

On Friday, 12th February 2021 the Chinese will be celebrating their New Year and the Year of the Ox will begin.

Year of the Ox: 1949, 1961, 1973, 1985, 1997, 2009, 2021



Our Mandarin teacher, Liang Qiao, has shared a few festive activities from The British Council. Why not try them for yourself? We'd love to see any photos of what you do. Share them with Mrs Whalley [here](#).

Activity: design a mooncake

Mooncakes are small round or square pastries made especially for the Mid-Autumn Festival, or Moon Festival, as it is also known. A month or more before the festival, special mooncake shops open up, and existing stores, hotels and restaurants all compete with each other to produce the best and sometimes the most unusual fillings and packaging.

Mooncakes are made in special moulds which create beautiful patterns on the top of the cakes. The filling of the cakes is traditionally sweet, with pastes made out of red bean and lotus seeds being a favourite. Often they have an egg yolk in the middle, representing the moon. Recently, the fillings have become stranger and more exotic, with savoury fillings of all kinds also becoming popular.

The link below has a page of designs for mooncakes with their fillings:

http://media.zenfs.com/en_SG/News/Makansutra/Tung-Lok-mooncake-motifs-Image-courtesy-of-Tung-Lok.jpg

Use this as a starting point for designing your own set of four mooncakes – remember you can be as imaginative as you like with the fillings. Perhaps you might like to make some that you think would sell well in your own home town or city.

Delicious mooncakes also need a beautiful box, so finally you can design and make a suitable box for your special cakes. You might want to include the moon and/or lanterns in your design, and remember that the lucky Chinese colour is red.

Mooncakes



Activity: make mooncakes

This recipe takes around 1 1/2 hours to make. If your school has suitable facilities you might want to try it with your class. However, it may be more suitable for students to try at home with their families.

Ingredients:

Dough

560g plain flour
85g dried milk powder
1 tablespoon baking powder
1 teaspoon salt
3 large eggs
250g caster sugar
170g unsalted butter, melted and cooled to room temperature
1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla essence

Filling

340g apricot jam
150g chopped pitted dates
80g desiccated coconut
130g raisins or sultanas

For a more authentic version, you can use a can of red bean paste instead of the jam.

Glaze

1 egg, lightly beaten
2 tablespoons water

You will need:

2 large mixing bowls
Sieve
Wooden spoon
Large metal spoon
2 baking sheets
Baking paper
Pastry brush
Wire cooling rack
Fork
Wooden skewers

Makes approximately 20 cakes

1 Make the dough. In one bowl, mix the flour, milk powder, baking powder and salt together.

FLOUR

2 Break the eggs into another bowl. Add the sugar, and beat together for up to five minutes. Pour in the melted butter and vanilla essence and fold in using a metal spoon.

SUGAR

3 Add the sieved dry ingredients to the liquid mixture. Using a metal spoon, fold in to create a dough.

4 Put the dough onto a floured surface and knead lightly. Once smooth, the dough is ready.

Roll the dough into a log shape. If possible, wrap the dough in cling film and chill in the fridge overnight, as this makes it easier to work with.

Cut into evenly sized discs, making approximately 20 pieces.

5 Make the filling. Mix the apricot jam (or bean paste), chopped dates, coconut and raisins together in a small bowl. Use a fork to mash down any chunks of apricot.

RAISINS

JAM

6 Preheat the oven to 375°F/190°C/Gas mark 5. Prepare two baking sheets by covering them in baking paper.

7 Press each dough piece into a 7cm circle. When stretching the dough, make the edges thinner and the centre thicker.

8 Press a portion of filling into the middle of each circle. Gather the edges together to enclose the filling and pinch closed. Roll into a ball, then flatten.

9 To replicate the look of traditional mooncakes, shape the cake as round as possible and use a wooden skewer to draw your design on the top.

10 Make the glaze. Beat the egg and water together in a small bowl. Brush each mooncake with the glaze, using a pastry brush.

11 Place each cake about 3cm apart on a baking sheet and put in the oven. Bake for 30 minutes or until the mooncakes turn golden brown. Remove from the oven and leave to cool on a wire cooling rack.

