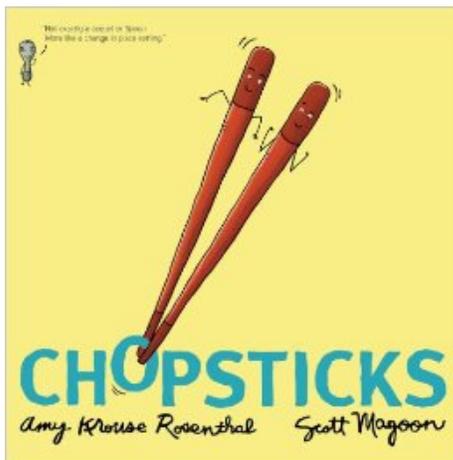
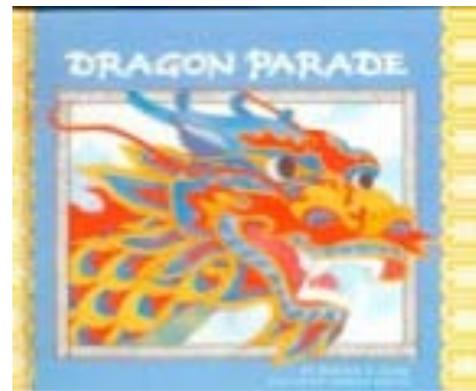




**Moonbeams, Dumplings & Dragon Boats**, by Nina Simonds, is a wonderful non-fiction book that is filled with fun facts, traditional stories, recipes, crafts, and other entertaining activities.

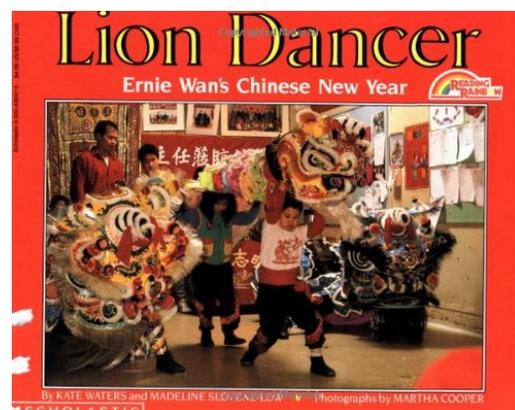
**Dragon Parade**, by Steven Chin, is based on the true story of a Chinese man, Norman Ah Sing, who moved to San Francisco and opened a grocery store.

He is excited to be in “the Land of the Golden Mountain” and invites everyone to celebrate the Lunar New Year. He helps organize the first big celebration in Chinatown in 1851, which featured the first dragon parade in San Francisco.

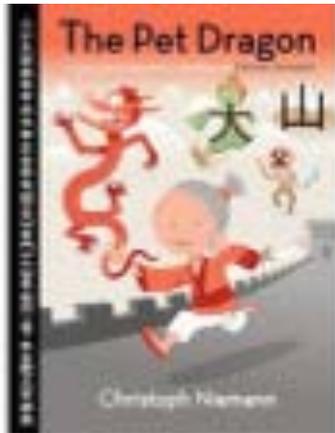


**Chopsticks** by Amy Krouse Rosenthal, is an inventive story that celebrates independence as well as the unbreakable bonds of friendship.

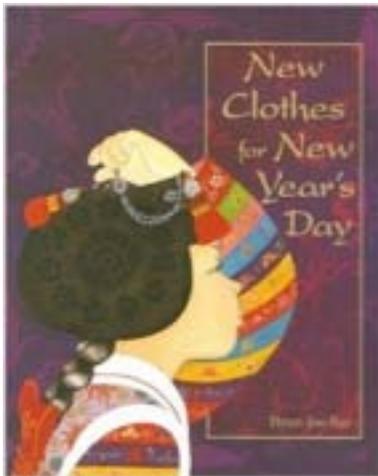
**Lion Dancer**, by Ernie Wong, is filled with awesome photographs by Martha Cooper, and is about the first Lion Dance of a young boy who lives in



New York City's Chinatown. There's a lot of information about how Ernie and his family celebrate Chinese New Year. I like this book because children can compare the celebrations in San Francisco and New York to those in China.



