Reading literature inspired by other cultures gives children an opportunity to develop empathy, understanding, and an appreciation of the world and its many people. Children can make connections between the stories and celebrations of other cultures to that of their own. Building these connections helps bridge the distance between us all. Chinese culture and literature is full of talking animals, fire-breathing dragons and yummy foods all sure to inspire your students to keep reading. Here are a dozen titles to share with your students and study Chinese myths and legends, celebrate the Chinese New Year, and explore customs and traditions. Enjoy!
Legends & Myths

questions for group discussion

On The Silk Princess
by Charles Santore:

• What problem does the Great Emperor have as the story opens? What does he hope to someday find?
• What does Princess Hsi-Ling Chi notice in the garden? What happens to the cocoon?
• How does her adventure begin? Describe what she sees in the garden.
• What beast first scares the princess? Do all good stories have some danger in them?
• What mistake does the princess make on the bridge? What saves her from the dragon?
• How does she know that she’s lost? Have you ever been lost before? How does it feel? What did you do?
• Who rescues the princess? What does he explain about the thread?
• Do you think the princess only dreamed her adventure or did she really have one? What clues in the story make you think so?
• How does the princess’s discovery change things with her father?
• Read the author’s note. What inspired this story? Have you ever been inspired to write a story of your own based on something you were reading?

On Day of the Dragon King
by Mary Pope Osborne and Grandfather Tang’s Story
by Ann Tompert:

• What elements of myth or legend are included in these two stories?
• Create a list of things you learned while reading. Can you learn facts while reading fiction too?
• Which story is your favorite? Why? What makes a story interesting?

classroom connections

Beware of Dragons!

Have students create simple clay using the following recipe and then sculpt a traditional-looking Chinese dragon inspired by the book The Silk Princess.

Notes on a Story

Fill out the following graphic organizer as you read a variety of myths and legends with your class. Discuss the results in small groups.

SAMPLE ORGANIZER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Magical Elements</th>
<th>Lesson Taught</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Long, Long Ago . . .

Instruct students to write their own myth or legend that explains something that is common in your own region. For example, how the box turtle got his shell.
questions for group discussion

On Bringing In the New Year by Grace Lin:

• What is the narrator of the story looking forward to? What holiday do you look forward to most? Why?
• What does Jie-Jie do to help get ready? How do you help your mom and dad?
• Who is Ba-Ba? What do you call yours? What does he hang?
• What does Ma-Ma cook to celebrate? What special food does your mom make for holidays?
• Make a list of important times to get a fresh haircut and buy new clothes.
• When do you hear firecrackers? Do you like them?
• What do the dragons do? Have you ever been scared of anything? What did you do?
• Why do the children make and carry lanterns? Would you like to be in that parade?
• What is the last step before the New Year can come? Who helps the dragon?
• Which illustration is your favorite? Why? What was the most interesting fact you learned?

On Demi’s Happy, Happy Chinese New Year! and Happy New Year! Kung-Hsi Fa-Ts’ai!

• How are the books similar? How are they different? Which one is your favorite? Why?
• Which illustration is your favorite? Why?
• What is the most interesting fact you learned while reading these books?

classroom Connections

Lighting the Way to New Year!

First, have students look up their animal on the Chinese zodiac calendar. Next, they should design a lantern out of a paper bag, recycled two-liter bottle, or any other handy household object by cutting out part of the design (like the eyes) and “lighting” it with yellow tissue paper. Once students string their lanterns from a stick it’s time for them to march in a classroom New Year parade!

Out with the Old

Remind the class that it is traditional to clean out old clutter for the Chinese New Year. Have students bring in clothing, books, or toys that they no longer want and make a classroom donation to a local charity.

Flower Messages

Have students study and sketch (or paint) the flora and fauna that are traditionally used to commemorate the New Year onto the front of small cards. Inside, they should offer wishes for the New Year and be sure to send to friends in a lovely red envelope!
Exploring Chinese Customs and Traditions

questions for group discussion

On Chopsticks by Jon Berkeley, Cleversticks by Bernard Ashley, and Fortune Cookie Fortunes and Dim Sum for Everyone! by Grace Lin:

- What foods are mentioned in the story? What is your favorite Chinese food?
- Have you ever tried to eat with chopsticks? What was it like?
- Dim sum is made up of small servings of a wide variety of foods. Would you like to try dim sum? Have you ever been to a buffet? How are the similar?
- Have you ever had a fortune cookie? Do you remember what it said? Do you believe they come true? Why or why not?

