



# China

a cultural perspective

## Chinese traditions and celebrations

# 4

section four

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# Chinese New Year

Unlike the Western calendar, the Chinese calendar is based on the movements of the sun and the moon, for instance, the first day of each month falls when the moon is new. The month – and new moon – that signals the start of Chinese New Year is the most important.

Traditionally, the house is given a spring-clean before the celebrations begin but all brooms and brushes must be put away by Chinese New Year's Eve. Superstition has it that cleaning and putting out the rubbish during the festivities will also remove the good luck the New Year has brought.

The house, which may be given a "lucky coat" of red paint, is then decorated with vases filled with plum or peach blossom branches, lucky red paper-cuts, plates of tangerines and oranges, and narcissus flowers. Trays of lollies and candied fruits are put out. Poetic couplets, blessings and good luck messages printed

on red and gold paper – the colours of good fortune – are hung in and outside the home.

This is a time for families to gather together to give thanks, to remember ancestors and to eat. All of the dishes prepared and eaten during the celebrations have a special meaning: dumplings symbolise "wealth and prosperity", uncut noodles signify "long life" while whole fish means "abundance and togetherness".

At midnight, firecrackers send off the old year and welcome in the new.

The most well-known of the Chinese New Year celebrations – the Lantern Festival – takes place on the 15th and last day of festivities. The Lantern Festival is celebrated under the light of the full moon with lantern displays and parades. The lanterns are often decorated with painted birds, flowers, animals and zodiac signs. The highlight is often a dragon dance with a dragon made of silk, paper and bamboo and as much as 30m long.

## Things to do:

The Chinese New Year is traditionally celebrated for 15 days. Why not try these 15 activities.

1. Make a decorated calendar listing the 12 animals that make up the Chinese Zodiac and the corresponding years. Remember: as the lunar calendar is based on the cycles of the moon, the beginning of the year can fall between late January and mid February.
2. Make lucky Hong Bao red envelopes and decorate them with lucky symbols or Chinese characters for good fortune. Fill them with "gold" (chocolate coins).
3. Design and make a large class dragon.
4. Make Chinese lanterns to be used during a procession on day 15.
5. Design and cut out red paper-cuts to decorate the walls.
6. Make a "gold tree" and decorate with gold-coloured fruit—oranges, mandarins and/or cumquats.
7. Make special candles to 'light' up the room.
8. Practise writing the Chinese characters for wealth, luck and happiness and then draw or paint a special painting of something that makes you happy and write the character on it.
9. Make lion and clown masks and make up your own "lion dance".
10. Design and make Chinese New Year cards for your friends.
11. Make a red cloth hanging to go around the top and sides of the door and decorate it with gold tassels.
12. Make red cut-out pineapples to decorate the doorway.
13. Make a "good luck" poster to hang upside down and show that luck had arrived.
14. Make some paper dolls and dress them in their Chinese New Year costume. Use the popular colours of orange, purple, yellow and pink.
15. Cook traditional noodles and make fortune cookies with appropriate messages.

## Zodiac Years

2000	Dragon
2001	Snake
2002	Horse
2003	Sheep
2004	Monkey
2005	Rooster
2006	Dog
2007	Pig
2008	Rat
2009	Ox
2010	Tiger
2011	Rabbit

## New Year Dates

January 6, 2009
February 14, 2010
February 3, 2011
23 January 2012



# Fireworks

It is believed that fireworks originated in ancient China. Through the centuries they have been used as a noisy way to drive away evil spirits or celebrate victories over enemies. They are used today for fun at parades, bonfire nights, national days, sporting events and many other special occasions.