[The Pet Dragon](#), by Christoph Niemann, is a sweet story about a little girl, Lin, and her baby dragon that was a gift. One of the things I like about this book is the author's illustrations. Students can quite easily copy and draw their own, helping them to understand a bit about Chinese writing.

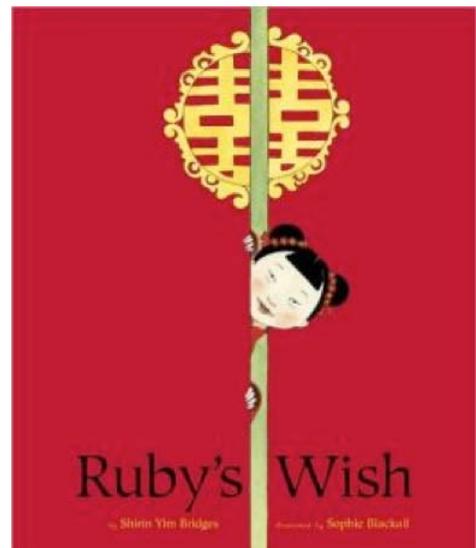


[New Clothes for New Year's Day](#), by Hyuun-joo Bae, gives background about the tradition of wearing new clothes as part of the festivities.

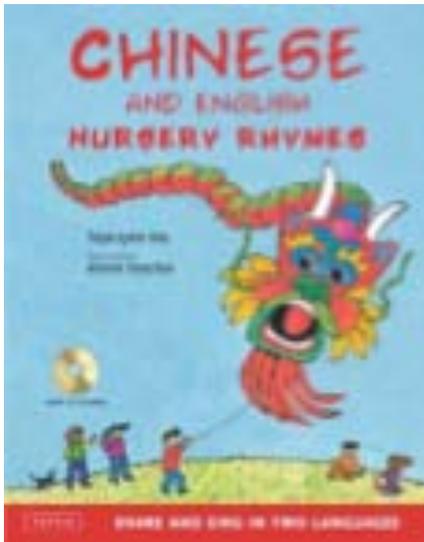
I like this story because it features a Korean girl, as she dresses and prepares to celebrate the Lunar New Year, showing another culture that celebrates in similar ways to China.

[Ruby's Wish](#) by Shirin Lim Bridges, is based on the true story of the author's grandmother.

Ruby, the main character, is not like most Chinese girls whose main goal in life was getting married. Instead, Ruby wanted to



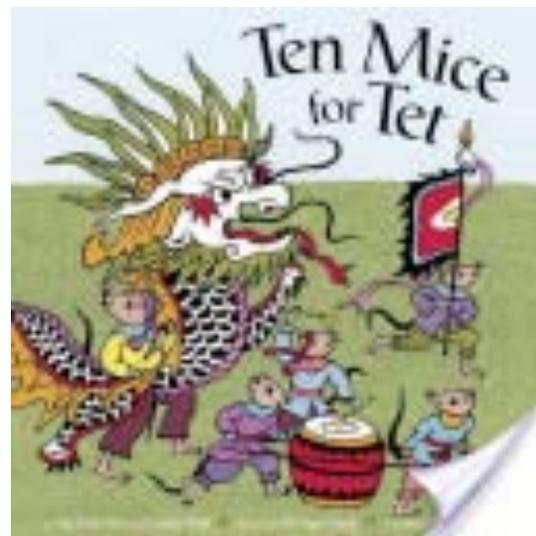
attend the university when she grew up. This was male-dominated at the time. It's an interesting tale of a young girl who has the courage to strive for more, and who has the support and encouragement of a loving family.



**Chinese and English Nursery Rhymes**, by Faye-Lynn Wu, is an interesting collection of favorite rhymes that are put in pairs.

There is one from China and another in English. It's a wonderful way to show diversity and the fact that children everywhere seem to enjoy similar things, no matter where they live. The book includes a CD as well.

**Ten Mice For Tet**, by Pegi Deitz Shea, is not a Chinese book; it's Vietnamese. I include it in this list because we have a large group of Vietnamese children attending American schools and it's nice to have something written in their language.



