

Chinese New Year Kids Yoga Lesson

Age: 3-12

Time: 20-60 minutes

Wear Red

Be sure to wear RED when you teach this class as it is the key color of Chinese New Year and symbolizes a bright and happy future.



Prep Work

Purchase a red gift envelope (*lai see* in Cantonese or *hóngbāo* in Mandarin) at your local China Town to hold all your visuals. Traditionally these have money in them and are given at special occasions such as festivals, holidays, weddings, etc.

Make a set of 12 Chinese Zodiac cards one for each animal. Use the graphics and descriptions below to create cards to fit into your red envelope. Glue these onto red cardstock and laminate for years of use.

Introduction

Introduce the topic of Chinese New Year by displaying your red envelope. Ask the children if they know what it is, what it symbolizes, when it is used, what is inside of it. Tell them when Chinese New Year will be this year. With older children you can explain about the Lunar Calendar. Chinese New Year starts on the first New Moon of the calendar year and ends with the Full Moon. Yes, it is a 15 day festival. For more details of each day see [Chinese New Year Facts](#).

Family Names Sign Language

Family connections are a major focus during Chinese New Year. Family members and ancestors are celebrated with dinners and gatherings and gifts are given to children. Learn to sign 6 different family members (mother, father, grandma, grandpa, brother, sister) with [this video](#).

Yoga Story

Tell the *Legend of the Chinese New Year* using yoga poses for each of the animals.

Legend of the Chinese Calendar

According to a Chinese legend, the twelve animals quarreled one day as to who was to head the cycle of years. The gods were asked to decide and they held a contest: whoever was to reach the opposite bank of the river would be first, and the rest of the animals would receive their years according to their finish. The **Jade Emperor (chair pose)** is the name of the Emperor of Heaven.

Long ago, in China, the Jade Emperor decided there should be a way of measuring time.

On his birthday he told the animals that there was to be a swimming race. The first twelve animals across the fast flowing river would be the winners and they would each have a year of the zodiac named after them.

All the animals lined up along the river bank. The **rat (child's pose)** and the **cat (cat/cow pose)**, who were good friends, were worried because they were poor swimmers. Being clever they asked the strong **ox (cow faced pose)** if he would carry them across the river.

'Of course' said the kind **ox**. 'Just climb on my back and I will take you across.'

The **rat** and the **cat** quickly jumped up and were very excited when the **ox** soon took the lead in the race. They had almost reached the other bank when the **rat** pushed the **cat** into the river leaving him to struggle in the water. Then just before the **ox** was about to win the race the **rat** leapt on his head and on to the bank to finish first.

'Well done,' said the Jade Emperor to the proud **rat**. 'The first year of the zodiac will be named after you.'

The poor **ox** had been tricked into second place and the second year of the zodiac was named after him.

Shortly after the exhausted **tiger (table pose with alternating arm/leg extended balance, add in a roar)** clawed his way to the river bank to claim third place. Swimming across the river had been an enormous struggle for him against the strong currents.

The Emperor was so delighted with his efforts that he named the third year after him.

Next to arrive was the **rabbit (bunny breathing for younger students, rabbit pose for older students)**, who hadn't swum across at all. He hopped across on some stepping stones and then found a floating log which carried him to the shore.

'I shall be very happy to call the fourth year after you,' the surprised Jade Emperor explained.

Just then a kind **dragon (low lunge w dragon fire breath and arms extended)** swooped down to take fifth place.

'Why didn't you win the race, as you can fly as well as swim?' the Jade Emperor asked.

'I was held up because some people and animals needed water to drink. I needed to make some rain,' the dragon explained. 'Then when I was nearly here I saw a poor little **rabbit** on a log in the water and I blew a puff of wind so that the log would float to the river bank.'

'Well that was very kind of you and now you are here you will have the fifth year of the zodiac named after you.'

The next thing the Jade Emperor heard was the sound of the **horse's (horse stance)** hooves.

Just as he was thinking the **horse** would be the next animal to arrive, a sneaky **snake (cobra pose)** wriggled out from around one of the horse's hooves. The **horse** was so surprised that he jumped backwards giving the **snake** a chance to take the sixth place in the race. The poor **horse** had to be satisfied with seventh place.

Not long afterwards a raft arrived carrying the **goat/ram (high lunge with arms overhead, hands behind head so elbows make horns)**, the **monkey (monkey antics or monkey mirror partner pose)** and the **rooster (stand tall, thumbs hooked under armpits to form wings, strut like a rooster, make rooster sounds)**.

They explained to the Emperor how they had shared the raft that the **rooster** had found. The **goat** and **monkey** had cleared weeds and pushed the raft to the shore.

The Emperor was very pleased that the animals had worked together. He said the **goat** would be the eighth zodiac animal, the **monkey** the ninth and the **rooster** the tenth.

The next animal to finish was the **dog (downward facing dog)**.

'Why are you so late when you are one of the best swimmers?' asked the Jade Emperor.

'The water in the river was so clean that I had to have a bath on the way,' explained the dog.

His reward was to have the eleventh year named after him.

Now there was one place left in the zodiac and the Emperor wondered when the last winner would come. He had nearly given up when he heard a grunt from the **boar (table pose with side cat looking side to side at your curly tail)**.

'You took a long time to cross the river,' said the Emperor to the boar.

'I was hungry and stopped to eat,' explained the **boar**. 'After the meal I felt so tired that I fell asleep.'

