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Blurb

Little Brother is told by his brother and his friends that he's too small to help out at the Spring Festival. He's not strong enough to hold onto a kite, and he's too little to hold the dragon poles. But Father says that he has a special job to do. What can it be?

He knows it's not hanging the lanterns up, as Father has already done that.

He knows it's not choosing the treats from the hawker, as Father chose the duck.

He knows it's not serving tea or lighting firecrackers, as he did those things last year.

About the Creators

Christopher Cheng is an award-winning author of many children's books including non-fiction, picture books and Chinese-themed historical fiction titles. He is co-chair of the Advisory Board for the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators and a recipient of the Lady Cutler Award for Children's Literature. Christopher is also an ambassador for the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature.

Born in China, Di Wu was an editor and illustrator in one of the biggest Chinese fine arts publishing companies before coming to Australia. He won awards for the books he published in China, and his first Australian picture book, *Rebel* (with Allan Baillie), was short-listed for the Children's Book Council Picture Book of the Year. He has since released *Ali Baba*, *Old Magic* (with Allan Baillie) and *Grandpa's Mask*, with text by Jing Jing Guo. More recently, Di Wu collaborated with NLA Publishing author Jane Jolly to create *Star of Anise*.

New Year Surprise! **Teachers' Notes**

Recommended for: Grades

The activities described in these teachers' notes can be adapted for students at all year levels. There are both general activities for each page of the book (these can be adapted for other pages as well) and also specific investigations and connections for each page.

See Think Wonder

For each illustration, create a 'See, Think, Wonder' activity for students to complete individually or in groups. Compile and discuss the students' work.

- What do you see?
- What do you think about that?
- What does it make you wonder?

For full understanding of this visible thinking routine, see [link](#).

Making Connections to the Text

For each illustration, explore the following connections:

- text to self (t-s)
- text to text (t-t)
- text to world (t-w)

Word Cline

Create word clines for exploring unfamiliar words.

Word and Language Study

Identify words throughout the text and discuss extensions of those words.

Identify the different forms of spoken language and discuss.

Asian Perspectives

Set in snowy rural Northern China, the traditional life depicted in this book remains the same today. People still wear thick clothing and beds are often platforms that are built over small wood-fired furnaces.

New Year Surprise! presents a less known cultural perspective of China and can be compared to modern Chinese cities, as well as to the cities and towns in all our societies.

You can use this book to:

- draw out the cultural characteristics of the family and the customs and celebrations
- examine religion
- explore the community and environment and the diversity across countries, regions and the world
- create identity

Pre-reading

Investigate Chinese culture, its food and festivals through digital media (e.g. YouTube), through class discussions, or with local Chinese identities.

Discuss food and celebrations, the use of spices and tools (e.g. brooms), party poppers, drinking tea and lanterns.

Activate Prior Knowledge

What do you know about Chinese festivals?

Have you experienced a Chinese festival before?

Have you experienced a similar festival?

What would you like to know? (e.g. about festivals, the Chinese culture)

Look at the cover of the book. What do you think the story is about?

- I wonder what they are celebrating.
- I wonder what sounds I might hear.
- I wonder why some people are dressed in red and some are in yellow.
- I wonder about the story of this dragon.
- I wonder whether women and girls also join in the celebration.
- I wonder what the surprise is.

End Paper

Investigating the Cats

- Is the cat a motif in this book?
- Retell the story from the point of view of the cat.
- Which cat are you more like?
- Do cats have culture?
- Are cats part of culture?
- What do cats symbolise?
- What significance do cats have in Chinese culture?
- Compare the expression and character development of the cat in these illustrations.
- How have cats been portrayed through the ages?
- Older students might investigate and compare the cat in this book with those in *Cats* (the musical) based upon the T.S. Eliot book, Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats.

Text Connections

- The cat in the book reminds me of ... (t-s)
- I have seen cats like this in ... (t-t)
- The cat in the book makes me think about ... (t-w)

Opening Pages

See, Think, Wonder

Identify the elements on the spread, including the dragon, the clothes of the men and the boy, the book title and its exclamation mark, the author's and illustrator's 'chops' (a chop is a personal stamp, or seal, used instead of a signature written by hand).

