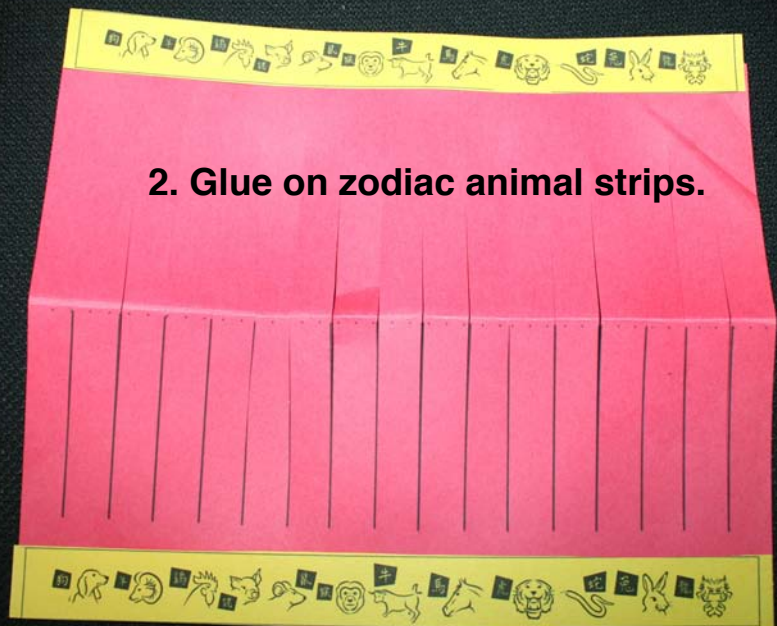


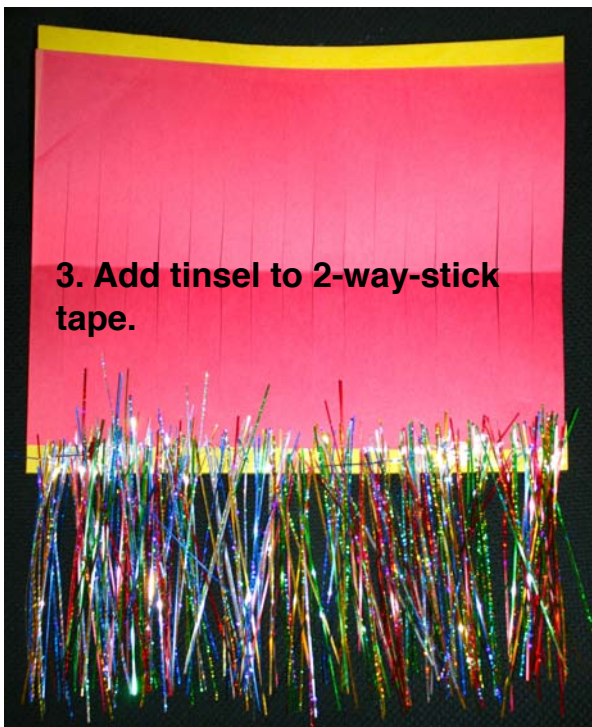
1. Fold & cut



2. Glue on zodiac animal strips.



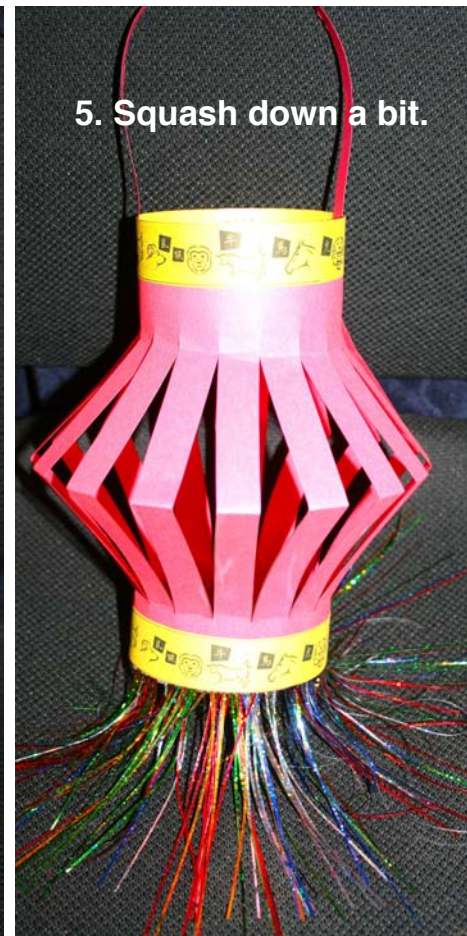
3. Add tinsel to 2-way-stick tape.



4. Connect, staple & add a handle.



5. Squash down a bit.



Chinese
New Year
Paper Lanterns



Run off on a variety of bright colors. Red or yellow are most popular.

