



Celebrating Chinese New Year in the early childhood classroom

Chinese New Year is celebrated in many communities around the world where there is a significant Asian community. It is likely that you have children in your class who celebrate Chinese New Year with their families or as part of a larger community festival.

Since the Chinese New Year celebrations take place over fifteen days, there is plenty of time for celebration in the classroom.

An important part of establishing a welcoming and supportive classroom environment is showing children that they are valued. One way of doing this is by getting to know each other and acknowledging and appreciating different family traditions.

This resource suggests simple ways of acknowledging your students of Asian background and teaching all students about Chinese New Year traditions by celebrating Chinese New Year in the classroom. Suggestions are designed for use in early childhood or lower primary classrooms, for children in their first three years of school.

A good way to get started is with use of the readlearn suite of resources [Family Traditions and Celebrations](#) which assists you collect valuable information about all the cultures represented in your classroom. Using the knowledge of families not only makes the information more tangible and personal, it shows children that their families are valued and respected.

Learning about the celebration of Chinese New Year – making it personal

Invite **children from your class**, or other classes, to talk about how their families celebrate Chinese New Year. They may be able to bring in photographs or other artefacts to support their talk, or even display in the classroom for a few days.

Invite **people from the community** to talk about the celebration and traditions; for example, the children's parents and grandparents, as well as others from the local Chinese community. These people too may have artefacts which they can talk about and may be willing to loan for a class display.

If the LOTE taught at your school is an Asian language, the **LOTE teacher** will be great to call upon for ideas and resources. You could even buddy up with one of the older classes learning the language for related activities.

The guests from the community may like to teach the children some simple **words and phrases** in the language; for example, how to greet each other, count to ten, ask simple questions or make simple statements, sing a short song or perform a dance.

Depending on their availability, you may involve them in other ways too; for example, as assistants if you set up **group activities** based on a Chinese New Year theme. Any of the above suggestions would be suitable for small groups, as would telling stories, especially personal stories, about Chinese New Year, or playing a simple version of the popular Chinese game *Mahjong*.

Your school librarian will be able to suggest resources to use and, of course, there is much information readily available on the internet, including the readlearn resource [Let's read about Chinese New Year](#).

Small group activities for learning about Chinese New Year

Explore books: Set up a display of books about China, other Asian countries and Chinese New Year. Include picture books, non-fiction books and travel brochures too.

Make a red envelope: (Templates included – see pages 3 and 4.) If children make envelopes (sometimes called red packets) prior to the celebration, they can be collected and returned to them on the celebration day with a small sweet treat (wishing them a sweet year) inside.

The red envelope tradition: Children receive red envelopes containing money at Chinese New Year from parents and grandparents. Red is an important colour to many Chinese people. It means energy, happiness and good luck. Giving a red envelope is a way of wishing someone luck and happiness.

Make a fan: Fans are a traditional Chinese accessory. There are many different ways of making fans. (One easy way is included below. See page 5.)

Make a lantern: Brightly coloured lanterns are used to decorate Chinese homes, restaurants and festivals. (One easy way of making a decorative lantern is included below. See pages 6-7.)

Make a good luck sign: Decorate 'fu' signs to wish each other good luck at Chinese New Year. Hang the signs upside down in the classroom to show that good luck is arriving. (See page 8.)

Do maths with Mahjong tiles: [Mahjong](#) is a traditional Chinese game played with tiles. It dates back centuries. The game played correctly is a game of luck and skill. It is quite a complex game and can take a long time to play, making it unsuitable for the classroom. However, if you have the assistance of an adult, you may be able to schedule a shortened child-friendly version. (See page 9 for other suggestions for using Mahjong tiles.)

Read the story of The Race – sequence the animals: Children read or listen to the story of the animal race that decided the sequence of the years in the Chinese zodiac. They cut and paste the animals, and the ordinal words, in the correct sequence. (See pages 10-11.)

Celebrating Chinese New Year – on the day

You could:

Distribute red envelopes or bookmarks (see [Happy Chinese New Year bookmarks](#)), if desired.

Bring in mandarins to share for fruit break.

Make fried rice – serve it in small bowls with chopsticks.