The dragon seems to be looking ahead.

- I think the dragon is ...
- I wonder what the dragon is looking at.
- I wonder who is controlling the dragon.

The boy is looking up.

- I think the boy is ...
- I wonder why the boy is looking up.
- I wonder what is he looking at.

The Title

Why does the title have an exclamation mark?

The Chops

The author and illustrator both have 'chops' after their English names.

Explore the significance and meaning of 'chops' and how they are used.

The Boy's Red and Yellow Clothes

- How does this clothing make the boy more powerful?
- Compare his clothes to the clothes worn by other people in the book.
- What do red and yellow symbolise?

Page 1-2

Investigating Language

- It's impossible to sleep. Why?
- What is done to prepare for the Spring Festival?

Text Connections

- How do we prepare for important festivals? (t-s)
- What other stories do you know that are set in the cold of spring? (t-t)
- The text mentions 'spring' and there is snow throughout the illustration. How is the season of spring and the geography of cold climates the same or different to where we live? (t-w)

Prediction

- What might the boy's special job be?
- What evidence is there in the text that may lead us to think "what is special and why it may be a good thing."
- What is the role of the elders in the story?



Page 3-4

Investigating Language

- I wonder why formal language is used ('Sister', 'Mother' and 'Grandfather')
- Mother 'teases' and Sister 'giggles'? Why would they do this?

Wondering

- I wonder why there are so many dumplings.
- I wonder what they taste like.

Text Connections

- Is there any traditional food that your family prepares? (t-s)
- What other stories have hidden coins in food? (t-t)
- What foods are important in other cultures? (t-w)
- What other food has hidden coins as a surprise? (t-w)

Investigate

- Utensils: chopsticks, bowls, chopping knives, boards, rolling pins, cups, teapots
- Characters: identify clothing worn, hair styles, family relationships

Page 5-6

For Discussion

- What evidence is there that this is a celebration?
- Does this celebration happen in real life?
- I wonder where the grandmother is?
- What is the role of the grandparents?
- What does 'good fortune' mean?

Text Connections

- Does this gathering remind you of a similar event in your family? (t-s)
- This reminds me of when my uncle gave me ... (t-s)
- A coin is also given for fortune in ... (t-t)
- What stories have similar family gatherings? (t-t)
- How do other cultures celebrate festivals? (t-w)
- Who would consider a horseshoe as very lucky. (t-w)
- Identify text–world connections for the lantern, banner, clothing, table type and setting. (t-w)

Families

- What is the relationship like between the grandfather and the boy? How do you know?
- Explore family systems and the relationships between members in New Year Surprise! Explore family systems and the relationships in your culture and in other cultures.

Page 7-8

Text Connections

- In my family we are not allowed to spill oil. (t-s)
- What is another book in which characters are superstitious. (t-t)
- Many cultures have superstitions like ... (t-w)

Explore

- Cultural understandings as shown in the illustrations. Examples would include the mirror, chairs, paper with script.
- The decorations
- Respect for Grandfather and the significance of Grandfather's chair
- The statement: *Mother yells, 'Ai-ee! Don't you remember Little One? We sweep the dust out the back door. Sweeping it out the front door is bad luck!*
- Superstitions: *Mother yells, 'Ai-ee! Don't you remember Little One? We sweep the dust out the back door. Sweeping it out the front door is bad luck!*
- I wonder why Mother reacts like this.

Word Cline

sterilise disinfectant spotless polish
cleaning clean cleansed tidy

Page 9-10

Art & Language

Investigate Quilts

- Discuss how quilts tell a story.
- Design your own quilt or class quilt.
- Create a quilt with fabric paint.

Investigate Masks

- How do masks tell a story?
- What are they used for?
- When have you used a mask when dressing up as a character?
- When have you used a mask to disguise what you do in real life?

Investigate the various ways of saying Happy New Year

- Gong Xi Fa Cai
- Also in Cantonese and other languages of class members

Maths

Explore:

- time
- clocks
- seasons of the year

Discuss

- Sustainability and how it is shown in this illustration.
- The symbolism that is shown in the wall mountings.