Fold on dotted line.

Cut on lines.

Remind students to STOP when they reach the end of the black line or their lantern will not be connected.

When done cutting, staple the ends of the lantern.

Gently press down so that the cut strips bow out.

Add a strip of paper for the handle.

You can also add a top and bottom border.
I've included one with the zodiac animals.

Tinsel, ribbon, or crepe paper streamers add pizzazz.

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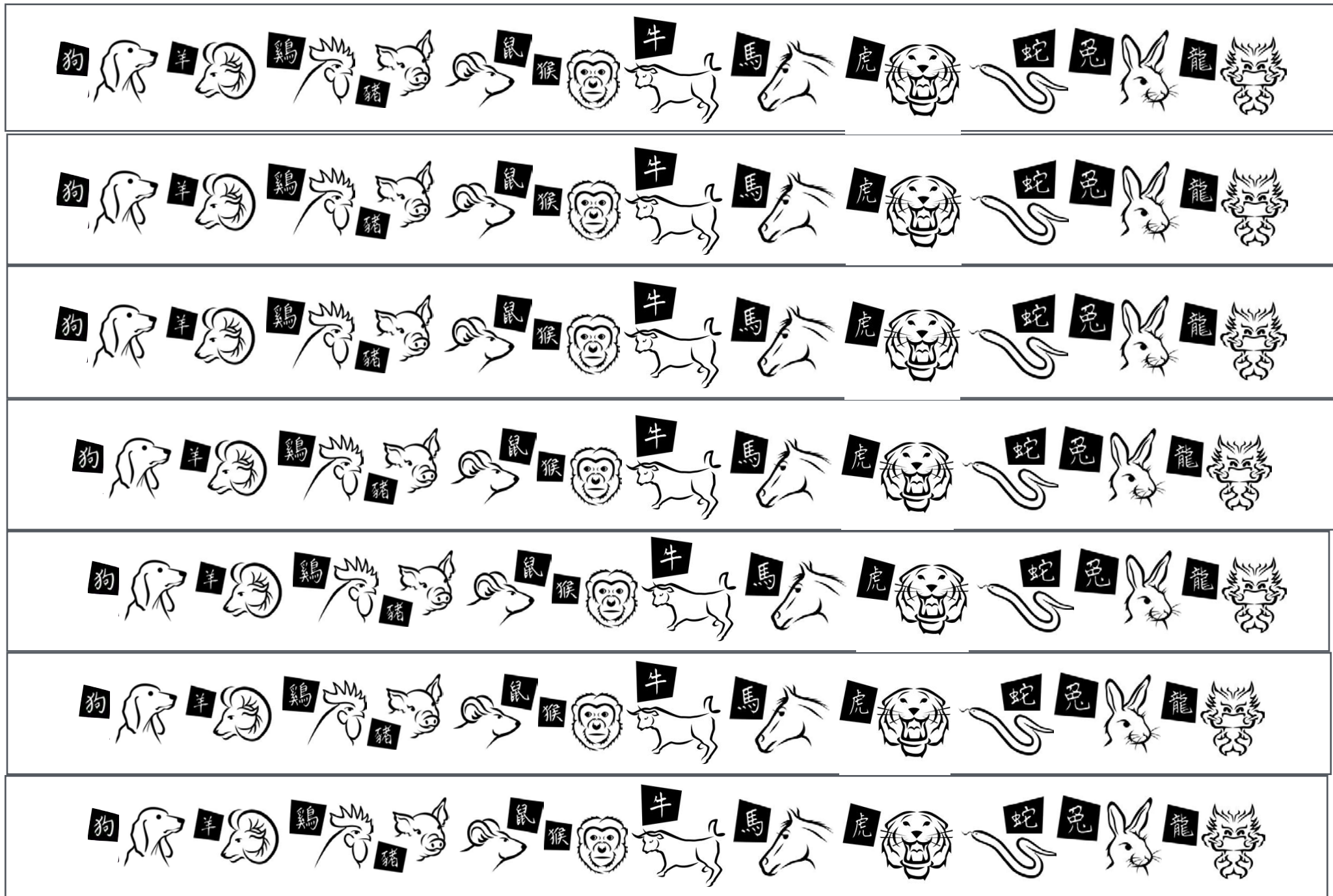
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Run off on yellow construction paper. Students can color the year they were born animal, as well as the current animal of the New Year. They glue their zodiac strip to the top of their paper lantern.



US \$
CAN

TINSEL
PAILLETTE
GROPEL

500 strands / fils / hebras





I absolutely LOVE YouTube.

It's a wonderful way to travel the world in the comfort of your own home or classroom.

The sights and sounds of the following were some of my favorites.

They are relatively short, and I felt age-appropriate for children.

As always, you decide what's right for your classroom.