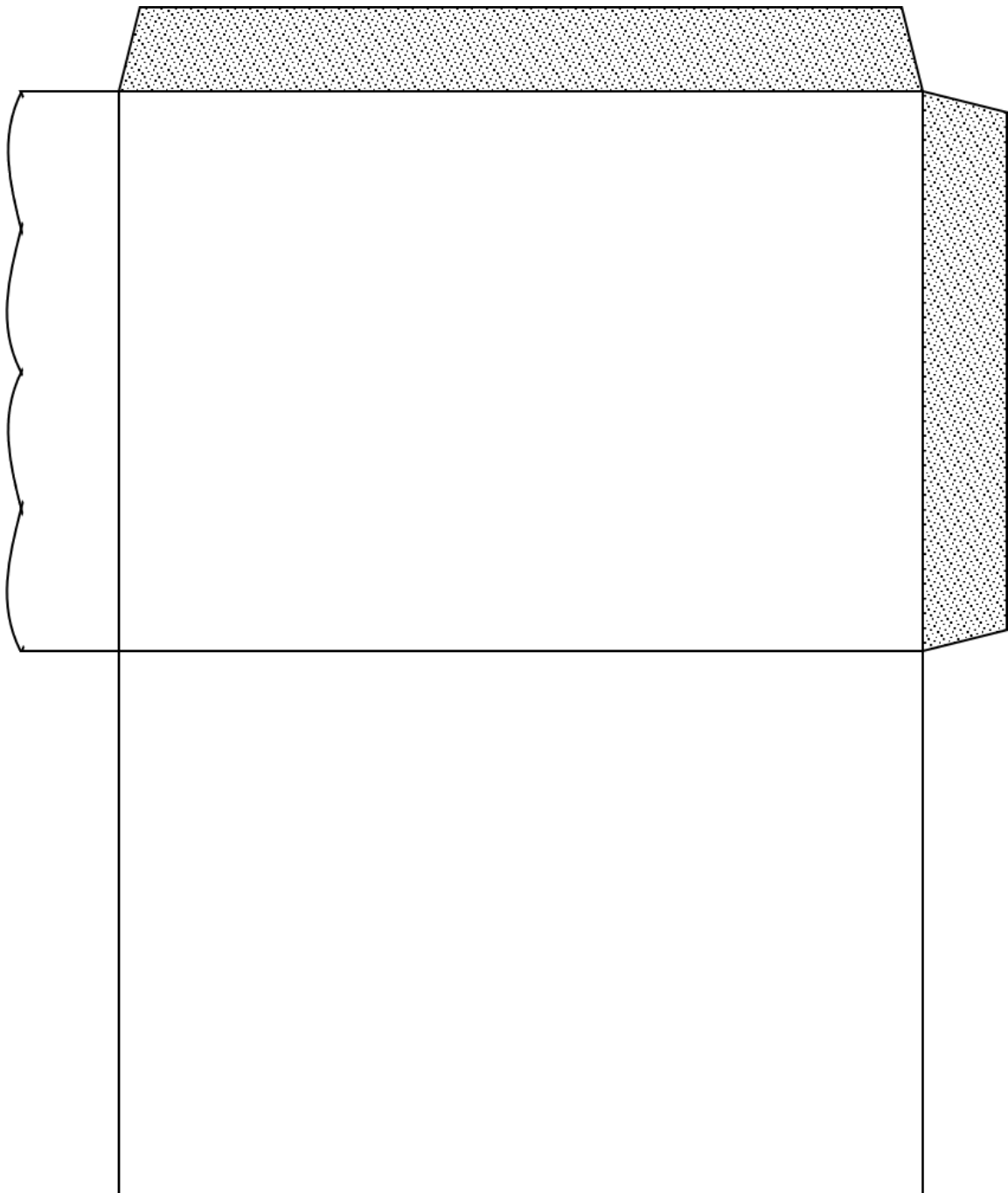
Make flavoured jelly or candies using agar agar.

Share fortune cookies.

Incorporate any of the above suggestions including welcoming guest speakers and engaging in Chinese New Year activities.