Activity: make a Chinese lantern

You will need:

- a sheet of A4 coloured card
- scissors
- a stapler or sticky tape.

1

Cut a strip about 3cm wide from the short side of the card. This will be used to make the handle.



2

Fold the rest of the sheet of card in half length-ways.



3

Cut a straight line across the fold of the card, about 2cm in from the side, stopping about 3cm from the unfolded edge. Don't cut all the way across!



4

Repeat Step 3 across the card, with the cuts about 2cm apart.



5

Unfold the card, curve it round so the two short sides are just overlapping, and staple together at the top and bottom (or stick together with tape).



6

Squash the lantern down a little so that the middle pushes outwards. Staple the handle strip to either side of the top of the lantern.



You can decorate your lantern any way you like, and hang up a row of different coloured lanterns along a string from the ceiling.

7



The story of the New Year Race

Many thousands of years ago – in fact more thousands than you could possibly count – the Jade Emperor was arranging the world in an orderly fashion so that he could keep track of what was going on and keep everything neat and tidy.

He was particularly pleased with the way that time worked, but had an irritating feeling that maybe he had missed something. As he walked around the Heavenly Peach Orchard one day – well actually it was several hundred years, but that was just like a day to him – he realised that what was needed was a way of tracking the passing of the years. He was quite happy with the seconds, minutes, hours, days and months, but the years just didn't feel right yet. They needed names, he suddenly

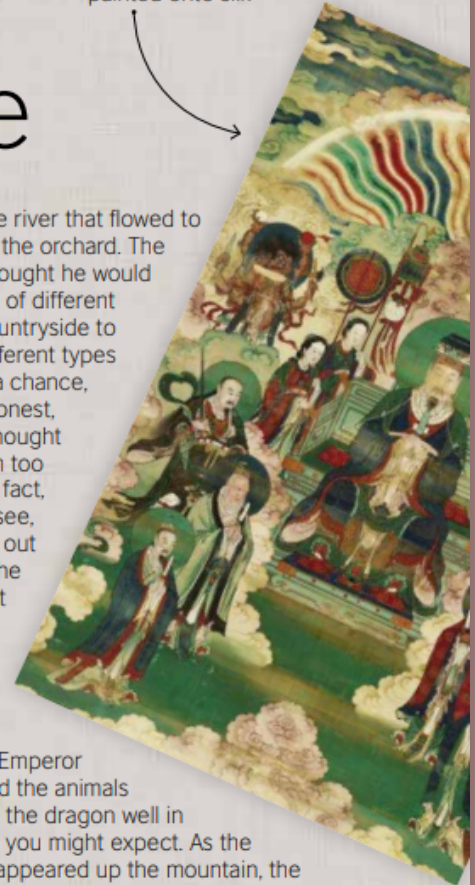
thought, not just numbers – that way they would be much easier to remember, and he could have a bit of fun making the names and what happened in those years fit together. But what to call them? As he thought about this, he watched two phoenixes playing in the sky above him, diving and swooping and chasing each other. "That's it", he thought, "I'll gather the animals and birds together and have a race. I can name the years after the order they finish. The first 12 I think, because that will make a nice number to remember."

Once he'd made this decision, he wasted no time in summoning all the birds and animals to take part in the Great Race; but when he saw the huge crowd that arrived, he realised that this might be a bit difficult and dangerous to arrange properly. He was a bit disappointed, because, being an Emperor, he liked things on a grand scale, but in the end decided that since he only wanted 12 winners he only needed 12 animals to decide which order the names should be in. Having decided this, he chose the animals that he thought humans were most familiar with – only when he came to count them, he realised he had been distracted by a particularly juicy peach he was munching on and had actually chosen 13! They were the Rooster, Dragon, Ox, Dog, Monkey, Rabbit, Tiger, Horse, Cat, Pig, Rat, Sheep and Snake. He lined them up at the gate of the Heavenly Peach Orchard, and described the course they had to race around. It started going up the mountain to the left of the orchard, made a big loop round and ended with them

crossing the river that flowed to the right of the orchard. The Emperor thought he would include lots of different types of countryside to give the different types of animals a chance, but to be honest, he hadn't thought this through too carefully. In fact, as you will see, it all turned out all right in the end, but not quite the way he imagined.