The Story Of Nian:

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

Lion Dance on YouTube

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BftlBp-U5jc>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BBmgllmXr_0

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=teer4fyMIMA>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B6Gi5UbNPtE>

Dragon Dance on YouTube:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4WUnWPpRslM>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vS5tZpNhETs>

Stilt Walkers on YouTube:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4oM6166LwE>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DhF2bLzSdck>

Lantern Festival on You Tube

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZZ5bPPYc6Ps>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6mFCQwARuo>

Floating Lanterns:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=00ys3PRFedE>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6NWHzU8NBTY>



Pictures
of riddle lanterns.

Riddle Me!

A list of riddles to enhance your Chinese New Year Celebration

Riddle Lanterns are extremely popular during the Lantern Festival. I have several paragraphs of explanation in the Chinese Lantern information section of this packet. I've also included a page of photographs of riddle lanterns.

To add a festive Asian flair to your room, hang up 2-3 large spherical red lanterns. Give your students some background about the riddle lanterns in China and challenge them to answer as many riddles as they can, in a given amount of time. Students can work independently or on a team. Just as the Chinese do, you could give a little treat or prize to the winners. Students get 1 point per correct answer.

So that you can easily make up some "riddle strips" for your lanterns, I've made up a list of some of my favorites. I tried to choose ones that were age appropriate, yet challenging. Some are rather simple, and others are a bit harder.

Run through the list and highlight the ones you want to print up for your students. Type or write them on strips of red and yellow paper and attach them to strings that hang from your lanterns.

Invite students to pick one and try to solve it, moving on to another one when they are done, and swapping it with another student.

To make figuring out who had the right answers to what riddles, make sure you number them.

When everyone has solved some riddles, have students write a few of their favorites on colored strips of paper so they can add them to their paper lantern.

Besides traditional "riddles" or "brain teasers" you could also use these as a Segway for a math problem review, vocabulary building, or even social studies and science facts etc.

You could also have students do research of their own and bring in 2-3 riddles to share with the class.

Here are some story riddles:

What force and strength
cannot get through,
I with a gentle touch can do,

and many in the streets would stand,
were I not as a friend in hand.
Answer: a key

Here on earth it is always true,
that a day follows a day.
But there is a place where yesterday
always follows today! Where is this place?
Inside a dictionary.

Basic Riddles:

What do the numbers 11, 69, and 88 all have in common?
They are still the same number when turned upside down.

What do you throw out when you want to use it, but take in when you don't want to use it?
An anchor

What goes up and down without moving?
Stairs.

What happens twice in a week, and once in a year, but never in a day?
The appearance of the letter e.

What grows in winter and dies in summer and looks like one big root?
An icicle

What grows up while growing down?
A goose

What has a foot on each side and one in the middle?
A yardstick

What has no beginning, end or middle?
A doughnut

This room has no windows or doors. What kind of room is it?
A mushroom

What has to be broken before you can use it?
An egg

How much money is the moon worth?
A dollar because it has 4 quarters.

What is the longest word in the English language?
Smiles. There's a mile between the first and last letter.

What flies without wings?
Time

What are two things you cannot eat for supper?
Breakfast and lunch.

What time is it when 12 cats chase after 1 mouse?
Twelve after one.

Without using a calculator, quickly tell me how many seconds are in a year.
12 (January 2nd, February 2nd etc.)

What is half of 2+2?
3 (Half of 2 is 1 and 1+2=3)

What Am I? Kinds of Riddles:

I have many eyes but cannot see.
I have no mouth or nose, but always smell. What am I?
A potato

Fill me in, fire me, or draw one. What am I?
A blank

What runs but cannot walk?
Water or your nose.

What occurs once in a minute, twice in a moment, but never in an hour?
The letter M.

Where do you find roads without vehicles, forests without trees, and cities without houses?
On a map.

Part of me is a key, but my purpose is not to unlock a door. Can you name all 3?
A monkey, donkey and turkey.

The more of them you take, the more of them you leave behind. What are they?
Footsteps
What weighs more—a ton of feathers or a ton of rocks?
They both weigh the same, one ton.

Your mother's brother's only brother-in-law is asleep on your couch. Who is asleep on your couch?

Your dad

What won't break if you throw it off the highest building in the world, but will break if you place it in the ocean?

A Kleenex

Which moves faster: heat or cold?

Heat; because anybody can catch a cold.

He who has it doesn't tell about it. He who takes it doesn't know about it. He who knows what it is doesn't want it. What is it? Counterfeit money.

It lives without a body, hears without ears, speaks without a mouth, and is born in air. What is it? An echo

What turns everything around, but does not move?

A mirror

What do you have when twenty rabbits step backwards?

A receding "hair" line.

What happens to a white rock when you throw it into the Red sea?

It sinks

I always tell the truth. I show off everything that I see. I come in all shapes and sizes. So tell me what I must be?