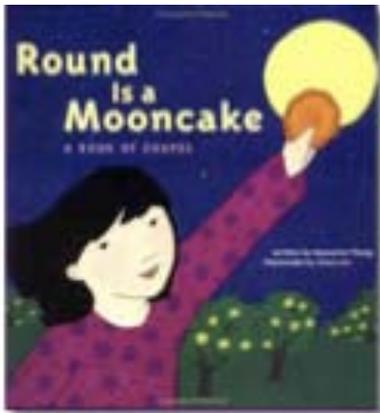
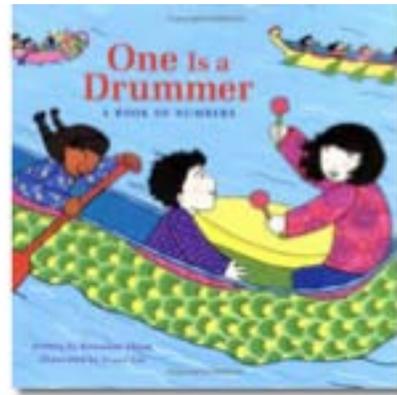
I also include it, because like China, Vietnam celebrates the Lunar New Year.

I have several activities that incorporate Chinese numbers from 0-10, so this is a nice addition that helps my Y5's compare yet another way to count.

I LOVE counting books and this one does not disappoint. Students learn about the rich traditions of a Vietnamese New Year through 10 playful village mice.

The exquisitely embroidered illustrations show ten scenes of preparation, gift giving, feasting, and firework displays. The book also includes an informative afterward.

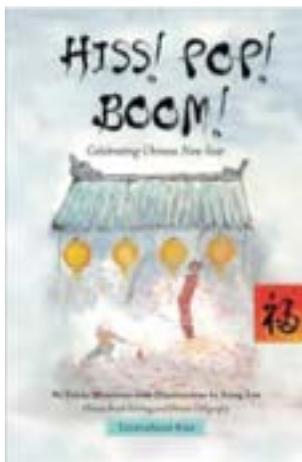
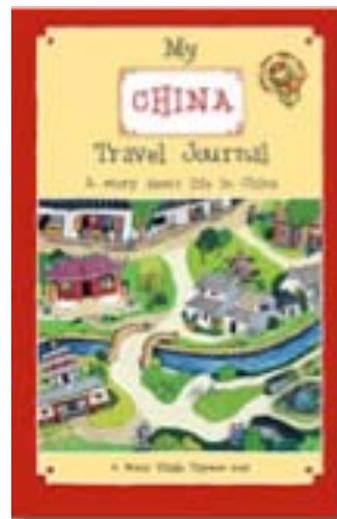
**One is a Drummer**, by Roseanne Thong, is a Chinese counting book. “... *ten are the bamboo stalks growing in a garden.*” Many of the featured objects are Asian in origin, but like the other books, they have universal appeal.



Roseanne also wrote **Round Is A Mooncake**, which is a story about a little girl’s neighborhood that’s filled with circles, (rice bowls) squares (dim sum) and rectangular things like “*Chinese lace in a pencil case.*”

A short glossary explains the cultural significance of the Asian objects.

**My China Travel Journal**, by Laura Barla, is a story about Emma and Joe who travel to China. The book is packed with photographs and information, and is a fun way to teach a bit about Chinese customs, culture, their foods, art forms, transportation, games, gardens, beliefs and even their types of homes. As a writing prompt, have your students make their own travel journal of China, or another country.

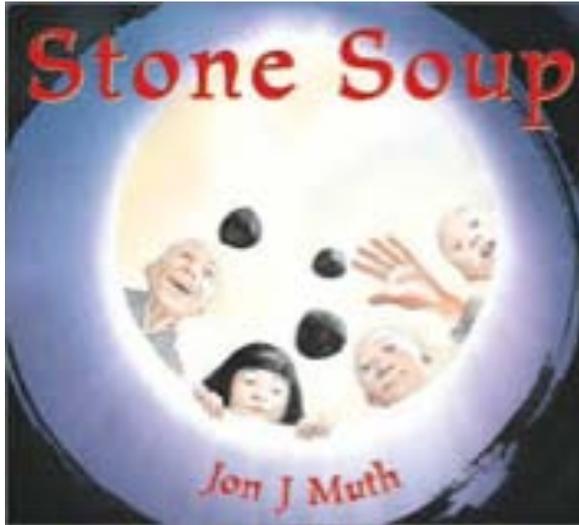
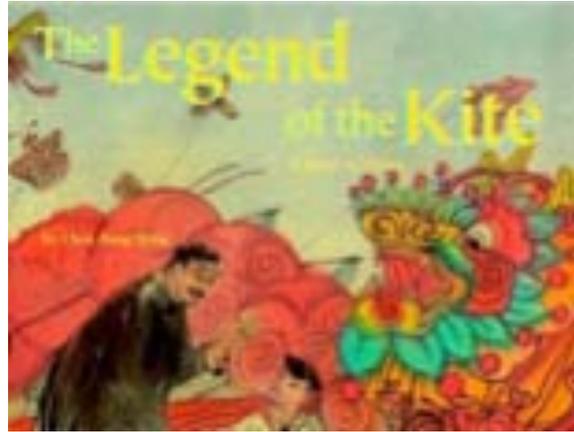


