



CHINA: CHINESE NEW YEAR



Ring in the year of the rabbit with **Sue Cowley's** Chinese-themed activities...

The Chinese New Year is a wonderful event for inspiring creative lesson activities. You'll also get a great opportunity to explore influences from another culture with your children. In 2011, it's the year of the rabbit (also translated as the hare). People born in the year of the rabbit are said to be calm, serene and diplomatic. A bit of a contrast to the outgoing year of the tiger!

ACTIVITY 1

Dragon dancing

MAKE COSTUMES AND LEARN A DANCE...

This whole-class craft, dance and music activity is a fantastic way to celebrate the Chinese New Year. The Chinese see the dragon as a sacred creature and show great respect towards it. For them, it symbolises many qualities, including power, courage and dignity. The Dragon Dance is performed on big occasions, and especially at Chinese New Year.

First, show your class a video of the Dragon Dance – a quick internet search will bring up lots, for instance here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=4WUWPpRslM Now get your children to create their own dragon masks and costumes. You will need:

- ★ One large square-shaped cardboard box
- ★ One long, thin rectangular-shaped box
- ★ Masking tape
- ★ Paints, collage materials, crepe paper, etc.
- ★ Several colourful scarves or pieces of material
- ★ Percussion – drums, cymbals and a gong

To make your dragon head, first firmly attach the rectangular box to the square one, to make a 'head and mouth' shape. Cut two eye-holes in the square box, just above the mouth, so that the person wearing the mask can see out. Now decorate your dragon head as you wish.

Now prepare your dance. One child will be the 'head' of the dragon, the others will be the 'body', holding the scarves or material over their heads. You will also need some musicians to do a musical accompaniment. Talk to the children about the kind of movements that a dragon might make, and the sounds that could accompany this. Once it's ready, share your dance with the school!



ACTIVITY 2

Great Wall of China

LOOK AT THE PAST AND BUILD FOR THE FUTURE...

Take your class on a 'wall walk' around the school (and beyond school if possible), using a digital camera and clipboards to gather photos and notes about the different walls. Ask the pupils to look for different types of wall, different uses for walls, different materials used to build walls, how walls are constructed, etc. When you get back to the class, talk together about what you have discovered.

Show your children some images of the Great Wall of China. You can find lots at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Wall_of_China. The Great Wall was built over 2,000 years ago, and although it's hard to measure accurately, it is around 6,000 kilometres long. Looking at some of the steep sections, how do the children imagine the people got the stone there to actually build the wall?

Talk together about why people might feel the need to build walls, both in the past and in the modern day. Discuss some of the emotions that make us want to create a barrier between ourselves and other people. You might like to introduce some of the history of Hadrian's Wall, the Berlin Wall, or the modern day wall between Israel and Palestine.

Now set your children a challenge – to build the tallest and strongest wall that they can, in a set amount of time. Offer them a variety of different construction materials: boxes, foam and wooden blocks, clay, buckets, empty food packaging, air bricks, sand, stones, mud, blocks of wood, etc. Once the walls are completed, test them to see which is tallest, and which is strongest. Identify what makes a good construction, that will stand the test of time.



ACTIVITY 3

Inventive China

CONSTRUCT A KITE...

China has been the source of many important inventions, including papermaking, printing and the compass. The kite was also originally invented in China, so why not try this kite-making activity with your class? First, talk with your class about why they think kites might have originally been invented. Can they think of lots of different jobs that a kite could do, apart from its modern day role as a fun activity? For instance, it could be used:

- ★ For fishing, with bait tied to the tail
- ★ To fly explosives into the air, in a battle
- ★ As a warning, or a signal for help
- ★ To carry a rope across a river
- ★ As part of a religious ceremony or festival
- ★ To gather information about the weather

Now get your pupils to make their own kites (this activity is great for recycling old carrier bags). You will need:



- ★ Lots of plastic carrier bags (about three or four per kite)
- ★ Bamboo BBQ skewers (two for each kite)
- ★ Sellotape
- ★ Lengths of thin string
- ★ Pieces of thick cardboard for the reel
- ★ Black marker pens
- ★ Scissors

Follow the instructions here: www.my-best-kite.com/kite-for-kids.html. Ask your pupils to take their kites home to fly with their parents, and to bring in a photo to show how they got on.

ACTIVITY 4

Animals of China

LOOKING AT PERSONALITIES AND PANDAS...

The Chinese Lunar Calendar has 12 years, each based around a particular animal. The animals are the rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, rooster, dog and boar. Depending on which year you were born, you are said to have the personality of that particular animal. Your children can find out which animal matches their birth date here:

www.chinesezodiac.com/calculator.php.

Working in groups, ask your children to choose an animal and to say what kind of qualities a person born in that year might have.

When we talk about the animals of China, most people automatically think of the giant panda. The giant panda is classified as an 'endangered species', and is also the logo of the WWF (see www.worldwildlife.org/species/finder/giantpanda/panda.html). It is estimated that there are less than 2,500 pandas left in the world. Identify some of the factors causing the panda to become an endangered species, for instance destruction of habitat. **Watch this video:**

<http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/kids/animals/creaturefeature/panda>. Now get your children to create a fact-file about pandas, including information about where they live, what they eat, their habitat, and so on. If you have access to some 'live' bamboo, bring it into class so that the children can see what it looks like.



Taking it further...

See these internet pages for more information about China and kites:

A history of kites:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kite>

Original uses of kites:

www.essortment.com/hobbies/kitehistorymak_slhl.htm

Kites in China and kite superstitions:

www.airdynamics.co.uk/chinese_other.html

Sue Cowley is an educational author, trainer and presenter. For more information visit suecowley.co.uk