A mirror

What has wheels and flies, but is not an aircraft?

A garbage truck

What can you catch but not throw?

A cold

What has four legs, a head, and leaves?

A dining room table.

The more you have of it, the less you see. What is it?

Darkness

If you have it, you can share it, but if you share it, you don't have it. What is it?

A secret.

Forward I am very heavy. Backward, I am not. What am I?
A ton.

If two is company, and three's a crowd, what are four and five?
Nine

What can go up a chimney down, but can't go down a chimney up?
An umbrella

What can pass before the sun without making a shadow?
The wind.

In what year did Christmas Day and New Year's Day fall in the same year?
It happens every year.

What can you swallow, but can also swallow you?
Water.

One of our US states is a long word. Can you spell it?
It is spelled i-t.

Is an old hundred dollar bill better than a new one?
Yes. Because it's worth \$99 more.

If you were standing directly on Antarctica's South Pole facing north, which direction would you travel if you took one step backward?
North, because all directions from the South Pole are north.
If you were to take two apples from three apples, how many would you have?
Two apples, they are the ones you took.

You are in Oklahoma. You can't take a picture of the people there. Why?
You don't have a camera or cell phone.

Even if they are starving, natives living in the Arctic will never eat a penguin's egg.
Why not?
Because there are no penguins there. They live in Antarctica.

I know a word of letters three. Add two and fewer there will be. What is the word?
Few

If a rooster laid a brown egg and a white egg, what kind of chicks would hatch?
Roosters don't lay eggs.

Emma was born on December 27th, yet her birthday is always in the summer. How is this possible?
She lives in the southern hemisphere where seasons are reversed.

While walking over a bridge I spied a huge boat travelling quickly through the water, yet it was not being pulled and there was not a single person on board. Why? They were all married.

I fasten it and it walks. I unfasten it and it stops. What is it?
A sandal

What is the tallest building in town?
The library, because it has the most stories.

I have a little house in which I live all alone. My house has no doors or windows, and if I want to go out I must break through the wall. What am I? A chicken in an egg.

As I was going to St. Ives, I met a man with seven wives, the seven wives had seven sacks, the seven sacks had seven cats, the seven cats had seven kittens; kittens, cats, sacks and wives, how many were going to St. Ives?
One. Only the man was going to St. Ives.

Poke your fingers in my "eyes" and I will open wide my jaws. Linen cloth, quills, or paper, I am greedy and devour them all. What am I?
A pair of scissors.

What is it that you will break every time you name it?
Silence

When you cut me I do not bleed. What am I?
A deck of cards.
I am taken from a mine, and shut up in a wooden case, from which I am never released, and yet I am used by almost everybody. What am I?
The graphite inside a pencil.

What doesn't get any wetter no matter how much rain falls on it?
The ocean or water.

What's full of holes, but still holds water ?
A sponge.

Twelve pears hanging high, twelve men passing by.
Each took a pear and left eleven hanging there.
How can this be? Each was the name of one of the men passing by.

What has four fingers and one thumb, but is not alive?
A glove.

How many letters are in the alphabet?

11 (count the letters in "the alphabet.")

What word looks the same upside down and backwards?

SWIMS

The one who made it, didn't want it.

The one who bought it, didn't need it.

The one who used it, never saw it. What is it?

A coffin

While on Safari in the wild jungles of Africa, Professor Ann woke one morning and felt something in her pocket. It had a head and a tail, but no legs. The professor showed little concern and went about her morning activities with that thing in her pocket. Why wasn't she concerned?

It was a coin.

Two mothers and two daughters go to a pet store and buy three cats. Each female gets her own cat. How is this possible?

There is a grandmother, a mother and a daughter.

The grandmother is also a mother, and the mother is also a daughter.

What runs around a house but doesn't move?

A fence

What word in the English language is always spelled wrong?

The word wrong.

Have you heard the saying what goes up must come down? Well what goes up and never goes down?

Your age

Miscellaneous Riddles:

- What has a face and two hands but no arms or legs? A clock
- What five-letter word becomes shorter when you add two letters to it? Short
- What word begins and ends with an 'e' but only has one letter? Envelope
- What has a neck but no head? A bottle
- What type of cheese is made backwards? Edam
- What gets wetter as it dries? A towel
- Why did the boy bury his flashlight? Because the batteries died.
- Which letter of the alphabet has the most water? The C
- What starts with a 'P', ends with an 'E' and has thousands of letters? The Post Office!
- What has to be broken before you can use it? An egg
- Why can't a man living in New York be buried in Chicago? Because he's still living!