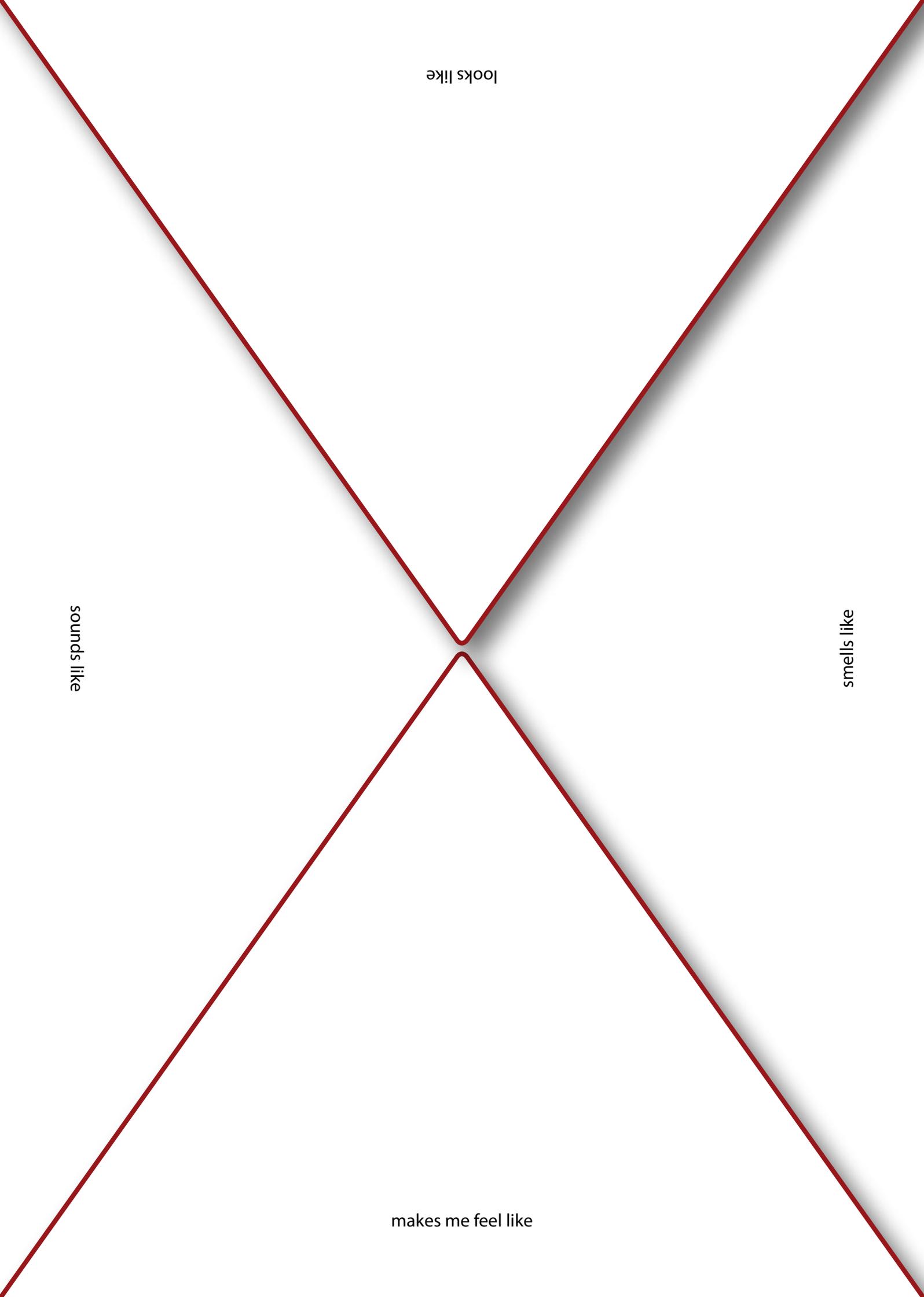
What would New Year's Eve be like without fireworks on the Sydney Harbour Bridge and at other major venues across Australia?

## Things to do:

1. Paint a fireworks picture using crayons and black paint.  
First, colour the paper with plenty of bright crayons.  
Next, apply black paint over the entire sheet of paper. This will represent the night.  
When the paint is dry scratch it off in patterns resembling exploding fireworks to make a fireworks scene.
2. Draw a daytime fireworks parade with Chinese Dragons and lanterns on poles.
3. Write a story or poem about a real or imaginary time when you were somewhere where there were fireworks.
4. Decorate toilet roll tubes or self-made cardboard tube to make a string of fireworks to hang from the classroom ceiling. Be sure to use plenty of the traditional red and gold colours as well as drawings of Chinese symbols and dragons.



