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](#).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Animal</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Personality Traits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rat</td>
<td>1948-2020</td>
<td>Charming, intelligent, inquisitive, generous, social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ox</td>
<td>1949-2021</td>
<td>Dependable, calm, patient, good listener, hardworking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tiger</td>
<td>1950-2022</td>
<td>Powerful, passionate, colourful, vivacious, adventurous</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rabbit</td>
<td>1951-2023</td>
<td>Graceful, lucky, strong willed, good friend, kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dragon</td>
<td>1952-2024</td>
<td>Whimsical, energetic, powerful, loyal, positive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Snake</td>
<td>1953-2025</td>
<td>Wise, beautiful, sceptical, deep thinker, graceful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horse</td>
<td>1954-2026</td>
<td>Cheerful, popular, loves outdoors, quick-witted</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ram/Goat/Sheep</td>
<td>1955-2027</td>
<td>Trusting, artistic, gentle, generous, lucky</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monkey</td>
<td>1956-2028</td>
<td>Flexible, clever, sociable, confident, inventive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rooster</td>
<td>1957-2029</td>
<td>Self-assured, organized, dedicated, meticulous, leader</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dog</td>
<td>1958-2030</td>
<td>Honest, intelligent, loyal, friendly, fearless</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boar</td>
<td>1959-2031</td>
<td>Honest, popular, seeks harmony, thoughtful, integrity</td>
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