- What begins with T, ends with T and has T in it? A teapot
- How many letters are there in the English alphabet? There are 18: 3 in 'the', 7 in 'English' and 8 in 'alphabet'.
- Which month has 28 days? All of them of course!
- Does England have a 4th of July? Of course. It comes after the 3rd.
- Where do fish keep their money In a riverbank.
- What do you get when you cross an automobile with a household animal? A carpet.
- Mary's father has 4 children; three are named Nana, Nene, and Mini. What is the name of the 4th child? Mary
- What 3 numbers have the same answer when added together and multiplied together? 1,2, 3
- What bone has a sense of humor? The humerus /humorous (also known as the funny bone.)
- What did the envelope say to the stamp? Stick with me and you'll go places.





Pictures of
Chinese Dumplings
For The
Lantern Festival.

The Chinese Lantern: Interesting Facts

When I'm designing some craft activities for my students, I always do a little research and fact-finding.

I have a voracious appetite to learn new things, and enjoy discovering the history behind what I'm working on.

I spent countless hours online reading legends, folklore, historical information, and even a few children's stories about Chinese lanterns and the Chinese Lantern Festival.

One tidbit led to another, and then another 'til day became night and I needed a lantern!

I wanted to see pictures of the lanterns, hear the music, and take a look at the recipes for how to make the Chinese dumplings, so popular during the Lantern Festival. I was fascinated!

I also combed through YouTube videos looking for clips that would make things even more real. (For easy access, this is on a separate page and categorized.)

Copying, pasting, editing, and rewriting this and that, I felt like I was writing a term paper on lanterns. I so enjoyed and appreciate the wealth of knowledge people are willing to share.

Although the pages do not look as interesting without photographs, I chose to put those on separate pages, to conserve ink, in case you want to print off a copy of this information to highlight what you want to share with your students.

I hope you enjoy my endeavors, and that in some small way these facts will help you understand a bit more about lanterns and the extremely interesting country of China. Personally, I will never look at a lantern the same way. My brain is over flowing!

Lanterns (*deng*) are one of the most prevalent symbols in China, particularly red ones, since red represents "happiness and good fortune" and is symbolic of fire, which wards off evil spirits.

Although lanterns can be seen throughout the year, they are especially prevalent during Chinese New Year, referred to as Spring Festival in China. They reach their peak use during the Lantern Festival, which is the culmination of the two-week holiday celebration.

Lantern Festival 元宵節 (written in Chinese) and referred to as *Yuánxiāo Jié*, means the first full moon night of the year.

It's celebrated on the 15th day of the first month of the traditional Chinese lunar calendar, and is the first night to see a full moon.

Lanterns are first brought out on the thirteenth day of the first lunar month. They are tested on the fourteenth, formally lit on the fifteenth, and taken down on the eighteenth. Some places boast as many as 10,000 lanterns!

During Lantern Festival, people get together to celebrate the beginning of spring by displaying lanterns, shooting off fireworks and eating Yuanxiao. (Dumplings)

The Lantern Festival is filled with folk art, parades, performances of the Lion Dance, Dragon Lantern Dance, stilt-walking, land-boat racing, and other kinds of dancing.

Drums, gongs, fireworks and music fill the air with a cacophony of sound.

Why the big deal about lanterns? Why have a Lantern Festival? I wanted to know.

Chinese red lanterns have a **long history**, (dating back over 2,000 years) and they have become a well-known **symbol** of China Towns worldwide. They started out as a practicality and evolved into elaborate status symbols.

How Did The Lantern Festival Come About?

Folklore and stories were as varied as the lanterns themselves. Here are a few of the most prevalent:

There was the legend of **Taiyi** and the Emperor Qinshibhuang, who first united China.

Still another talked about the Jade Emperor's anger at losing his favorite crane. During that time there were many fierce wild beasts and birds that greatly affected local people's lives and safety.

In order to protect themselves, their livestock and property, people had to kill them. One day, a sacred bird (the emperor's crane) got lost and fell on the mortal world. An ignorant hunter thought the bird was one of those fierce animals and unfortunately killed it. This enraged the Jade Emperor.

He planned a “firestorm” to retaliate, but his daughter warned the villagers who then hung blazing red lanterns outside their homes, made bonfires, and lit firecrackers for three days. The plan worked as the Jade Emperor was tricked into thinking the village was already ablaze and the people punished. Satisfied he called back his “storm” troops.

Another explanation had its roots in Taoism and Tianguan (their god of good fortune). His birthday was at this time, and he loved entertainment, so the Chinese did their best to put on a great show, in the hopes of receiving good fortune. Each year things continued and became grander; thus leading to what became known as the Lantern Festival.

Then there’s the story of Yuan Xiao, a maid in the emperor’s palace during the Han Dynasty. This story also explains the popularity of eating dumplings.

Yuan Xiao was very depressed because she was not allowed to see her family. An old man heard her crying and thought of a plan to help her.

He set up a fortune-telling booth in town and everyone who went seeking their fortune was given the same one: a fire would occur on January 15.

