



New Moon, New Year

What do lanterns and lucky lions have in common? They're part of the Chinese New Year celebration! Let the new year roar in with this collection of cultural ideas.

ideas by Michele Gunther



Gung Hay Fat Choy! *Comparing New Year customs, descriptive writing*

What do these words mean? They mean “Happy New Year” in Chinese! The Chinese New Year spans several days. It marks a new beginning, as well as a new planting season, for China. People prepare for and celebrate this holiday in many ways. Introduce your students to some of the Chinese customs that mark the coming of the new year.

With the new moon of Chinese New Year, everyone turns a year older, no matter on what month or day they were actually born. Celebrate with cupcakes and a round of “Happy Birthday.” Lead a discussion eliciting students’ feelings about this concept. Is it one they like? Why or why not?

Familiarize your students with other Chinese customs. Share *Gung Hay Fat Choy* by June Behrens. Have students compare our New Year’s Eve customs to the ones used to celebrate the Chinese New Year. Direct each student to write a paragraph about his favorite new year custom—American or Chinese. Compile these in a class book titled “Let’s Celebrate!”





The “Write” Stuff

Recognizing cultural differences in written language

Your students can greet the new year by painting Chinese characters to say, “Gung Hay Fat Choy!” Explain that writing in China is done with paint-brushes and that symbols are used instead of letters. The Chinese do not write from left to right as we do, but rather from top to bottom and right to left.



Model the symbols that spell out “Happy New Year” in Chinese (see the example on page 93). Have students paint the characters with black paint on red or orange paper (red and orange are the colors that symbolize happiness and joy). Your students will be intrigued not only by the symbols, but also by their vertical direction.



Scrolling in the New Year!

Participating in a cultural custom, writing couplets

To welcome the new year, the Chinese hang banners expressing good luck, best wishes, or thoughts of happiness. Messages are written in couplets on red scrolls that are decorated with flecks of gold.

Create scrolls for your classroom using sheets of 9" x 12" red construction paper. Have students brainstorm rhymes for key words, such as *spring, year, red, money, day*, etc. Model the couplet form by incorporating words from the students' list into a rhyme. Encourage each student to write a two-to eight-line message in couplet form. Have each student copy his message onto a sheet of construction paper, printing each line with a pencil and then going over it with a fine-line black marker. For a finishing touch, add gold glitter or flecks of gold foil to create a trim around the scroll as shown. Hang these banners throughout the school as a welcome to spring.

Lunar Log

Introducing the lunar calendar, observing the moon

The Chinese New Year is determined by the ancient Chinese lunar calendar. A *new moon* (the phase in which the moon seems to disappear) marks the beginning of each new month. The Chinese year begins with the first new moon, sometime between January 21 and February 19. Read *Papa, Please Get the Moon for Me* by Eric Carle to familiarize your students with the moon's phases.

Enlarge a January and February calendar to display in the classroom. Draw a full moon on the first date it occurs. Each day, chart the moon as it *wanes*, or appears to shrink, and draw its shape on the calendar. When the moon “disappears,” it's time to celebrate the new year!