Complete the X-chart on the next page describing how fireworks look, sound, smell and make you feel like.



looks like

sounds like

smells like

makes me feel like



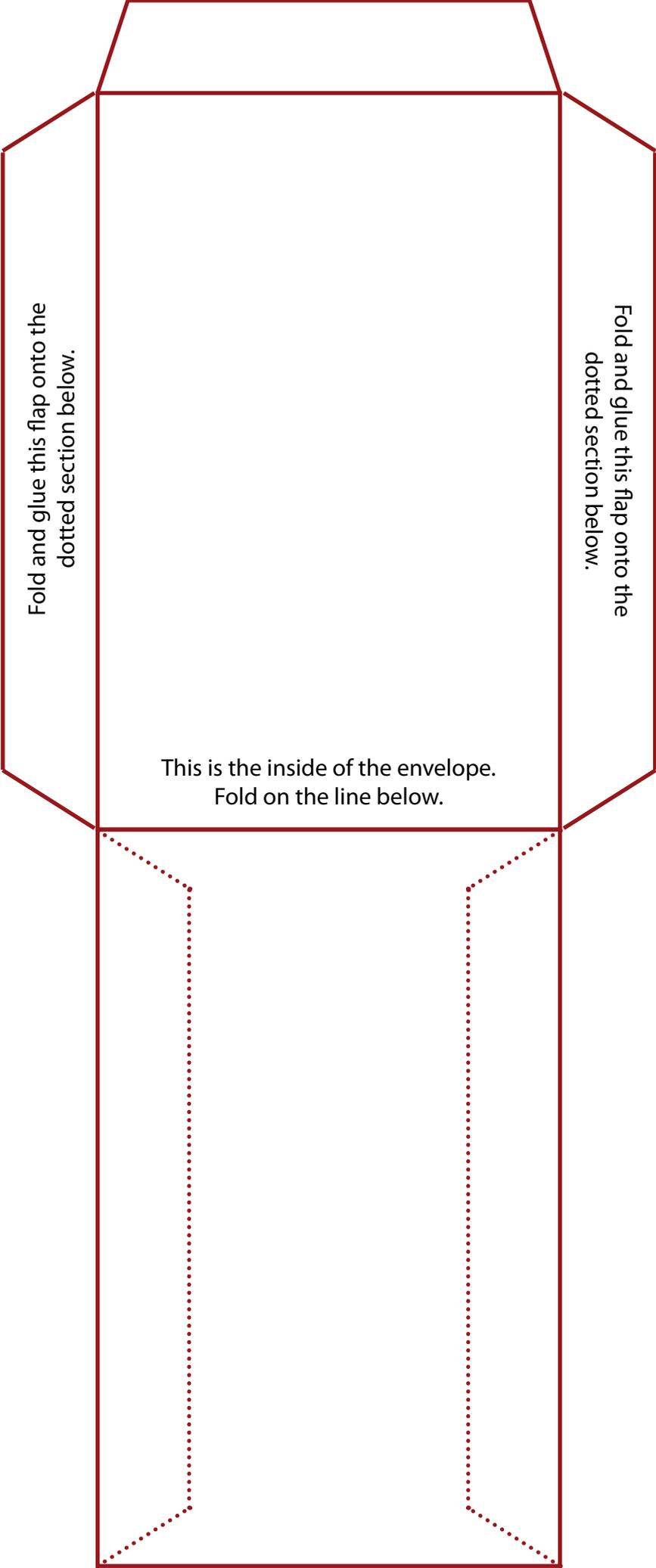
# Lucky Money: Hong Bao

At Chinese New Year children are given little red envelopes containing money by parents, family members and friends. Red is the colour of wealth and prosperity and also symbolises good luck for the giver and receiver. It traditionally represents the active, positive and protective energy of Yang. The amount of money can be anything from a small coin to a larger amount.

## Make your own Hong Bao



1. Either bring an envelope from home (you might even be lucky enough to find a red one from a greeting card)  
*or*  
use the pattern provided on the next page to cut out and glue together an envelope. Use red paper if you have it.
2. Decorate the envelopes with gold sticky stars and add details using gold paint or a gold pen.
3. Cut out round pieces of cardboard to represent money. Either paint the coins or cover them with gold foil. Gold foil is best because you can make patterns on it with a pointed stick.
4. Write a lucky message to go into the envelope with your lucky money.
5. With your classmates bring a few small branches from a shrub and make a lucky tree. You could spray it red or gold if you like.
6. Hang the Hong Bao from the tree.
7. Hold a Chinese New Year Party and swap envelopes with a classmate.



Fold and glue this flap onto the dotted section below.

Fold and glue this flap onto the dotted section below.

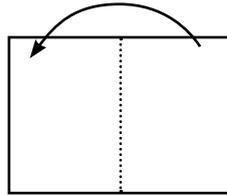
This is the inside of the envelope.  
Fold on the line below.