He said the God of Fire would send a fairy dressed in red to burn down the town. The fairy would be riding a black horse. This of course was Yuan Xiao.

Word got to the emperor who didn’t know what to do. The old man told him that the God of Fire liked to eat *tangyuan* (湯圓).

Tangyuan are sweet, round dumplings made with rice flour and filled with a large variety of yummy ingredients.

The man said everyone in town should make tangyuan, hang red lanterns and light firecrackers, so their town would not be burned. He also instructed that all the people should come to the palace to admire the decorations and carry red lanterns.

To save his people, the Emperor followed the directions. Yuan Xiao’s was reunited with her parents when she saw them in the crowd. The emperor enjoyed the day so much that he turned it into an annual holiday. Because Yuan Xiao made the best tasting tangyuan, the festival became known as Yuan Xiao.

An Interesting Aside About Tangyuan:

I researched a bit about tangyuan, because it is also an extremely important aspect of the Lantern Festival.

Tangyuan has a similar pronunciation to "*tuanyuan*," which means reunion. I thought this was interesting because the story was based around Yuan Xiao being reunited with her family.

One of the reasons eating tangyuan has become so popular is that some Chinese believe that doing so, symbolizes family union, and will lead to harmony and happiness for them.

Because the dumplings are spherical, they are also said to represent the first full moon and a completeness of family unity.

Today, there are many different types of *yuanxiao*, with many different fillings that can be spicy, sweet, sour, or salty or a combination.

It seems that the sweet fillings are the most popular. They can be filled with sweet bean paste, sweet sesame, date paste, ginkgo nut, peanuts, almonds, and hawthorn fruit. Other fillings include pickled cabbage, minced pork, minced ham, shrimp, green beans, sweetened tangerine peel, walnut meat, dried fruit, sugar and even dried flowers: rose petals, omanthus and chrysanthemum.

You can make *yuanxiao* by wrapping or rolling. Wrapped *yuanxiao* are called tangyuan, and are popular in southern China. Tangyuan are assembled by making a depression in a ball of rice flour dough, inserting the filling into the depression, and then sealing the ball. Rolled *yuanxiao* are popular in northern China. Assembly consists of rolling a small ball of the filling in dry rice flour, then building it up like a snowball until it reaches the desired size. The completed *yuanxiao* and *tangyuan* may be boiled, steamed, or deep-fried.

Continuing with the legends of the Lantern Festival

There is also the story of **Nian**, a ferocious man-eating beast. The story goes that the monster was afraid of the color red, fire and loud noises. This would explain the reason for so many red lanterns, the popularity of that color, as well as the reason for so much noise using gongs, beating drums and setting off firecrackers.

Today, Nian refers to New Year's Day or the Spring Festival. People often say ***Guo Nian***, which means '*live the festival*.' Furthermore, Nian also means the year. For example, the Chinese often greet each other by saying ***Xin Nian Hao***, which means ***Happy New Year!*** Xin means new and Hao means good.

While doing research, I found a short video of this story on YouTube. (See separate page of video links.)

Finally, others believe that the Lantern Festival began as a way to celebrate the first full moon of the New Year. In ancient times 1000's of lanterns were hung outside to pay homage to the moon. Even children carried small lanterns as they walked through their villages, which continues to this day.

Despite the variety of wonderful folktales and stories of why lanterns are popular, it is a historical fact that monks used lanterns on the twelfth day of the first lunar month in their worship of Buddha.

During the Eastern Han Dynasty, the Emperor Liu Zhuang was a Buddhist and ordered everyone to light lanterns. Many believe that this continued for years developing into the Lantern Festivals of today.

It is also recorded that during the Tang Dynasty (618 - 907), people made lanterns to celebrate their peaceful life. The lovely luminaries symbolized and celebrated the prosperous, strong and powerful country. The practice continued developing into the Lantern Festival

Others say that the Lantern Festival originated from the Torch Festival. During the Han Dynasty, people in rural areas lit torches to scare away beasts and insects, to reduce insect damage which would result in a better harvest.

In some areas of Southwest China they still have a traditional lighting of the torches, which are made of branches and dried reeds. They dance in groups on their fields, or places where they dry the grain.

No matter what legends or facts you believe, The Lantern Festival has definitely evolved. It started as a one-day festival in ancient times, to a 10-day festival in the 15th century under Emperor Chengzu, then to the present day 2-week celebration.

That's a bit of the "why" of lanterns, and "how" the festival came about.

While doing this research, I also found out a plethora of information about the kinds of lanterns and how they are made.

Just as the festival changed, the lanterns became larger and more elaborate. The first festivals featured small, hand-held paper lanterns with small wax candles inside.

Today they come in all shapes and sizes – from paper and bamboo globes to spheres and animal shapes to pyrotechnic metal and neon structures.