"Yi, er, san, kaishi!" the Emperor shouted and the animals set off, with the dragon well in the lead, as you might expect. As the animals disappeared up the mountain, the Emperor strolled across the river to wait for them. He took a large basket of peaches with him to keep him going, and just as he was finishing the 273rd he saw the Ox swimming across the river and hauling himself out onto the bank. "Well, well, well," he said to himself. "Who'd have thought it!" But imagine his surprise

A portrait of the Jade Emperor painted onto silk



The story of the New Year Race

when, just as the Ox had got his front hooves onto the bank, out from behind his ears jumped the Rat, who landed neatly on solid ground, and with a small squeak of triumph, raced across the finishing line. The Ox lumbered up next, grumbling and mumbling about how the Rat had tricked him into giving him a lift. One by one the other animals emerged from the river and crossed the line. Third was the Tiger, then the Rabbit, followed by the Dragon, the Snake, the Horse, the Sheep, the Monkey, the Rooster, the Dog and the Pig.

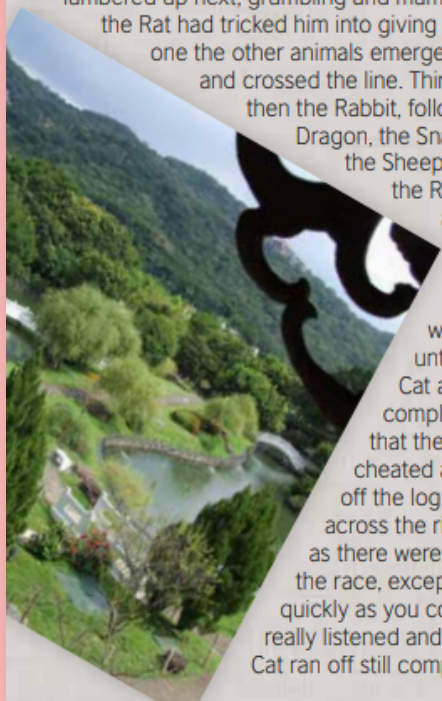
They all stood around for a while waiting, until at last the Cat appeared complaining bitterly that the Dog had cheated and pushed it off the log they floated across the river on. But as there were no rules for the race, except to finish as quickly as you could, no one really listened and eventually the Cat ran off still complaining and

promising to get even with the Dog. The Jade Emperor was very pleased with the result of the race, but was a bit puzzled by why some of the animals hadn't done as well as he had expected. When questioned, the Dragon, who could have won the race so easily, admitted that he had been distracted by several humans he had found in various sorts of trouble and had stopped to help them – that, after all, is what Chinese dragons do. The Dog said that the Cat had put up rather more of a fight than he had expected and he had stopped to lick all the scratches better, and eventually the Pig had to admit that he had stopped for several snacks and a light breakfast on the way.

All in all, however, the Jade Emperor said that they had each acted according to their nature, especially the tricky Rat and the greedy Pig, so he carefully recorded the result of the race. This was on a long yellow scroll which he hung at the gates of the Heavenly Peach Orchard. It is probably still there now. What is certain is that the Rat is still the first year of the Zodiac, the Pig the last and the Cat has still not forgiven the Dog.

Because this all happened so long ago, no one can be certain of the exact details of the race, and who did what to whom. All that we do know for sure is the order the animals finished in.

A Chinese dragon carving at a temple



Activity: make a Chinese shadow puppet

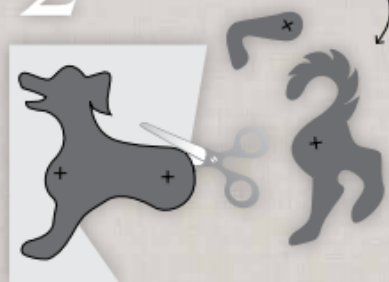
You will need:

- light coloured card
- masking tape
- pens/pencils/crayons
- scissors
- bradawl
- paper hole reinforcers
- brass paper fasteners
- sticks (chopsticks, lolly sticks or garden canes).

