Chinese New Year

The First Day of the Chinese Calendar—Late January or Early February

The Chinese New Year is based on the ancient Chinese calendar. This calendar follows the phases of the moon. It is celebrated at the start of a lunar month in early spring. Celebrations usually last about fifteen days. Chinese New Year is an important holiday.

Spring Festival is the traditional Chinese New Year. This holiday honors household gods and ancestors. Today, young people celebrate by taking time off from work. They may still use the time to renew family ties, as well.

Summary of Activities

Reading: Literature
A Chinese Fairy Tale: Yeh-Shen—fairy tale with a compare-and-contrast activity

Reading: Informational Text
Celebrating the New Year—nonfiction passage with comprehension questions

Writing
Messages of Good Fortune—activity in which students make scrolls and write messages of good luck for family and friends

Bonus
Chinese Lanterns—activity in which students make Chinese lanterns

Vocabulary: ancestors, disguised, fortune, icons, message, phases, recognize, scroll
A Chinese Fairy Tale: Yeh-Shen

Directions: Read the fairy tale. Then complete the activity on page 34.

Long ago, a cave chief had two wives. They each had a baby girl. Then the chief and one wife died. Her baby was named Yeh-Shen. The only person left to take care of the baby was her stepmother. Yeh-Shen was more kind and beautiful than the other girl. The stepmother treated her poorly. Yeh-Shen had to do the most awful chores. Her only friend was a fish with big golden eyes. The girl fed the fish every day. She didn’t have much food for herself, but she was happy to share. One day, the stepmother disguised herself and went to see the fish. She stabbed the fish and cooked it for dinner. Then she told Yeh-Shen what she had done. Yeh-Shen sat crying, when suddenly she saw a wise, old man. He said the bones of the fish had a powerful spirit. If she found herself in great need, she should kneel before the bones and tell them what she needed. He gave her a warning not to waste this gift. Yeh-Shen got the bones from the trash and hid them in a safe place.

Spring Festival came. The young people would meet to find husbands and wives. Yeh-Shen wanted to go, but her stepmother wouldn’t let her. She was afraid someone would pick Yeh-Shen instead of her own daughter. The stepmother and her daughter went to the festival. As soon as they left, Yeh-Shen asked the bones for clothes to wear to the festival. Suddenly, she wore a beautiful gown and feather cloak. She had golden slippers on her feet. The bones warned her not to lose the slippers.

When Yeh-Shen arrived, everyone at the festival looked at her. Yeh-Shen was afraid her stepmother would recognize her. She ran out of the village so quickly that she lost one of the golden slippers. By the time she got home, she wore her rags again. The bones fell silent. Sadly, she hid the one golden slipper in her bedstraw.

A merchant found the lost slipper. Seeing it had great value, he sold it to someone else who then gave it to the king. The king wanted to find the owner of the beautiful slipper. His men searched the kingdom, but no one could wear the tiny slipper. He put the slipper on display to try to find the owner. The king’s men waited just out of sight. The slipper did not fit anyone who tried it on. One night, Yeh-Shen crept close and took the tiny slipper. She tried to escape, but the king’s men caught her. They took her to the king. He was angry and couldn’t believe that anyone in rags could be the owner of the golden slipper. Then he noticed her tiny feet and great beauty. The king took her to her home, where she took the other slipper from its hiding place. Once she put on the two slippers, her rags turned back to the beautiful gown and feather cloak.

The king married her, and they lived happily ever after. Yeh-Shen never allowed the stepmother and her daughter to visit. They had to live in the cave all the rest of their days.
A Chinese Fairy Tale: Yeh-Shen (cont.)

Directions: Read the story on page 33. Which fairy tale is similar to this story? Complete the Venn diagram below to compare and contrast Yeh-Shen with another fairy tale. Include details from each fairy tale to show how they are similar and how they are different.

Yeh-Shen

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both
Chinese New Year is an important holiday. It honors household gods and ancestors. The holiday is also known as Spring Festival. Spring Festival is when people celebrate the traditional Chinese New Year.