Materials for making a lantern:

Materials vary, but the most widely used are: bamboo, wood, rattan, wheat-straw, metal or steel wire for the frame; gauze, paper or silk for the shade. They were decorated with Chinese calligraphy, paintings, paper cuttings, embroidery, as well as picking and seaming.

Red is the most popular color for lanterns. This is probably due to the auspicious symbolism of that color discussed earlier.

Many Chinese feel that wearing and displaying red will bring about good things. Words I found that were said to be symbolic of the color red were: happiness, luck, good fortune, joy, wealth, health, and prosperity.

Popular Kinds Of Lanterns:

I also learned that there are numerous “kinds” of lanterns.

Floating Lanterns: The floating sky lanterns that are so popular worldwide, have been attributed to Zhuge Liang (諸葛亮), knick named Kong Ming, who used smaller versions as a way to communicate military intelligence during the Three Kingdoms Period.

These lanterns are often referred to as Kong Ming after this man. Others believe the lanterns are called Kong Ming because they are the same shape as Kong Ming’s hats in his portraits.

The most common Chinese lanterns are red, with an **oval** shape, and are decorated with red or golden tassels, however the square as well as round lantern are also extremely popular.

Riddle Lanterns: Known as *cai deng mi*

Guessing the meaning of lantern riddles has been a unique folk custom during the Lantern Festival for 100’s of years. It is also known as “playing lantern riddles.”

The Chinese people are very proud of their intelligence and ability to think abstractly, which makes guessing lantern riddles an extremely popular activity during the festival.

In older times, the riddles were obscure literary allusions to the Chinese classics and therefore appealed many to the wealthy and educated classes.

Today the riddles often contain messages of good fortune, family, reunion, abundant harvest, prosperity, and love. Some are simple and some are difficult. People of all ages enjoy guessing the answers.

Some historians believe that the riddle lanterns emerged during the Song Dynasty (960-1279) when people began to write the riddles on their lantern for visitors to guess.

When I discovered “riddle lanterns” I decided to search for some riddles I thought students would enjoy solving, and added this as an embellishment or activity to go along with my paper lantern “craftivity.”

I read hours worth of riddle books that I had tucked away in my basement, as well as spent some time Online wading through “jokes and riddles for kids” sites.

I made up a list of my personal favorites and hope you and yours enjoy them too.

No one really knows how attaching a riddle to a lantern started, but it has become extremely popular today, and is an integral part of China’s Lantern Festival.

Unlike our riddle books, the answer has to be guessed from a word, a poem, or a phrase and is not given.

Trying to solve these thought-provoking, mini mysteries makes the festival more interactive and fun. Some places award prizes, or give a little gift if you can guess the riddle.

Palace Lanterns:

The palace lanterns are among the most valuable. They are known for their delicate craftsmanship, as well as their graceful and dignified pictures. Many were made from the finest wood and then covered in silk or glass. Dragons and the phoenix were popular designs. Some of them are extremely ornate. Shapes are very diverse and include octagonal as well as hexagonal. Some are quite large.

Shadow Picture Lanterns:

These lanterns have been around for over a 1,000 years, and were used for entertainment. Its shape is much like the palace lanterns, but these have two layers of covers. Paper cut out’s are pasted on the inner layer. Pictures can also be drawn here.

When lit, the heat causes a paper wheel inside the lantern to rotate, so that moving pictures appear on the outer cover. The Chinese were one of the first people to

realize and use the transformation of hot air currents to produce mechanical energy.

Zou Ma Lanterns:

This is quite a spectacular type of lantern, as like the shadow picture lanterns they revolve. The revolving figures are known as *zou ma*, which look like a paper pavilion with upturned eaves and corners. It revolves like a merry-go-round.

These lanterns are ringed with a number of extremely detailed people or animals. Panoramic landscapes are also painted or cut out of paper and include intricate mountains, rivers and flowers.

This kind of "roundabout" lantern can be traced back to the Tang and Song dynasties about 1,000 years ago. The figures or pictures are erected along the circumference of a wire frame that is fastened to the center of a vertical shaft pasted with paper vanes.

This shaft is propelled by hot air from a lit candle; the vanes turn the shaft, which turn the frame with the figures. Today, kinds of lanterns have become even more beautiful and elaborate, although the basic structure remains the same.

A Bit OF History:

The Chinese lantern originated as an improvement to the open flame. The shade not only protected the flame inside from being extinguished in windy weather, but also provided a more diffuse form of lighting.

Given the Chinese penchant for embellishment, it was inevitable that these shades would become the object of artistic expression. Lampshade artisans started to compete amongst themselves to produce shades of exquisite beauty, functionality, design, and artistic decoration.

During a festival in Rio de Janeiro, people compete to see who can come up with the most impressive and lavish costumes. In China, they have a lantern competition

The difference is that the best lantern designs in China – except for those reserved for the Imperial Palace – become public property and can be copied by anyone.