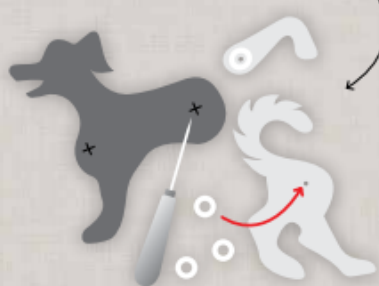
1 Choosing one of the templates provided, copy the outlines onto a sheet of light coloured card. Colour in the puppet with pens, pencils or crayons if you wish.



2 Go over the outlines with a marker and cut out the pieces carefully.



3 Carefully make a hole at the points marked with an 'X' with a bradawl and strengthen each hole on the back with an adhesive paper hole reinforcer to prevent them from tearing.



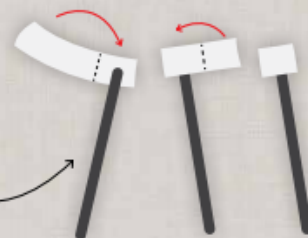
4 Attach the moving parts to the main puppet using brass paper fasteners pushed through the reinforced holes from the front and opened out at the back.



Now make the hinged attachments to fix the sticks to the puppets. These will allow the sticks to be held at an angle to the puppets, so that the sticks and puppeteers' hands will not show on the screen.

5

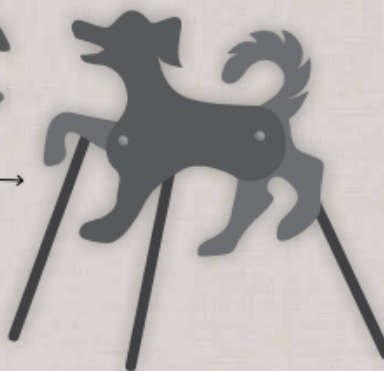
First stick a 10cm length of masking tape to the end of each stick, extending past the end and the sides, fold over a few times then flatten the tape to make a small spade-like end on the stick.



6

With a shorter piece of tape, stick the tape 'spade' (not the stick) to the back of the body of the puppet. Flip the stick upwards, and stick the underside of the 'spade' to the puppet as well. This creates a hinged handle.

Trim off any tape that shows from the front of the puppet.



7

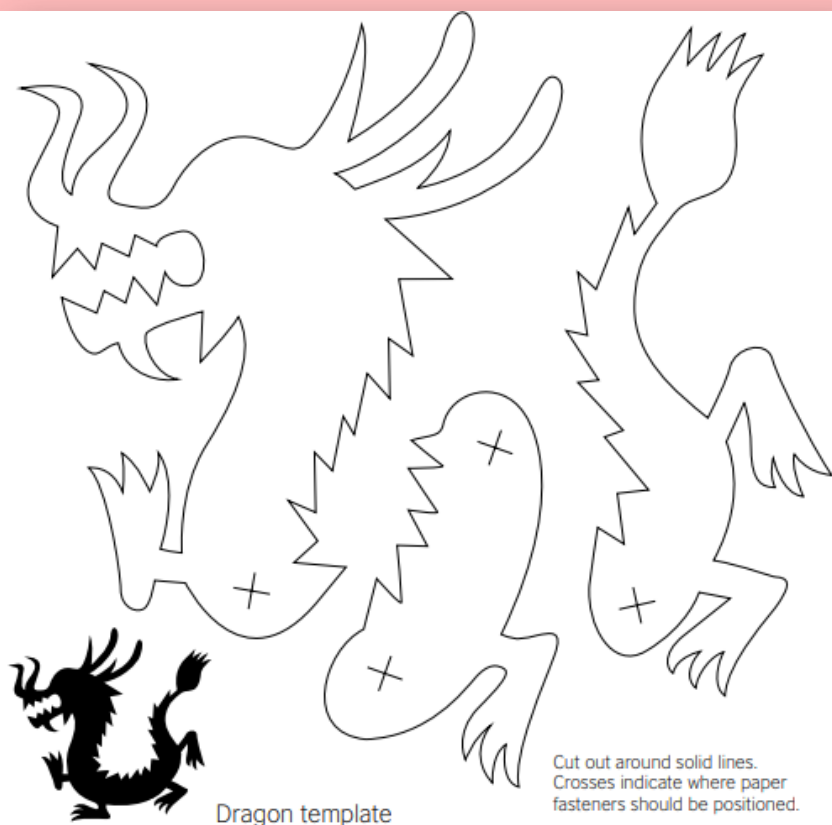
Repeat the process for all the moving parts of the puppet, so each piece has its own hinged handle attached.