Predict

Sister says: I wonder what you'll do on this special day?

- Discuss the sister's question and what she might be thinking. What jobs might she think her brother will do?
- Create a see 'See, Think, Wonder' chart for the sister.
- Build a prediction list.



Page 11-12

Religion

- Students explore messages of hope and inspiration.
- Use quotes from Psalms etc.

Investigating Language

- Use the text: pasted the red banners with Spring Festival messages
- Investigate and discuss:
 - the words that could be written on the banners
 - banners and how they are used in this setting and in our society.
 - examples of memes that are important to you. Use these to create personal banners.
 - examples of inspirational words or phrases
 - the significance to the boy of a special job

Text Connections

- I hang decorations ... (t-s)
- Does the hanging of decorations here remind you of a similar book? (t-t)
- How do we decorate our houses for special occasions, e.g. Christmas? (t-w)

Page 13-14

Text Connections

- Link with other texts where the youngest child is 'too young' (t-t)
- What does it feel like when you are told you are too young? (t-s)
- How is this similar to everyday events? (t-w)

Think Alouds—Kites

- I wonder if Brother has a variety of kites for different celebrations (favourite kite)
- Kites and kite flying is part of many cultures.
- How have kites been used in battles?
- Places for flying kites.
- Explore cultural significance of kites.
- Use YouTube and investigate kite flying:

• **Festival of the winds (Bondi)**

youtube.com/watch?v=T6snWqS9xcY

youtube.com/watch?v=9uZ2wj4KQmM

• **International Kite Festival (Weifang)**

youtube.com/watch?v=t54VYAGe0NQ

youtube.com/watch?v=iieWki_PEzc

chinahighlights.com/festivals/weifang-international-kite-festival.html

• **Others**

youtube.com/watch?v=YM9HWo3WtF8

Page 15-16

Explore the Ducks

- Are the ducks hiding?
- Link with the story, Ping (by Marjorie Flack and Kurt Wise).
- Predict what will happen to the duck that Father is carrying.
- Investigate which cultures accept duck as food for celebrations. Create an evaluative question.

Investigating Language

Create word clines for hawker and treats.

Text Connections

- On which occasions do you receive treats? (t-s)
- What do you do at New Year? (t-s)
- What treats do you receive? (t-s)
- The hawker reminds me of the book ... (t-t)
- The duck as a special treat reminds me of ... (t-t)
- What foods are used in other cultures to celebrate special events? (t-w)
- What other cultures have hawkers selling goods? (t-w)

Page 17-18

Text Connections

- Are you allowed to make tea? (t-s)
- What happens when your family comes together? Compare and contrast. (t-s)
- Is the situation in The Tiger Who Came to Tea (by Judith Kerr) the same as the tea ceremony in this illustration? (t-t)
- Identify tea, tea shop, ceremony and range, and relate these to other cultures. (t-w)
- How does this tea ceremony compare to our coffee culture (t-w)

Investigate

- Kangs ('kang' is the name for the platform in the room, used at night as a bed)
- Where tea comes
- The history of tea
- The tea trade
- Use digital tools to create an information report on the tea trade.

Discuss

- I wonder why the people in the picture have taken their shoes off.
- I wonder what the children are playing.
- What could the cupboards contain?
- Is the kang (the platform) hot?

Page 19-20

Wonder

- The adults didn't receive anything so I wonder why they are happy.
- I wonder why the children are allowed to touch the fireworks.
- Text Connections
- How do you celebrate New Year's Eve? (t-s)
- When do you receive gifts? (t-s)
- Do any of the children remind you of you? (t-s)
- This reminds me of the book ... (t-t)
- How do people celebrate New Year's Eve around the world? (t-w)

Investigate

- Fireworks, history and use
- Create a presentation (e.g. on fireworks or on gift-giving) using sound and visual

Red Envelopes

- Explore the meaning of red envelopes and the culture behind them.
- Discuss how it is decided how much money is given to whom (e.g. Some families give money only to children who are unmarried).

Investigating Language

- List the many ways we say 'thank you'. For example:
 - Xie, xie (Mandarin)
 - Doh je (Cantonese)
- Discuss how there are different forms of 'thank you' in Chinese.