**Hiss! Pop! Boom!**, by Tricia Morrissey, with elegant watercolor “brush” paintings and calligraphy by Kong Lee, is a great read aloud because of all the onomatopoeia.

**The Legend Of The Kite**, by  
Kuiming Ha

I like this book because I have a themed day featuring kites in March, and also because the Kite Festival is another Chinese celebration in the spring.

When the main character's kite flies away from him, his grandfather tells him the legend behind the festival and encourages him to build a new, even more beautiful kite.



Since January is National Soup Month, we make chicken soup for a special snack. Prior to this, I read the following Chinese “soup stories.”

**Stone Soup**, by Jon Muth is one of my very favorite Chinese stories. There are many versions.

I'm not sure if it's even Chinese in origin, as versions have turned up throughout Europe and even Northern Kenya.

There's an American account, where the main character is a Civil War soldier.

The theme is always about making something from nothing. Here, it's a great-tasting soup, that begins with a stone and boiling water, and becomes a delicious soup with the addition of a little bit of this and that.

I think Muth's version, with three Chinese monks as the main characters, is one of the best, as they, like all of the rest, teach an entire village the true meaning of kindness and the value of sharing.

You can listen to this version on YouTube:

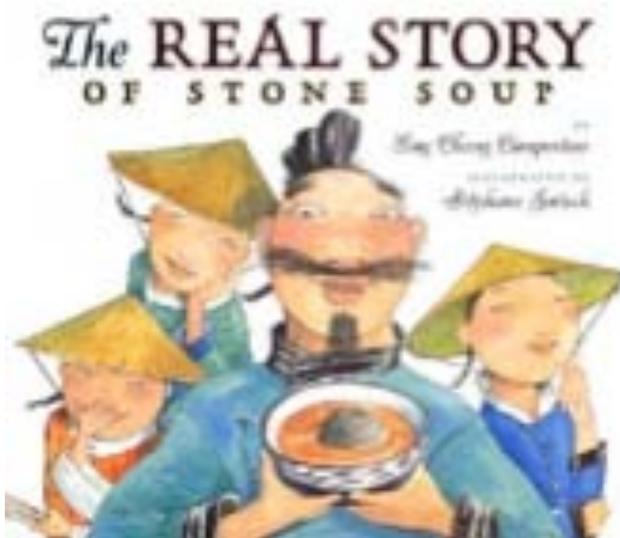
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P\\_TXIoIUbd4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P_TXIoIUbd4)

Because of this story, I add a smooth polished stone to our crock-pot of soup. It eventually ends up in one of my student's plastic bowls. They spoon it out, and I clean it off so they can take it home.

Just like the story, each child in my class, contributes something. I send a note home, so that children bring in some kind of chicken soup to add to the pot. I chose chicken soup because younger children like it so much better than vegetable soup.

I encourage parents to try to get something different, and they come through with everything from dinosaur and princess chicken noodle soup to a can with ABC noodles.

Mixed all together, they taste yummy and our room smells delicious. Since it's pretty cold in January my kiddos really enjoy this warm and healthy treat when they come in from a snowy recess. Every year I have a few students who enjoy our "stone soup" so much, that they have a 2nd bowl!



