

Classroom Guide for
SAM AND THE LUCKY MONEY
 by **Karen Chinn**
 illustrated by **Cornelius Van Wright**
 and **Ying-Hwa Hu**

Reading Level

Interest Level: Grades K-3

Reading Level: Grade 3

(Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula)

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 3.3/.5

Lexile Measure®: 660 AD

Scholastic Reading Counts!™: 3.5

Themes

Chinese New Year, Homelessness, Giving

Synopsis

Sam can hardly wait to go shopping with his mom. It's Chinese New Year's day and his grandparents have given him the traditional gift of lucky money -- red envelopes called leisees (lay-sees). This year Sam is finally old enough to spend it any way he chooses. Best of all, he gets to spend his lucky money in his favorite place -- Chinatown!

But when Sam realizes that his grandparents' gift is not enough to get the things he wants, his excitement turns to disappointment. Even though his mother reminds him that he should appreciate the gift, Sam is not convinced -- until a surprise encounter with a stranger.

With vivid watercolor paintings that celebrate the sights and sounds of festive Chinatown streets, *Sam And The Lucky Money* tells the affecting story of a child who discovers that sometimes the best gifts come from the heart.

Background

gung hay fat choy

That means "I wish you a prosperous New Year" in the Cantonese dialect of Chinese. The Chinese New Year is a time of much celebration that marks the end of the harvest season and the beginning of spring. Because it is based on the lunar calendar, it does not take place on the exact same day every year. It is a time when family and friends reunite to usher in the New Year and to bring closure to the old, a time to garner good luck for the upcoming year.

Many preparations are made for the celebration. A thorough housecleaning is undergone to flush out the misfortunes of the past and to welcome the New Year. Red strips of paper expressing propitious wishes are hung for good luck. Firecrackers are shot, in part to ward off evil spirits. Debts are finalized. New clothes are purchased as are gifts for family members and friends. A

feast, usually consisting of such foods as dumplings, fish, and cake, is prepared for the New Year's Eve dinner.

On New Year's day, people rest, exchange presents, enjoy friends and families and various activities. One of the gifts that children receive from grandparents and older generations are money-filled red envelopes called leisees, that are usually decorated with symbols of luck (the color red itself being an example). Whereas a feast takes place the prior evening, on New Year's day, a fast of sorts takes place to accommodate a self-purification as well as to allow rest -- namely, no meat is eaten nor is lard used for cooking. No cleaning is done lest amassed good luck be swept away. Doors are closed to seal-in accumulated good luck and keep bad spirits out; sharp objects are avoided lest good luck be severed.

One of the activities that takes place during this celebration is the lion dance, a dance that is performed to celebrate propitious occasions. It is a study in martial arts movements and hand-eye coordination and a rigorously exercised dance, especially considering that the papier-mâché lion's head can weigh from 15 to 20 pounds. Businesses invite passing lions into stores to chew and spit out a head of lettuce and reward the lion, or rather the dancers in the lion, with a tip contained in a red envelope.

BEFORE READING

Prereading Focus Questions

Before students read the story, here are some questions to discuss as a motivation for reading.

1. What do you notice about the cover?
2. Look at the title. Guess what the story is about.
3. Do you know anything about Chinese New Year and its traditions/customs? How do you spend Chinese New Year?
4. What kind of gifts do you like to receive? If you receive money, how do you like to spend it?
5. How do you think Sam will spend his lucky money?

AFTER READING

After reading, discuss the story. Some questions to generate discussion are:

1. What gift did Sam receive? Why was he especially excited about receiving this gift this year?
2. What surprise encounters did Sam have in Chinatown?
3. What is your conception of homeless people? Describe the homeless man in this story. Why couldn't Sam stop thinking about him?
4. By the end of the story, Sam says he knows that he is the lucky one. What made him lucky? Why did he give his leisees to the homeless man?
5. What do you learn about Sam? How does he change and develop throughout the story? As a class, create a character web for Sam.

6. Do you think that Sam's family approved of the way Sam spent his lucky money? Do you think it is important to get the gift giver's approval on how a gift is used?

Vocabulary

Ask the students to write down the words they do not know in their vocabulary notebooks, to study their definitions, and to use them in sentences. (If someone in the class reads Chinese characters, ask them to translate them for the class.)

Reader's Response Journal

To promote active reading, have the students keep a reader's response journal as they read the story. This journal will help students personalize what they are reading.

1. Sam made an important decision by himself. What kinds of important decisions have you had to make by yourself? Do you like making decisions? Do you like getting advice? Who do you go to for advice?
2. What do you think of Sam's reaction to the homeless man? Has this story affected your view of the homeless? How?
3. Do you come from a bilingual home? Do you see this as an advantage or disadvantage in your life? When Sam went to the bakery, the woman who worked there spoke to him in Chinese and he could not understand her. What expectations do people have of you, based on the way that you look or where you live?
4. When Sam's mom gave the homeless man a quarter, why did the man, according to Sam, "act like (the quarter) was a million bucks?" What things make you feel grateful?