'You have still done well,' said the Jade Emperor. 'The last year of the zodiac will be named after you.'

As for the **cat** who had been pushed into the water by the rat, he finally crawled out of the water but was too late to have a year named after him. He felt very cross with the rat and since then cats have never been friends with rats.

Coloring Page

Here is a [fun coloring page of the Legend of the Chinese Zodiac](#)

Zodiac Character Traits

Discuss the character traits of each animal. Find out what year the children are born and what animal they are on the zodiac. Ask the children if they feel this is an accurate description of themselves.

Create self-affirmations using “I am” to develop the positive attributes of their zodiac sign.

Mindful Eating

Food is an important part of Chinese New Year. Bring in oranges or tangerines give your students the gift of mindful eating. This is a way to teach awareness of the food we consume by giving mindful attention to colors, texture, flavors and temperatures.

Give each child an orange. Have them examine it, feel it, smell it, and predict how it will taste. Peel or cut up the fruit. Enjoy the squirt of juice, notice the pattern of the sections. Bring a piece of orange close to your nose, your lips. Slowly take a bite. Thoughtfully notice the flavors on your tongue. The first taste, the middle taste, the aftertaste. Allow time before taking another bite. Throughout this exercise ask lots of questions:

- What shape is your orange?
- What color is it?
- What color variations are there?
- How does it smell?
- How do you think it will taste?
- What temperature is your orange?
- What is the first thing you notice as you take a bite?
- Is the flavor what you expected?
- How does an orange feel in your hands, in your mouth, on your tongue?

For a complete list of good-luck food and what they represent visit [Eating Good Luck](#) by Cora Wen

Chinese Lanterns

Make [Chinese Lanterns](#) as a craft project.

Gong Xi Fa Cai

Teach the children how to wish one another Happy New Year in Chinese – [Gong Xi Fa Cai](#) (Mandari) or Gong Hey Fat Choy (Cantonese) along with the appropriate hand gesture (mudra).



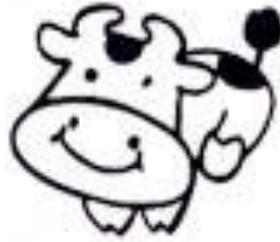
Relaxation

Complete your lesson by inviting the children to rest in savasana and take them on a guided visualization inspired by lanterns which guide our way and light our path since the last day of the Chinese New year culminated with the [Lantern Festival](#).

Chinese
Zodiac



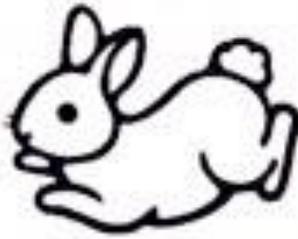
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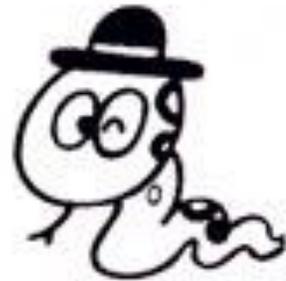
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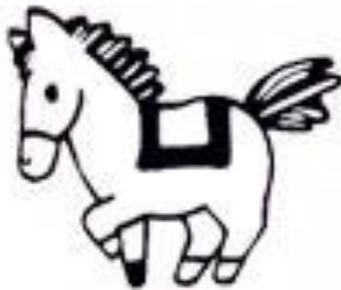
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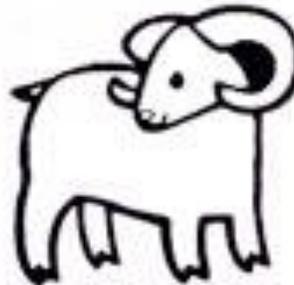
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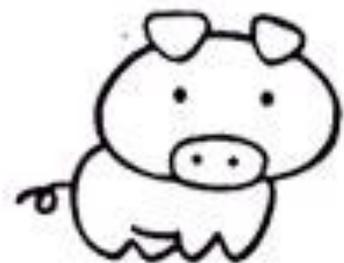
猴



雞



狗



豬

Rat

1948 1960 1972 1984 1996 2008 2020

Charming, intelligent, inquisitive, generous, social

Ox

1949 1961 1973 1985 1997 2009 2021

Dependable, calm, patient, good listener, hardworking

Tiger

1950 1962 1974 1986 1998 2010 2022

Powerful, passionate, colourful, vivacious, adventurous

Rabbit

1951 1963 1975 1987 1999 2011 2023

Graceful, lucky, strong willed, good friend, kind

Dragon

1952 1964 1988 2000 2012 2024

Whimsical, energetic, powerful, loyal, positive

Snake

1953 1965 1977 1989 2001 2013 2025

Wise, beautiful, sceptical, deep thinker, graceful

Horse

1954 1966 1978 1990 2002 2013 2026

Cheerful, popular, loves outdoors, quick-witted

Ram/Goat/Sheep

1955 1967 1979 1991 2003 2015 2027

Trusting, artistic, gentle, generous, lucky

Monkey

1956 1968 1980 1992 2004 2016 2028

Flexible, clever, sociable, confident, inventive

Rooster

1957 1969 1981 1993 2005 2017 2029

Self-assured, organized, dedicated, meticulous, leader

Dog

1958 1970 1982 1994 2006 2018 2030

Honest, intelligent, loyal, friendly, fearless

Boar

1959 1971 1983 1995 2007 2019 2031

Honest, popular, seeks harmony, thoughtful, integrity