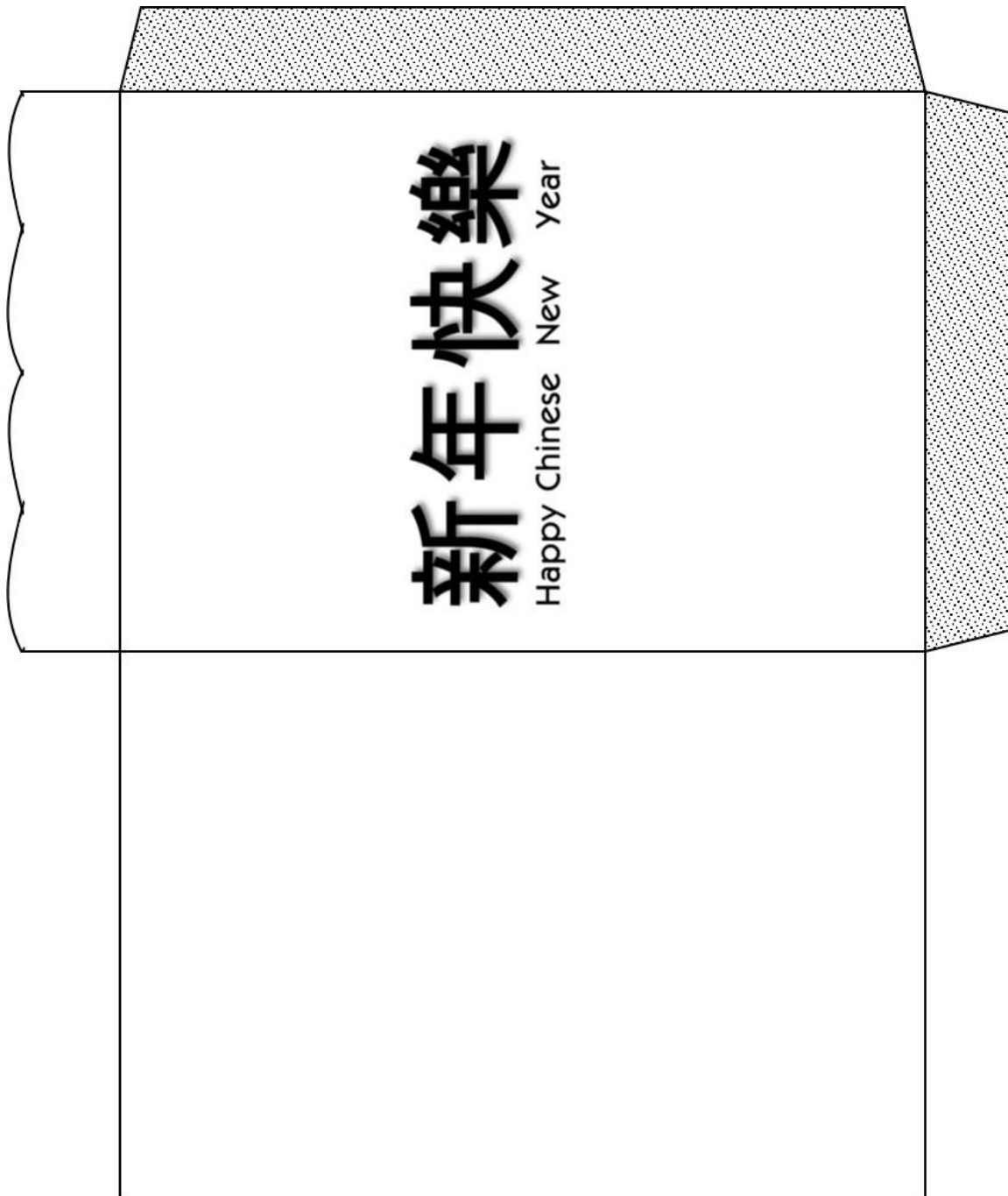
What else will you do to celebrate Chinese New Year?

Make a red envelope



1. Print on red paper.
2. Cut along the outside lines.
3. Fold along the inside lines.
4. Apply glue to the shaded parts.
5. Press together to make the red envelope.
6. Decorate.
7. Place a sweet treat inside to gift to a friend at Chinese New Year.

Make a red envelope (with Happy New Year greeting)



1. Print on red paper.
2. Cut along the outside lines.
3. Fold along the inside lines.
4. Apply glue to the shaded parts.
5. Press together to make the red envelope.
6. Decorate.
7. Place a sweet treat inside to gift to a friend at Chinese New Year.

Make a fan



A traditional Chinese fan

Start with an A4 piece of red paper. Decorate it with gold glitter or pens.

or

Start with an A4 piece of white paper.



Decorate with colourful flowers, butterflies, or patterns and spatters of red.