Other Writing Activities

Ask students to respond to one or more of the following writing activities:

1. Describe a New Year's celebration that you spent with your family. What kind of activities took place and how did you participate?
2. Do you think people have an obligation to help others in the community, including homeless people? Why or why not? Are there homeless people in your neighborhood? Should you help? If so, how?
3. What is the best gift that you have ever been given?
4. Write endings to go with the different items Sam could have bought: what do you envision happening if he had bought the basketball? The cakes?
5. After discussion, imagine and write down an account of a day in the life of the homeless man Sam encountered.

ESL Teaching Strategies

The following are activities to engage students who speak English as a second language.

1. Before reading, lead a thorough discussion of the book's illustrations. Highlight words that match the pictures.

2. Build background information on Chinese New Year by asking students what they know about celebrations. Illustrate with comparative webs from the information generated. (See diagram 1)

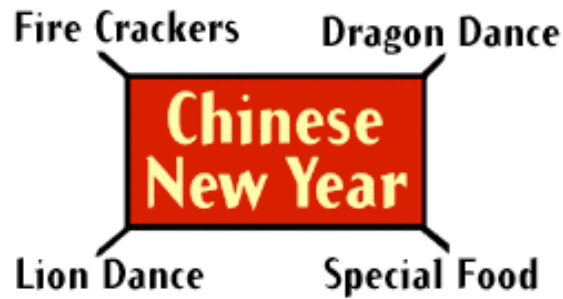


diagram 1

3. While reading the story, the teacher can use different character voices and pantomime actions to bring the story to life. Pause periodically and allow students to ask questions to check comprehension. (It may also be helpful for the teacher to preview the story by telling it in the students' native language.)

4. After a first reading, review the story and check for comprehension by asking students to pantomime all or portions of the story, or have students retell the story in their native language.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

In order to integrate students' reading experiences with other subject areas, have students complete some of these activities.

Social Studies

1. Learn more about the different traditions for Chinese New Year. If possible, display leisees, watch a lion dance (they are available on video), and offer some of the customary cuisine.

2. Invite someone from a homeless organization to the class to present the services they give to the homeless and how the class can get involved. (Generate questions for the guest beforehand with the students.)

3. Learn about the history of Chinese Americans. When did they first immigrate to the U.S.? What were the reasons they left their homeland? What cities did the Chinese settle in? What were the origins of Chinatowns?

Math

Give catalogs, supermarket pamphlets, and other similar materials to students. Set a common theme, e.g., gifts or a family meal, and ask the students to spend a certain amount of (imaginary) money for the items necessary. Ask them to compare costs of different items, to add up the amounts, and factor in discounts when appropriate.

Science

1. What are different materials that keep people warm? How are they made? Where do they come from?

2. The Chinese New Year is based on the lunar calendar as opposed to the solar calendar. Explain the difference. Show the students how the sun, moon, and earth move.

Art

1. Make red envelopes (leisees), a traditional Chinese New Year gift for children. Trace pattern below onto a red piece of paper and cut it out. Follow instructions for pasting and folding. Students can draw symbols of luck such as a fish (a good harvest), two peaches (a long life), coins (good fortune), and bamboo leaves (peace). (See diagram 2, 3, and 4 below). Full-size print versions of diagram 2 is located at the end of this document.