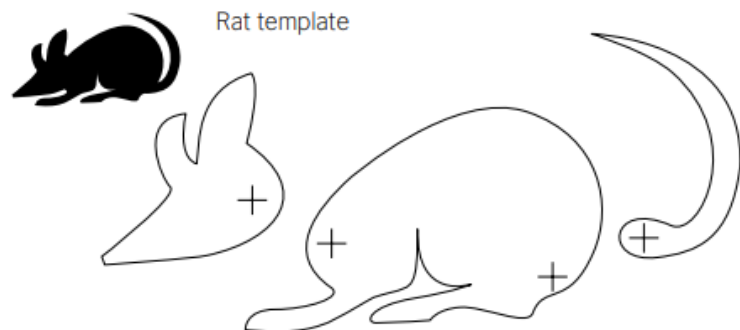
8

Use a lamp to shine on a light coloured cloth or wax paper screen.

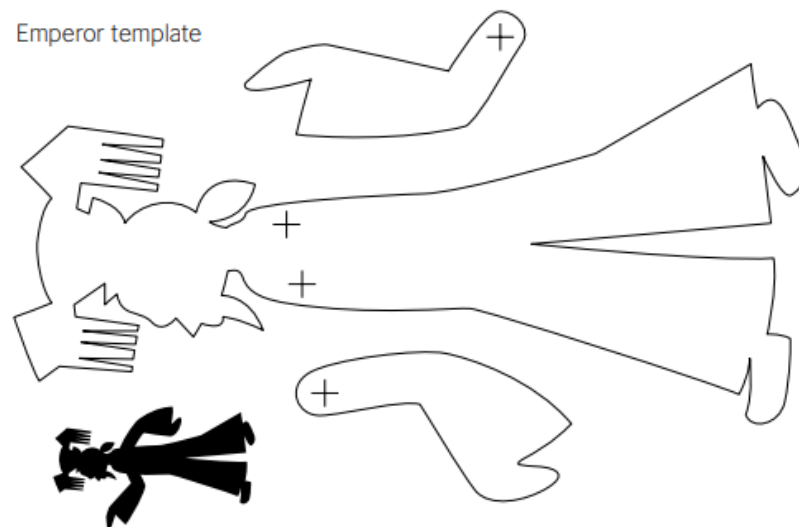
Practise moving your puppets in front of the light to make the shadows move. Use the sticks to hold the puppets up close to the screen whilst your hands are further back. This will ensure they do not show up on the screen.



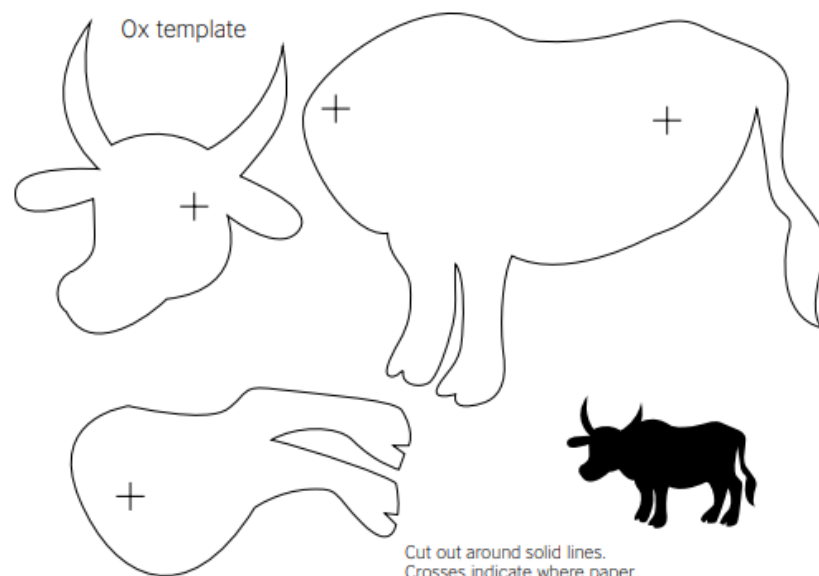
Cut out around solid lines.
Crosses indicate where paper
fasteners should be positioned.