Fold the paper backwards and forwards like a concertina along the short side,



until it's all folded.



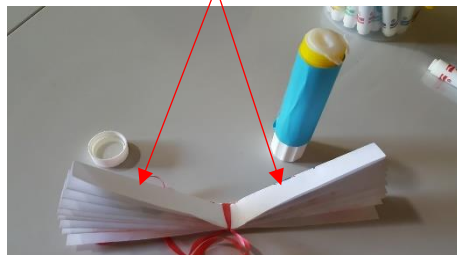
Fold it in half.



Tie a ribbon around the fold



Spread glue along the inside of both halves.



Press them together. Then open out your fan.



Make a lantern



You need: paper, pens, a pencil, a ruler, scissors, glue, a strip of paper or ribbon for hanging (if using ribbon, you also need a hole punch)

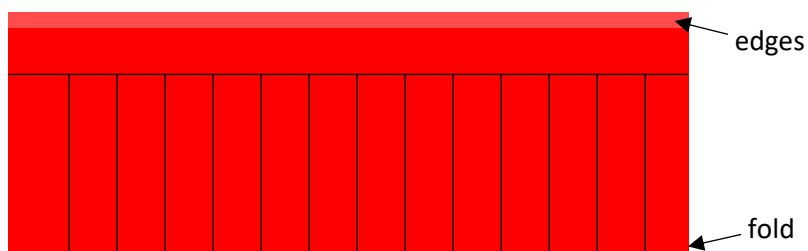
1. Decorate a piece of A4 paper. It may be white, red or any other colour.
2. Fold the paper in half so you have a long narrow rectangle.



3. Use a ruler to draw a line the width of the ruler from the edge of the paper.



4. Use the ruler to draw lines from the folded edge of the paper to the line.



5. Cut along the short lines from the fold. Stop when you get to the long line.



6. Unfold the paper with the edges at the top and the bottom. Spread glue along one side strip from the top edge to the bottom edge.



7. Curve the paper around. Press the other side of the paper to the glued side to make a cylinder.

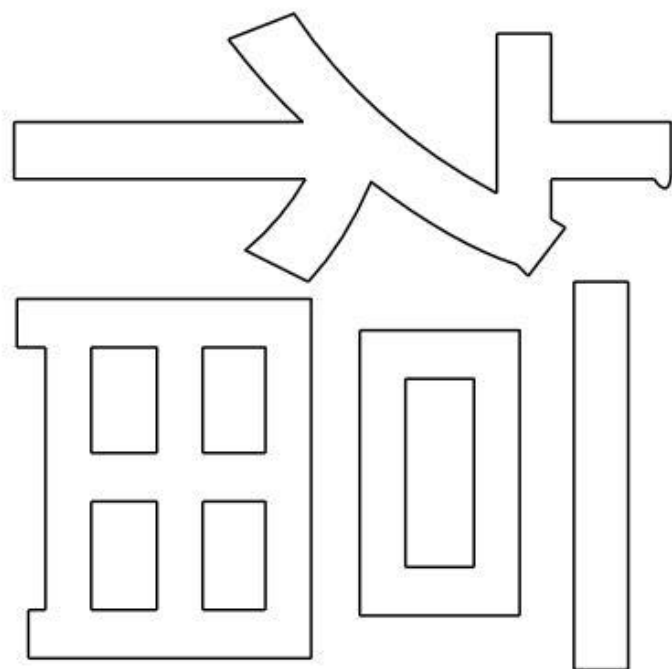
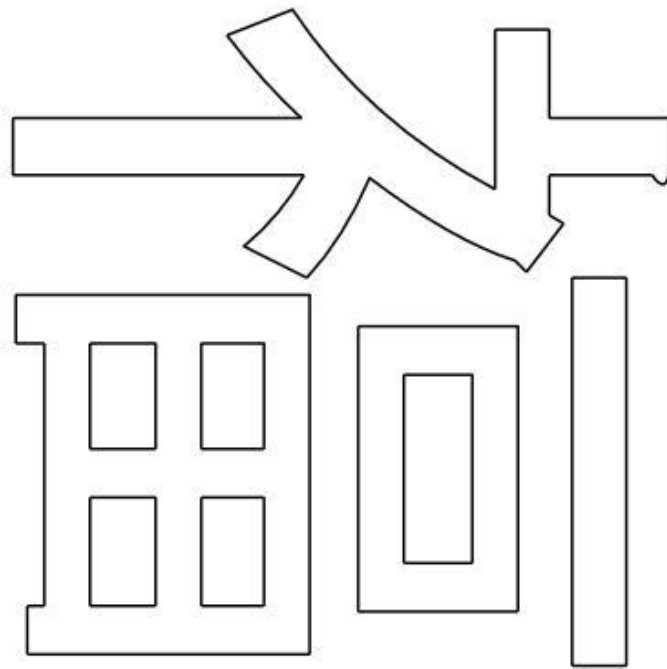