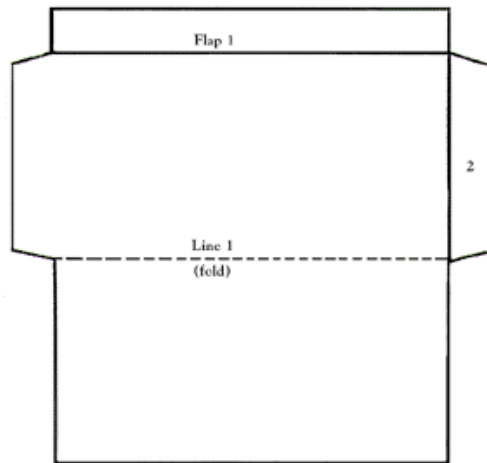


diagram 2

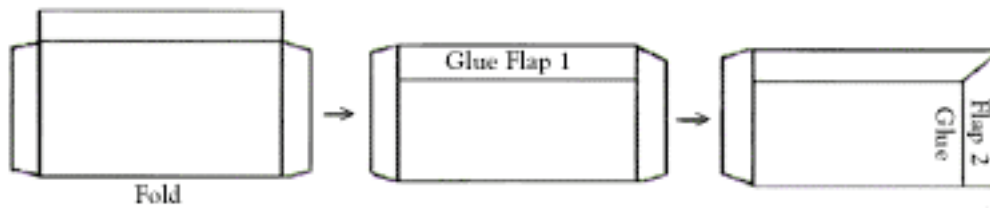
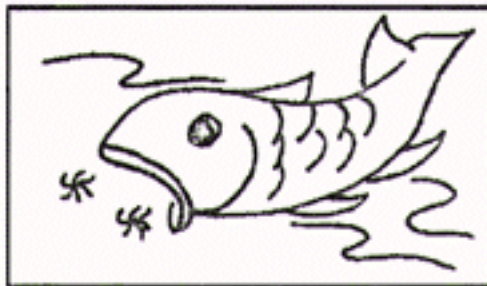
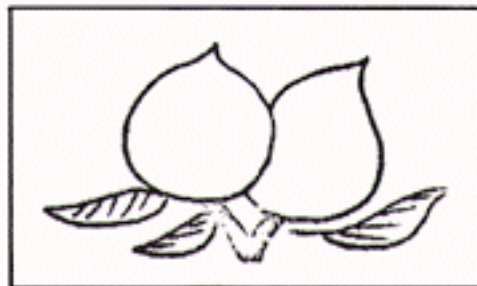


diagram 3



Fish
A wish for plenty of food



Peaches
A wish for long life

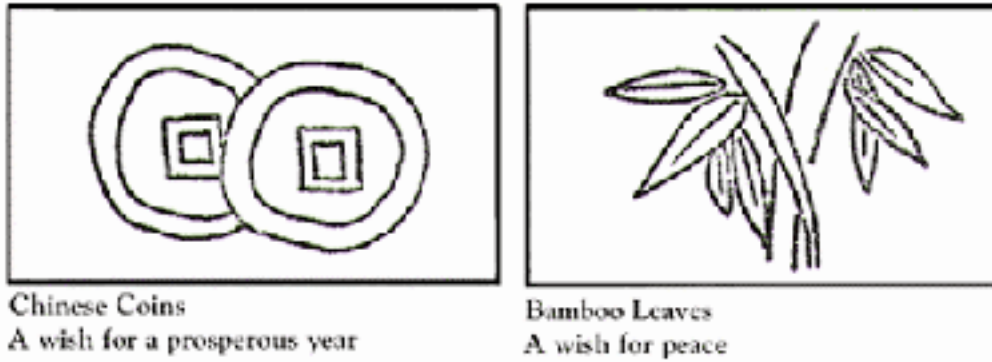


diagram 4

2. Make a Dragon Mobile, which imitates the movement of the Dragon Dance. Using the illustration below, students color and cut out along the heavy, dark lines. Glue tongue depressor behind dragon's head (at right angle). Wave it in the air and see how it moves up and down. (See diagram 5 below). A full-size print version of diagram 5 is located at the end of this document.



diagram 5

3. Make a Chinese New Year Sign. Using the illustration below, use a paintbrush to paint Chinese characters in gold paint. Then cut out circles and paste on 4 squares of red construction paper. See the illustration below on how to punch holes and use 3" pieces of red yarn to tie squares accordingly. (See diagram 6 and 7 below). A full-size print version of diagram 6 is located at the end of this document.

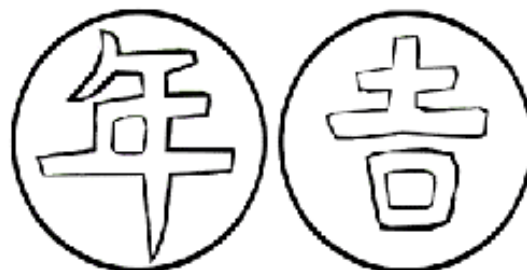




diagram 6



diagram 7

Drama

Read the story aloud, pausing at significant moments, i.e., when Sam meets the stranger or when Sam discovers he doesn't have enough money for the basketball. At these points, discuss the characters in the story along with such aspects as: what they want, what thoughts might be going through their heads, what (if any) obstacle exists, and how they are resolving the conflict.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND THE ILLUSTRATORS

Karen Chinn received a bachelor's degree in Communications from the University of Washington. She lives in Seattle, Washington with her husband and their daughter. This is her first picture book.

Cornelius Van Wright and **Ying-Hwa Hu** have been illustrating books together since 1989. Other books illustrated by the couple for Lee & Low are *Zora Hurston and the Chinaberry Tree* and *The Legend of Freedom Hill*. They live in New York City with their son and daughter.