The Chinese New Year is based on the Chinese calendar. It is many years old. This calendar is based on phases of the moon. The calendar has twelve signs along the path of the sun. Each sign represents an animal. Each new year is the year of one of the animals. The Chinese say people have some traits of the animal for the year they were born.

Traditional Chinese New Year celebrations focused on home and family. People cleaned their homes. They wanted to get rid of anything from the old year that might not bring good fortune in the new year. Such cleaning would also please the gods. People offered food and paper icons to ancestors and the gods. They put scrolls with lucky messages on the doors to their homes. Elders gave children an even amount of “lucky money” in red paper packets. People lit fireworks to frighten evil spirits. People hoped for good luck and long life for their parents.

The most important part of the festival is the food. During the first five days of the new year, people eat long noodles. The noodles are a symbol of long life. People eat round dumplings. This food stands for family and protection. Family members share a special meal together. The last course of the meal is a fish. People do not eat the fish. It stands for many good things.

Today, some places have parades. People enjoy time off work. Some families celebrate in the old ways. They get together and share meals with traditional foods. They do things to bring good luck. Other people do different things to celebrate. They watch special shows on TV. They get together with their friends. Old and new, people enjoy thinking about a new year!

1. What is the meaning of the word ancestor?
   a. relative who lived long ago  b. a powerful being  c. a type of animal

2. Why do people eat long noodles during the New Year’s festival?
   a. to frighten away evil spirits  b. to bring good luck  c. to have long life

3. What is the relationship between the Chinese New Year and Spring Festival?
   a. They happen at different times of the year.  b. One is celebrated in China and one is celebrated in the United States.  c. Spring Festival is another name for the traditional Chinese New Year.
Messages of Good Fortune

Directions: Read the passage. Then follow the instructions to make a Chinese scroll.

One way people celebrate Chinese New Year is by writing and displaying messages of good luck. Sometimes they write on scrolls. They put the scrolls on the doors to their houses. Sometimes they write good-luck messages with brushes on diamond-shaped pieces of red paper. They display them in homes or businesses.

We wish people “Happy New Year!” People in China also greet one another at the new year. They want to wish people good fortune.

What You Will Need

- a piece of white drawing paper
- red crayon or colored pencil
- scissors
- tape or glue
- two pencils or sticks

What You Will Do

1. Fold a piece of white drawing paper in half lengthwise.

2. Write a good-luck message on one side of the paper. Consider using one or more of the sayings below. Decorate the paper.

Popular Chinese New Year’s Greetings

Much happiness and prosperity to you.

Fortune will smile on you.

Get wealthy quickly.

Success is on its way.

3. Place a pencil or stick at the top of the paper. Fold over the paper and tape it in place. Follow this same step for the bottom of the paper.
Chinese Lanterns

Directions: Read the passage. Then follow the instructions to make a Chinese lantern.

Families get together for the Chinese New Year. The Chinese New Year celebration lasts for a month. On the fifteenth day, there is a lantern festival. Lanterns are painted with different scenes. People hang glowing lanterns in the temples. They carry lanterns to parades. During the parade, there is a dragon dance. The dragon is made of silk, paper, and bamboo. It may be as long as one hundred feet! Young men hold the dragon in the air. They dance through the streets.

What You Will Need

- colored paper (red and yellow are traditional Chinese colors)
- scissors
- glue or tape
- a ruler
- a pencil
- markers or other decorations (optional)

What You Will Do

1. Mark a one-inch strip across the edge of the short end of the paper. Cut the strip off and set it aside for the handle.

2. Fold the paper in half lengthwise. Draw a line one inch from the edge of the paper (opposite the fold line).

3. Start at the fold, one inch from the short edge of the paper. Cut a strip just to the line you drew in step 2. Continue to cut one-inch strips from the fold just to the pencil line.

4. Decorate the lantern if you wish.

5. Unfold the paper. Bring the edges together to form a tube. There will be vertical slits cut in the tube. Glue or tape the edges together. Glue or tape the handle to the top.