Page 21-22

Personal Development

The boy mumbles: I could still wear a dragon shirt.

Discuss how putting on the shirt makes the boy strong.

Investigating Language

- Why do you think Brother whispers?
- Create a word chart for mumbles.
- A dancer yells: You're too small.
 - Discuss how this would make the boy feel.
 - How would this make the Brother feel?

The Dragon

- Investigate the importance of dragons in Chinese culture.
- Investigate how the dragon costume is constructed and how the dancers prepare.
- Discuss the symbolism of dragons in Chinese culture.
- Watch a Dragon Dance on YouTube.
- In teams, research and perform a Dragon Dance.

Text Connections

- At what times have you felt like the young boy? (t-s)
- How is the way the young boy feels similar to other texts? (t-t)
- At what times are young people told they are too young? (t-w)

Page 23-24

Wisdom

What is wisdom? Discuss wisdom.

How do children portray wisdom?

Character Exploration

Find evidence in the text that shows or tells that these characters are wise:

father, sister, mother, brother, boy

How do you know the characters are 'wise'?

Explore the Pearl of Wisdom

What is the Pearl of Wisdom?

Why is it important in a Dragon Dance?

Why do you think the role falls on the young boy?

Text Connections

- When are you wise? (t-s)
- Other examples of books about wisdom are ... (t-t)
- What wise decisions have people made? (t-w)

Prediction/Wondering

- I wonder what might happen to the boy/the Brother/the Father?
- I wonder how the people will react to two Pearls of Wisdom?
- How will the dancers react to the young boy holding a Pearl of Wisdom?

The Father

- Everyone always listens to him.
- Why would everyone listen to Father?
- What does this demonstrate about the Father's position in the village?
- What does this demonstrate about the village?
- Explore the qualities of leadership.

Investigating Language

- Then Father speaks.
- How does this sentence reveal the impact of the father speaking?
- How would he have said those words?

Page 25-26

Fortune

The child expects that the Dragon will bring 'good fortune to our village'.

- What do you think good fortune:
 - looks like
 - feels like
 - sounds like?
- Discuss how the Dragon would bring good fortune.
- Is there evidence in the story of good fortune?

The Dancers

- What are the dancers doing?
- Who are the dancers?
- Investigate how they create the movement of the Dragon.

Word Study

fortune, fortunately, fortunate, unfortunate

Prediction/Wondering

- I wonder how the dancers feel?
- I wonder how the boy feels?
- I wonder what happens to the dragon when it is not being used in the dance?

Page 27-28

See, Think, Wonder

I see ...

- Identify all the components in this illustration (band members, villagers, dragon, dancers, flag bearers, lions etc.)

I think ...

- this is a small village because ...
- everyone is happy because ...

I wonder ...

- what the dance would sound like.
- what the villagers are doing during the dance.
- what the band is doing.
- whether the dancers get tired.
- what happens after the dance.
- what happens immediately after the Dragon Dance.
- how the villagers react to the Dragon Dance.
- what the dragon does after the dance?

Discuss

- Why is the dragon dynamic?
- The hopes and messages that the dragon would send to the villagers.

Create

- Design banners that the villagers could use.



Page 29-30

Discuss

- The messages that are maintained and reinforced through the celebration.
- How the village is connected with spring.
- Why the boy is so tired.
- The scene in this illustration.

Text Connections

- When have you felt so tired that you had no trouble sleeping? (t-s)
- How is this different from other texts about New Year? (t-t)
- How are these New Year events different from the events celebrated in your town or city? (t-w)

Predict

- What will happen in the village the next day.
- How the boy will be viewed within the village.
- Investigating Language
- I have no trouble sleeping! What does this mean?
- The whole village sleeps too. Why? How is this demonstrated in the illustration?
- What is the result of the celebration?

Investigating Language

- I have no trouble sleeping! What does this mean?
- The whole village sleeps too. Why? How is this demonstrated in the illustration?
- What is the result of the celebration?

Art

- Discuss how the illustrator shows:
 - that it is cold.
 - that it is a celebratory time.
 - the time of day/night.
 - the quietness of the setting.
 - the contemporary setting.