The highest honor for a lampshade artist was to be able to work for the emperor.

Although there is no longer a practical need for Chinese lanterns, they are still made, used, and enjoyed by the Chinese people, continuing to be a means of artistic expression.

Lanterns are the traditional craftwork folklore of China. The art of lanterns is inherited from one generation to the next and continues to improve. They play an extremely important role in Chinese history and symbolize the “brilliant” culture of China.

Ancient Uses for Lanterns

The earliest Chinese lanterns were created for practical use in homes and to light entryways. They eventually became highly ornamental status symbols.

Early lanterns were commonly called *qi si feng* ("enraging the wind") because they were coated with fish glue, which made them windproof, while still letting the candlelight show through.

The ceremonial use of lanterns centered around burials, weddings, and changing residences. White gauze was used on the outside of crudely constructed lanterns approximately a foot and a half long and eight to ten inches in diameter.

They often had four red paper letters attached to the gauze that meant, "***a hundred children and a thousand grandchildren.***"

This was a friendly way of wishing someone good luck. (Hoping they would have a large family, and much respect when they grew old.)

Lanterns were "regarded as an omen of good" and were hung on poles and attached to vehicles as they transported people to weddings, funerals, or the new place they were moving to.

As a cultural symbol, the lantern stood for joyfulness, the return of spring, and a renewal of the earth. Undoubtedly, the most important and complex display of lanterns occurs during the Lantern Festival.

Another reason for the lantern's popularity was its portability, a “flashlight” if you will. Historians note that the lantern was the earliest invented portable illumination instrument in the world.

Some historians believe that the concept of street lighting in Europe, stemmed from the Europeans contact with Imperial China's hanging lanterns.

By the beginning of the Tang Dynasty in the 7th century, the lantern displays lasted 3 days. The Emperor also lifted the curfew, allowing the people to enjoy the festive lanterns day and night. Because of this, the Lantern Festival has also been referred to as the Chinese Valentine's Day, because in days of old it gave girls and boys a rare chance to go out in the evening and mingle.

Lanterns Today

The lanterns today are quite spectacular, and come in all shapes and sizes. Some are created in the form of animals, insects, flowers, people or even machines and buildings.

Others depict scenes from popular stories teaching traditional values. A popular subject that appears on many is the zodiac animal of the year – this year (2014) it is the year of the horse. Last year it was the year of the snake.

Celebration days and customs of the Lantern Festival gradually changed and expanded with the development of China.

It is a vast country with a long history, and many people. In fact, it's the most populated country in the world. A 2012 census put the country at 1.351 billion. India is a close second with a population of 1.237 billion, compared to the 313.9 million people who live in the United States.

Thus the customs associated with the Lantern Festival vary from region to region, but all center around the color red, lots of lanterns, lion dancing, dragon dancing, fireworks, and eating a variety of delicious foods, especially Chinese dumplings.

The traditional **dragon dance** originated in ancient China, and was already a popular activity by the Sung Dynasty (960-1279 AD).

It is still an extremely popular part of most Chinese festivals, especially at Chinese New Year. Chinese people traditionally revere the dragon, which symbolizes strength, good fortune, wisdom, longevity, and nobility.

It is very common to see processions of hundred-foot long dragons, lit with flashing eyes and luminous bodies, accompanied by pounding drums, cymbals and brass instruments.

When my husband and I were in Chinatown in San Francisco, one came parading through the restaurant we were eating in. It seemed to go on forever as its green body zig-zagged through the building.

The **lion dance** is also popular and generally performed by 3 people. One acts as the lion's head, one plays the role of the lion's body and rear foot, and one leads the lion.

There are seems to be 2 kinds of lion dances—a tame dance, and a rather ferocious Kung Fu dance.

The tame lion dance shows the gentle character of the lions' daily life, while the Kung Fu lion dance shows the lions' brave and fierce side.

The lion dance is supposed to bring good luck. The dance is a very careful demonstration of stylized movements - a martial art in itself. To make the lion more life-like, the eyelids, mouth and ears of the lion usually move. Both dances are an integral part of the Lantern Festival.

No matter where you go, big cities and small towns are decorated to the hilt with red lanterns during 3 big festivals: Chinese New Year, and The Lantern Festival, as well as the Mid-Autumn Festival.

Even little children make and carry lanterns. Days before the festival, streets are lined with vendors selling lanterns, and small shops have them displayed in abundance.

In some places it's a tradition for an uncle to buy his nephew (one who is under the age of 12) a lantern. It is a way for them to wish them a healthy and happy New Year.

When I checked out travel sites, most of them agreed that the most spectacular decorations can be seen in Beijing, Hong Kong and Nanjing.

This information was gleaned from over 40 different Internet sites, and then cross-checked for verification whenever possible. As with any information found on the Internet, make sure you feel comfortable with sources.

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