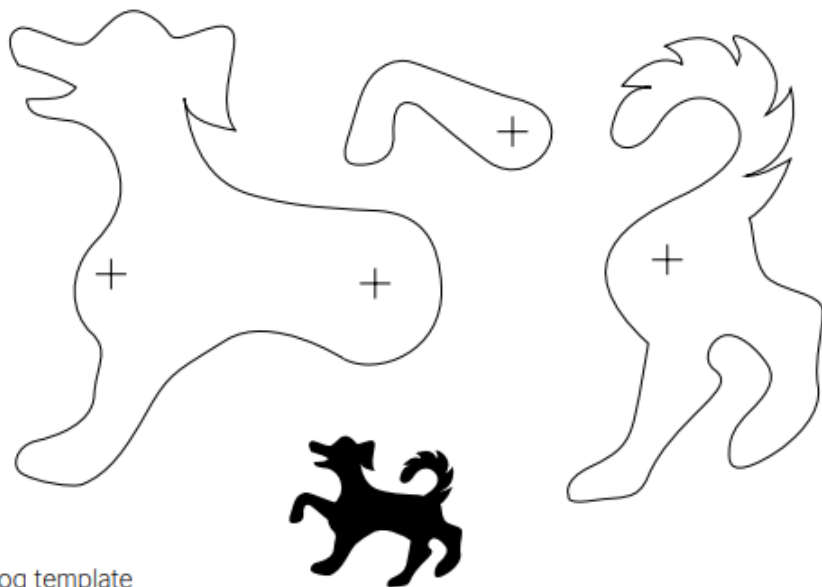
Emperor template



Ox template



Cut out around solid lines.
Crosses indicate where paper
fasteners should be positioned.

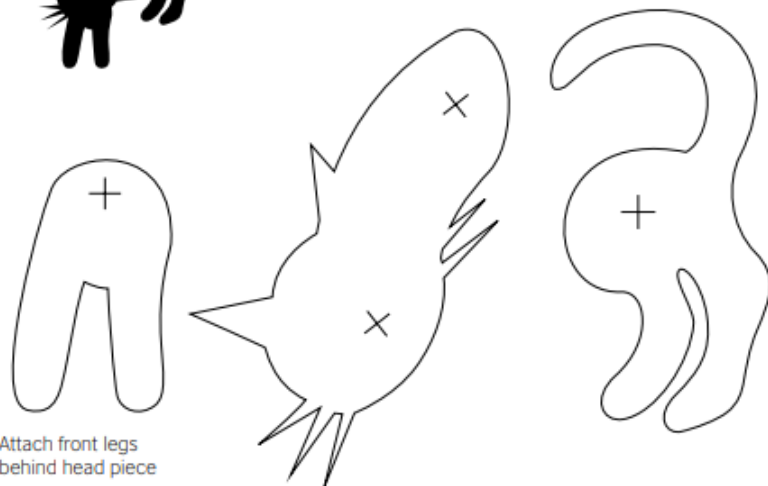


Dog template

Cat template



Cut out around solid lines.
Crosses indicate where paper
fasteners should be positioned.



Attach front legs
behind head piece

When the puppets are complete, set up a screen using a lamp projected on a light coloured cloth or a wax paper screen. Alternatively you can create a small theatre by cutting out the side of a box, sticking wax paper or cellophane over the empty side and decorating the front.