Resources on the Web

Learn more about ***Sam and the Lucky Money***:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/101/hc/sam_and_the_lucky_money

Sam and the Lucky Money in Spanish:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/159/hc/sam_y_el_dinero_de_la_suerte

Sam and the Lucky Money in Chinese:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/164/hc/sam_and_the_lucky_money_chinese

Also illustrated by Cornelius Van Wright and Ying-Hwa Hu:

Zora Hurston and the Chinaberry Tree

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/136/hc/zora_hurston_and_the_chinaberry_tree

Zora Hurston and the Chinaberry Tree in Spanish:

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The Legend of Freedom Hill

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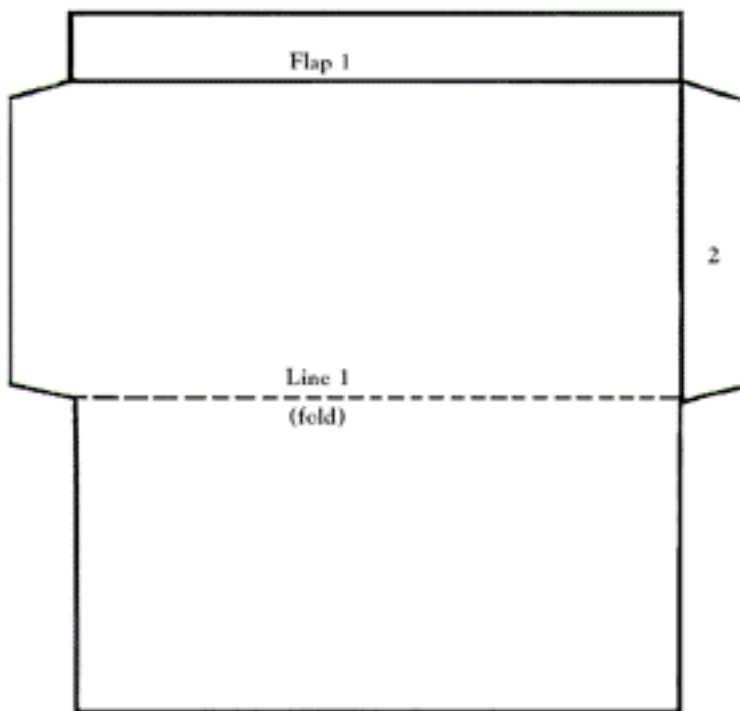


diagram 2

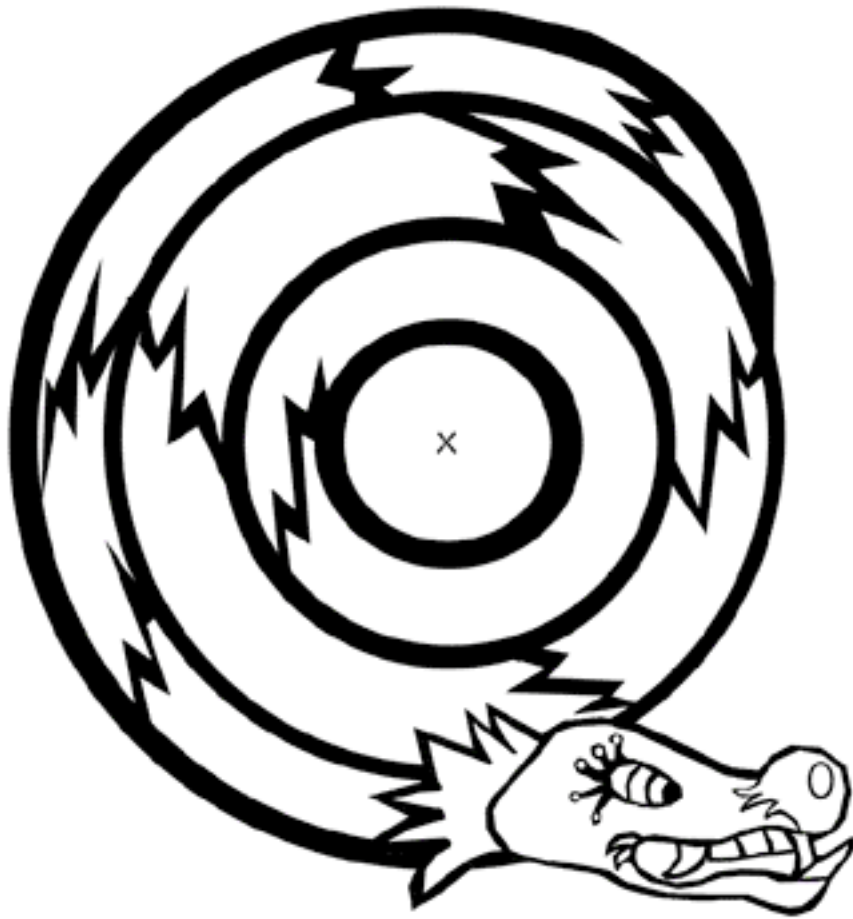


diagram 5



diagram 6