On Tae Kwon Do! by Terry Pierce, Kites by Demi, and Kite Flying by Grace Lin:

- People in China believe flying kites is more than just fun. Why?
- Have you ever flown a kite before? Is it easy?
- How can you make a kite? What design would you choose?
- Which book is your favorite? Why? Why do you think the illustrator used the palette of colors for that book?
- Different cultures have different sports and festivals. Compare the ones in the book to the ones your family celebrates. How are they alike? What is different?

classroom connections

A Class Feast

Locate a restaurant that serves dim sum. Plan a class trip to the restaurant and afterward have students write and share a brief journal about the experience. If there are no restaurants nearby that serve dim sum, then create a class feast of your own.

Kite Fight!

Have students research a variety of kite designs and then host a kite-flying festival on a windy day. Instead of kites fighting with the glass or porcelain strings (like the stories mention), have students compete on how long their kite flew. Other awards can be given for most colorful, most creative, best representation of an animal, best celebration of a season, etc.

Good Fortune

On small slips of paper have students write fortunes that have to do with learning and school. Find an easy fortune cookie recipe to slip the school fortunes inside of or place them in small treat bags or Chinese take-out containers (available at most craft stores). Let students select a cookie and read their fortune aloud to the class.
### Legends & Myths

**Day of the Dragon King**  
*Magic Tree House #14*  
Mary Pope Osborne  
Illustrated by Sal Murdocca

Jack and Annie set off to find an original copy of an ancient Chinese myth. Armed only with their magic library cards, they must take on a book-burning emperor. But with the help of a scholar and a silk weaver, they triumph again.

- **Grades K–3**
- **PB:** 978-0-679-89051-5 (0-679-89051-3)  
- **GLB:** 978-0-375-91521-5 (0-375-91521-4)  
- **HC:** 978-0-375-83664-0 (0-375-83664-0)

**Grandfather Tang’s Story**  
*Ann Tompert*  
Illustrated by Robert Andrew Parker

“Drawing on a Chinese form of storytelling with seven shapes cut from a square of paper, Tompert recounts the tale of two fox fairies. Parker’s pen-and-watercolor art adds drama, while the tangram insets will motivate children to try their own versions. Ingenious.”—*The Bulletin*

- **Grades K–3**
- **PB:** 978-0-517-88592-5 (0-517-88592-1)  
- **GLB:** 978-0-375-93664-7 (0-375-93664-5)  
- **HC:** 978-0-375-81082-4 (0-375-81082-X)

**The Silk Princess**  
*Charles Santore*  
Princess Hsi-Ling Chi emerges from the gates for the first time with her magical thread unraveled from a tiny cocoon that dropped into the Empress’s teacup, and she knows it will lead her back to the palace garden. But she is very far from home when she notices that the thread has broken, and that she is lost. How will she find her way back? And will the secret of silk be lost forever?

- **Grades PreK–2**
- **PB:** 978-0-553-11254-2 (0-553-11254-6)  
- **HC:** 978-0-375-81521-8 (0-375-81521-X)

### Ring In the Chinese New Year!

**Bringing In the New Year**  
*Grace Lin*

This exuberant story follows a Chinese American family as they prepare for the Lunar New Year. Each member of the family lends a hand as they sweep out the dust of the old year, hang decorations, and make dumplings. Then it’s time to celebrate.

- **Grades PreK–1**
- **PB:** 978-0-375-83448-6 (0-375-83448-6)  
- **HC:** 978-0-375-81008-4 (0-375-81008-0)  
- **GLB:** 978-0-375-93664-0 (0-375-93664-0)

**Happy, Happy Chinese New Year!**  
*By Demi*

“In a book that is itself a celebration, Demi explains the rituals and ideas behind the Chinese New Year festival.”—*Booklist*

- **Grades PreK–3**
- **HC:** 978-0-375-81521-8 (0-375-81521-X)  
- **PB:** 978-0-375-81008-4 (0-375-81008-0)  
- **GLB:** 978-0-375-93664-0 (0-375-93664-0)

**Happy New Year! Kung-Hsi Fa-Ts’ai!**  
*With delightful charm and simplicity, Demi offers a lovely look at the Chinese New Year. Primary-grade assignments will be enriched by this jewel-toned picture book presentation.*

- **Grades K–3**
- **PB:** 978-0-517-88592-5 (0-517-88592-5)

### Exploring Chinese Customs and Traditions

**Chopsticks**  
*Jon Berkeley*

In a busy harbor, in the faraway island of Hong Kong, there is a floating restaurant. This restaurant is home to Chopsticks, a tiny gray mouse. Chopsticks befriends a wooden dragon who wants to fly. On the night of the full moon, during Chinese New Year, they share a high-flying adventure with the help of Old Fu, the dragon’s creator.

