Introduction to China Box

The East Asian Studies Center presents China Box, a teaching tool for teachers to expose their students to the Chinese language and culture. The items were selected and obtained during our last two trips to different parts of China. Each item in the box informs and reflects on different aspects of the Chinese culture. Therefore we hope, through the concept of realia, that students can see, feel and hence experience Chinese culture.

The items are divided into 4 categories, namely- ‘Going to School,’ ‘Chinese Games,’ ‘Daily Life in China,’ and ‘Chinese New Year.’ In this guide, descriptions of the items and suggested class activities are provided for each of these categories. We have not provided any particular lesson plans with the China Box as we believe that the teacher knows how to best use and apply these items in his/ her classroom. We hope that you will find this box helpful in planning your lessons.

We appreciate your comments and feedback on our China Box. In addition, when you return the box, we would like to hear how you used the items in your lessons/ classroom and the outcome of your lessons. If you have lesson plans based on the materials in the box and would like to share them with other teachers, please submit them when you return the box. With your permission, we would like to include the lesson plans in the box as a resource for other teachers.
IV. Chinese New Year

New Year's Day is the most important day on the Chinese lunar calendar. It is the first day of the first lunar month, usually falling between mid-January and mid-February in the western calendar. Like all traditional holidays, it is a family festival rather than solely a religious or state holiday. As with Christmas in America, Chinese New Year is always more than just a day ~ it is a season! In years gone by, New Year's preparations started several weeks in advance. In the weeks before New Year's, everything in the house is moved outside and thoroughly cleaned. On the twenty-fourth day of the twelfth lunar month, all the various local and family gods, including most importantly the Hearth God, whose image sits in a niche above the family stove, must report his observations of the family from the past year to the Jade Emperor in Heaven.

Traditionally, to encourage the Hearth God to make a good report, his lips are smeared with honey and he is placed in a sedan chair (a carrying chair made of bamboo stalks) and escorted by a paper horse and groom. These images are set on fire and off he goes to Heaven! Exploding firecrackers frighten off evil spirits that might disrupt his trip. New Year's is also the time to settle debts that have piled up during the course of the year.

In modern China and Taiwan, these old customs survive more in the countryside than in the cities, but everywhere New Year's is still a time when families gather from far and near. Almost everyone gets several days off so they can return home. On New Year's Day, families enjoy a festive meal as rich as their financial circumstances permit. Popular snacks include melon seeds, peanuts, and dried seafood. Food is prepared the day before so that no knives have to be used on New Year's Day. This prevents the risk of 'cutting' the good luck of the New Year.

An important New Year's custom is visiting friends and neighbors. Lion or Dragon Dances take place in the streets to the loud music of pounding drums and crashing cymbals.
Lion Dance
Considering that there are no lions in China, it is strange that it is such a popular figure in Chinese culture. The lion image was derived from the imaginations of Chinese nobles. Chinese temples all over China and overseas have lion sculptures placed at the entrance. These lions are far from the true likeness of a real lion because the real ones have no horns. The traditions of the lion dance have a long history in China. In the Tang dynasty, the lion dance was performed in a group of five lions of different colours. Each lion was followed by twelve men dressed in colourful costumes, with a red band round the forehead and a red colored brush in his hand. These people were called ‘lion-men’ and they danced to the lion dance beat.

Today’s lion dance is enacted by two dancers. One handles the head, made out of strong but light materials like paper-mache and bamboo, while the other controls the body and the tail under a cloth that is attached to the head. The ‘animal’ is accompanied by three musicians, playing a large drum, cymbals and a gong. A Little Buddha teases it with a fan or a giant ball. The head dancer can move the lion’s eyes, mouth and ears for expression of moods. The lion dance combines art, history and kung fu moves. Normally the performers are kung fu practitioners. Every kind of move has a specific musical rhythm. The music follows the moves of the lion: the drum follows the lion, and the cymbals and the gong follow the drummer. (Adapted from http://www.visitsarawak.com/wushu/liondance.html)
Description of Items

19. Lucky Red Envelopes (Hong Bao)

20. Chinese Zodiac Animals (Mobile)

21. Qipao
Activities

I. Making Lucky Red Envelopes (Hong Bao)
(Adapted from http://www.chinatown-online.org.uk/class_packet.html)

To make your own Chinese Red Envelope you will need:
- a sheet of red paper
- scissors
- paper glue

First, refer to Appendix D for an outline graphic of the red packet. Print this onto a sheet of red paper, or if you don’t have any red paper print it onto white paper and color it in red. Cut out the packet and fold it along the dotted lines, folding in the direction away from the printed Chinese characters (if you want to make your packet particularly nice, you can paint the characters with gold paint). Straighten the packet out again, and turn it over so you are looking at the side without the characters, as in the diagram below.

Now fold over flap A and apply a little glue along its right edge. Fold over flap B and press it firmly onto the glued edge of flap A. Apply a little glue to flap C and press it firmly onto flap B.

You now have your Chinese Hong Bao! Flap D is the flap of the envelope and a little glue can be applied to seal it— but don’t forget to put your gift money inside first!

II. What is your Chinese Zodiac Sign?

From Appendix C, locate your zodiac sign. Do you agree with the characteristics and personalities of your zodiac sign?