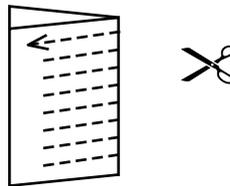
# Chinese Paper Lanterns

## Your task

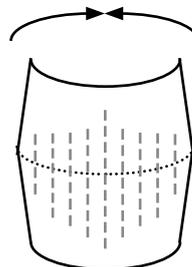
Make your own paper lantern.  
Fold a piece of red coloured paper or light card (origami paper is ideal) in half.



Cut the folded paper starting from the folded edge. Leave a band wide enough to form the bottom and top of the lantern.



Join the lantern at the top and bottom.



Attach a handle, made from another piece of card, to the top and streamers or curling ribbon to the bottom.

For variations use bright red wrapping paper or decorate your paper before you start.

Chinese paper lanterns are a colourful part of traditional Chinese culture. A bright red lantern is a symbol of long life, energy and good luck and is traditionally associated with marriages and births. But white and blue lanterns are not so festive. A blue lantern symbolises sickness in the family and a white lantern means someone has died.





# Zao Jun

## Chinese Kitchen God

Kitchen Gods have an important role to play in Chinese Lunar New Year celebrations.

Traditionally the first part of the Chinese New Year festival starts a week early when the Kitchen God Zao Jun or Tsao Chun visits the Jade Emperor (Yu Huang), in heaven to report on the family's behaviour. The belief is that the Emperor uses the report to either reward or punish the household.

Kitchen gods or Masters of the Stove are found in many Chinese homes. Their task is to look after the family's affairs and to report to Heaven about what the family has done during the year.

Sometimes the family makes offerings of sweets, fruits and flowers to the Kitchen God's statue. Often a sticky sweet is offered in the hope that the Kitchen God will only say nice (sweet) things in their report.



### Your Task

1. Use the Internet to find out more about the Chinese Kitchen God tradition and the story of Zao Jun.



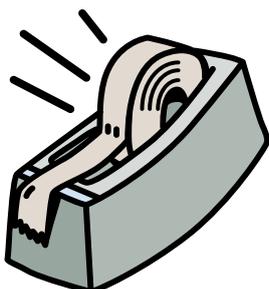
2. Collect images of the traditional Kitchen God to make a collage of images and surround it with offerings of sweets, fruits and flowers.

*or*

make a box work Kitchen God

*or*

make a Kitchen God from clay or plasticine.





# The Chinese Dragon

The Chinese Dragon has for many centuries been a symbol of the emperor and of strength, prosperity and good fortune. It has traditionally been associated with water in its many forms including rivers, lakes, waterfalls and the four seas around the coast of China.

It can decide when it rains; and its breath can form the clouds and mists so often seen in China. However, the negative side of the Dragon, if offended by mortals, can result in thunder and lightning; bring devastation in the form of floods and tidal waves, or can just as likely initiate periods of drought.



Dragon spotting is complicated as there are nine classical types of dragons with each having different responsibilities and tasks. As well there are nine Dragon Children.

During Chinese New Year processions huge dragons up to fifty metres long wind their way through the streets. The Dragon twists and gyrates as he clowns around with a Good Luck Lion and chases the Flaming Golden Pearl that represents wealth, good luck and prosperity.

Dragons are believed to be hard of hearing so the celebrations are accompanied by firecrackers, drums and gongs.

Other time-honoured sacred animals include the unicorn, the tortoise and the phoenix.

Those born in the Year of the Dragon are practical, full of energy, ambitious and brave. They have hot tempers but are popular, generous, and are often physically attractive.

Dragon people are honourable, charming and enjoy being leaders.



The dragon is seen to be made up of features from different animals. It is said to have:

- the head of a camel
- the horns of a deer
- the ears of a cow
- the neck of a snake
- the belly of a frog
- the palm of a tiger
- the talons of an eagle
- the scales of a carp fish
- five toes on each foot.

## Your tasks

Choose from these activities.

1. Construct an individual or class dragon using boxes and coloured cloth. If you are making a large dragon for a procession you can use hoops to hold up the dragon sections.
2. Paint dragon pictures or make collages depicting different dragons.
3. Use search engines to find further information about the different types and of Dragons and Dragon Children.
4. Collect photographs of Chinese dragons in art, sculpture, architecture and clothing and present your compilation as a PhotoStory or PowerPoint.
5. Find out what well-known people have been born in Dragon Years.