8. Add a paper strip or ribbon handle. Hang your lantern as a happy decoration.



Make a good luck sign

Print these "Fu" good luck signs on red paper. Children colour the symbols black. Cut out around each sign. Hang upside down in the classroom to welcome good luck.





Doing maths with Mahjong tiles

Mahjong is a traditional Chinese game played with tiles. It dates back centuries. The game played correctly is a game of luck and skill. It is quite a complex game and can take a long time to play.

However, children will enjoy investigating the tiles which can be used for a variety of maths activities.

Mahjong tiles consist of four sets each of three suits numbered from 1 to 9: sticks (bamboo), circles (wheels) numbers (characters). In addition, there are wind tiles, dragon tiles and flower tiles.

Children can:

- sort the tiles into the different suits
- sort into the tiles into suits and arrange them in sequence
- find matching pairs of tiles
- use selected pairs of tiles to play a game of memory

Here's another simple game to play:

First to nine

The object of the game is to get 9 tiles of one suit in sequence.

Spread the tiles out face down in the middle.

Each player takes nine tiles to start.

Players stand their tiles so only they can see them. They arrange the tiles in suits.

They must decide which suit they will attempt to collect and sequence.

In each turn, players pick up and discard one tile, so they always have nine tiles.

Players take turns to pick up one tile from the middle. They may choose to keep it and discard another tile, or they may discard it. The discarded tile is placed face up amongst the remaining face down tiles. The next player only may choose that tile, or another of the face down tiles.

Play continues until one person has completed a suit in sequence.

The Race

Long, long ago, the Jade Emperor needed twelve guards. He told the animals that he would choose the twelve fastest animals to be his guards. The first to arrive would have the highest ranking.

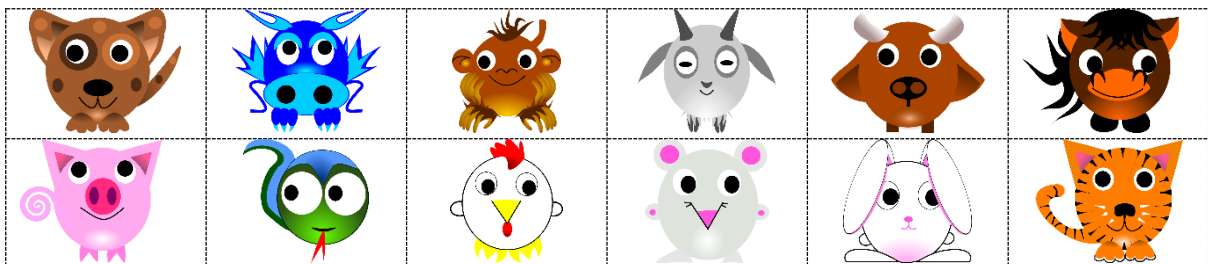
In the morning, the Rat was the first to arrive at the Heavenly Gate. Then came the Ox. After the Ox came the Tiger and the Rabbit. Dragon was fifth, followed by Snake. Then came Horse, and Goat came eighth. Monkey came next, then Rooster and Dog. Pig was the last of the twelve to arrive.

The Jade Emperor named a year for each of his guards. The years follow each other in a cycle, one after another, in the order in which the animals arrived at the Heavenly Gate.

Oh no! The words and animals have fallen off the chart and been all mixed up.

Can you cut them out and paste them in the correct order?

ninth	second
first	fifth
seventh	eighth
third	twelfth
sixth	fourth
eleventh	tenth



Zodiac images, Slide 5: CC0 Creative Commons by dimalique www.openclipart.org

Name: _____ Date: _____

Sequence the animals

Ordinal word

Animal

1st		
2nd		
3rd		
4th		
5th		
6th		
7th		
8th		
9th		
10th		
11th		
12th		