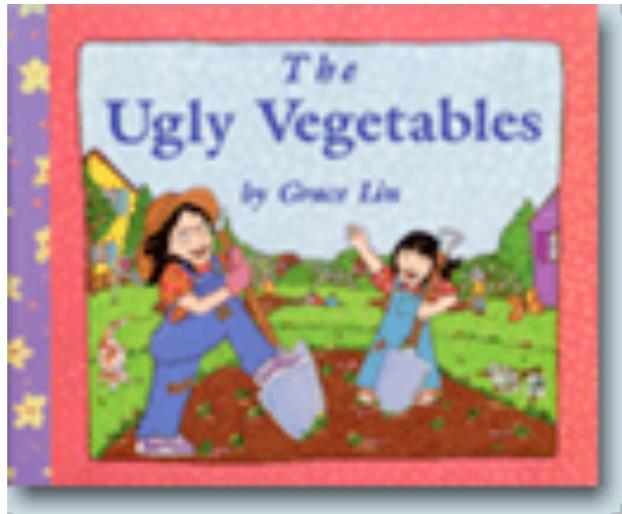
Another twist to this story is called **The Real Story Of Stone Soup**. In this version, by one of my favorite Asian writers, Ying Chang Compestine, a miserly old fisherman makes his three young helpers do all the work.

After scolding them for forgetting to make his lunch, they assure him that they can whip up some "stone soup."

The boys fill a hole with water and special "favored stones" tricking the fisherman into making bowls and chopsticks, and providing salt and sesame oil.

While he's not looking the y stir in bird eggs, wild vegetables, and even a fish. The fisherman returns to partake of a very tasty soup. "Egg Drop Stone Soup" is still a traditional dish in southeast China. As with all of Ying Chang's books, he includes the recipe.

Another delightful Chinese soup story is entitled **The Ugly Vegetables**, by Grace Lin. It is probably my favorite book by this author and is about a child and her mother's garden.

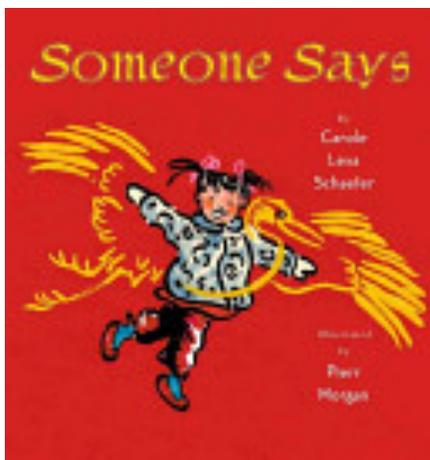


She thinks that all of the other neighbors' gardens that are filled with flowers are so much prettier than their patch of prickly stems, fuzzy wrinkled leaves, and blackish purple vines.

Her mom reassures her that their garden will be “much better than flowers.” Come harvest time, she finally agrees, for those ugly vegetables make a delicious soup.

As her entire neighborhood shares flowers and ugly vegetable soup, she learns that regardless of appearances, everything has its own beauty as well as a special purpose in life.

I especially like that the book comes with a guide to the Chinese pronunciation of the vegetables + a recipe for ugly vegetable soup!



**Someone Says**, is another book by Carole Lexa Schaefer.

Here's an excerpt: ***“In the morning, as always, we line up to go into school. Someone says, “Let's leapfrog in.” And . . . spring-boink, spring-sproink . . . we do.”***

Follow this happy group of Asian children as they pretend and imagine their way through their school day. They prance, swoop and slurp, inventing all sorts of things to become. Your students will especially enjoy the onomatopoeic language that celebrates the creativity of children.

Finally, last, but certainly not least, is a personal favorite, because the book is so different!

**The Magic Book**, by Marcus Pfister, is not about China, or Chinese New Year, but features a fire-breathing dragon at the end of the story, which fits right in with my Chinese New Year dragon studies.

The main character is Eve, who is learning how to be a magician.

For her latest trick she wants to produce a dragon. Her first attempts produce all sorts of crazy creatures, but no dragon.

She continues to try and is helped by the extraordinary features of the book.

This is by the same author who wrote **The Rainbow Fish** stories. Your students will enjoy this remarkable book, which allows children to work their own magic as they manipulate the pages to create six different books, ending with the awesome dragon.

I hope you found this bibliography helpful. I'd enjoy hearing about your favorite Chinese books. You can contact me at:  
[diane@teachwithme.com](mailto:diane@teachwithme.com)

Read On!