- **Grades PreK–3**
- **HC:** 978-0-375-83309-9 (0-375-83309-9)  
- **PB:** 978-0-679-89332-7 (0-679-89332-5)

**Kites**  
*By Grace Lin*

“A celebratory book that is going to inspire some serious kite-making/kite-flying activities.”—*The Bulletin*

- **Grades K–3**
- **PB:** 978-0-440-42192-4 (0-440-42192-6)  
- **HC:** 978-0-375-81521-8 (0-375-81521-X)

**Dim Sum for Everyone!**  
*Fortune Cookie Fortunes*

This exuberantly illustrated story about every kid’s favorite part of a Chinese meal also includes a brief history of the fortune cookie.

- **Grades K–3**
- **PB:** 978-0-375-81521-8 (0-375-81521-X)  
- **HC:** 978-0-375-81521-8 (0-375-81521-X)

**Tae Kwon Do!**  
*Step into Reading—Step 1*

**By Terry Pierce**  
Illustrated by Todd Bonita

“We’re off to Tae Kwon Do class, where we’ll learn to kick, spin, box, jump, and even break a board! We’ll also have fun in this simple Step 1 book. Perfect for kids who are both learning to read and learning Tae Kwon Do or another martial art.”

- **Grades PreK–1**
- **PB:** 978-0-375-81992-4 (0-375-81992-4)  
- **HC:** 978-0-375-81082-4 (0-375-81082-X)

**Kite Flying**  
*Kite Flying celebrates the Chinese tradition of kite making and kite flying and lovingly depicts a family bonded by this ancient and modern pleasure.*

- **Grades PreK–3**
- **PB:** 978-0-553-11254-2 (0-553-11254-6)  
- **HC:** 978-0-375-81520-1 (0-375-81520-1)
books for older readers

Middle Grade

THE FIVE ANCESTORS

Jeff Stone

Filled with action and adventure and seeped in Chinese culture, this series is perfect for engaging reluctant readers!

Grades 5 up

**Tiger**
- PB: 978-0-375-83072-3 (0-375-83073-3)
- GLB: 978-0-375-93071-5 (0-375-93071-X)

**Monkey**
- PB: 978-0-375-83074-7 (0-375-83074-4)
- HC: 978-0-375-83073-0 (0-375-83073-1)
- GLB: 978-0-375-93073-7 (0-375-93073-6)

**Snake**
- PB: 978-0-375-83076-1 (0-375-83076-6)
- HC: 978-0-375-83075-4 (0-375-83075-8)
- GLB: 978-0-375-93072-4 (0-375-93072-8)

**Crane**
- HC: 978-0-375-83087-9 (0-375-83083-7)
- GLB: 978-0-375-93083-9 (0-375-93083-5)

**Eagle**
- HC: 978-0-375-83089-3 (0-375-83083-9)
- GLB: 978-0-375-93083-5 (0-375-93083-5)

by Lensey Namioka:

**Half and Half**
- Grades 3–7
- PB: 978-0-440-41890-0 (0-440-41890-9)

**Yang the Third and Her Impossible Family**
- Grades 4–7
- PB: 978-0-440-41231-1 (0-440-41231-5)

**Yang the Youngest and His Terrible Ear**
- Grades 4–7
- PB: 978-0-440-40917-5 (0-440-40917-9)

Young Adult

**Chinese Cinderella**

Adeline Yen Mah

Grades 7 up
- PB: 978-0-440-22865-3 (0-440-22865-4)

**Hot, Sour, Salty, Sweet**

Sherri L. Smith

Grades 7 up
- HC: 978-0-385-73417-4 (0-385-73417-4)
- GLB: 978-0-385-90431-5 (0-385-90431-2)

**Wandering Warrior**

Da Chen

Grades 5 up
- PB: 978-0-440-23771-6 (0-440-23771-6)

by Lensey Namioka:

**Ties That Bind, Ties That Break**
- Grades 7 up
- PB: 978-0-440-41599-2 (0-440-41599-3)

**An Ocean Apart, a World Away**
- Grades 7 up
- PB: 978-0-440-22973-5 (0-440-22973-1)

**Mismatch**
- Grades 5–9
- PB: 978-0-440-23879-9 (0-440-23879-9)
- HC: 978-0-385-73183-6 (0-385-73183-3)

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Guide prepared by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer, a reading specialist and children’s author.

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