

Classroom Resources — Free on This Site

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PRINTABLE

Chinese New Year Decorations

Printable lantern templates for the stage-front lanterns.

chinesezodiac.com/printables/decorations

PRINTABLE

Lantern Riddles

Fourteen cut-out riddle slips for the lantern riddle wall.

chinesezodiac.com/printables/lantern-riddles

Cast (12 roles)

Narrator 1

Narrator 2

Grandma Chen

Grandpa Chen

Mei (daughter)

Bao (son)

Lantern Maker

Riddle Master

Neighbor Lin

Townsperson 1

Townsperson 2

All

Staging at a Glance

Hang real or paper lanterns across the front of the stage, and if you can, dim the room lights so the lanterns and a paper 'moon' seem to glow. Set the Chen home and kitchen at one side of the stage and the town square at the other, so the family can 'walk out into the street' between scenes. For the moon's rise in Scene 5, raise a round yellow cutout slowly on a string above the back of the stage. The two narrators can stand at the front corners and take turns, which keeps the story moving and gives more students a part.

Script

Scene 1 — The Fifteenth Night Begins

The Chen family home, early evening. The family is gathering as dusk falls.

Narrator 1: It is the fifteenth night of the new year. The very first full moon of the year is beginning to rise over the rooftops.

Narrator 2: And in the Chen household, that means one wonderful thing.

Mei: The Lantern Festival! Yuanxiao! It is my very favorite night of the whole entire year!

Bao: Grandma, I have a question. Why do we hang up lanterns tonight, and not on all the other nights of the new year?

Grandma Chen: Come here, Bao, and I will tell you. Tonight is the fifteenth and last day of the new year celebration. The lanterns welcome the spring and light the way for good luck to find us.

Grandpa Chen: And tonight brings the first full moon of the whole year. A round, full moon stands for a whole, happy family, all together in one place.

Bao: A whole family, like ours, all under one moon.

Grandpa Chen: Exactly so, my boy. That is the meaning of tonight.

Scene 2 — Rolling the Tangyuan

The Chen family kitchen. Grandma is at the table with a bowl of sticky rice dough.

Narrator 1: In the warm kitchen, Grandma was rolling little white balls of sticky rice flour between her hands.

Mei: Tangyuan! Oh, may I help roll them, Grandma? Please?

Grandma Chen: Of course you may. Here, take a little dough. Roll each one round and smooth. Round like the moon, round like our family.

Bao: What is hiding inside this one, Grandma?

Grandma Chen: That one has sweet black sesame paste tucked inside. When you bite into it, it melts warm and sweet in your mouth.

Mei: And why do we always eat tangyuan on this night?

Grandma Chen: Because the word for these round little balls sounds like the word for being together as a family. Eating them is a wish for everyone to stay close, all year long.

Narrator 2: Soon the tangyuan were bobbing happily in a pot of sweet, warm soup. The family ate together, and then it was time to go out into the night.

Scene 3 — Lanterns in the Street

A busy town street, glowing with lanterns. A Lantern Maker calls out from a stall.

Narrator 1: The Chen family carried their own little lanterns out into the street, and what a sight waited for them there.

Lantern Maker: Lanterns! Red lanterns! Paper lanterns! Lanterns shaped like rabbits and fish and dragons! Come and see, come and see!

Bao: Look, Mei! Look at that one! It is shaped like a great long dragon, and it glows from the inside!

Lantern Maker: Ah, you have a good eye, young man. I bend the bamboo, I stretch the silk over it, and I paint every single one by hand. Each lantern carries a wish for the year ahead.

Mei: Oh, I love the rabbit lantern, the little white one. Grandpa, may I please carry it?

Grandpa Chen: You may, but hold it carefully, Mei. The little candle inside is like a tiny flame of hope. We must keep it safe.

Mei: I will hold it so carefully. I promise.

Narrator 2: Strings of glowing lanterns hung across the whole square, and beneath them, little slips of paper fluttered in the evening breeze.

Scene 4 — The Lantern Riddles

The town square. A Riddle Master stands beneath a row of lanterns, each with a paper slip.

Neighbor Lin: Chen family! Over here! Come and try the lantern riddles! The Riddle Master has stumped half the town already tonight!

Riddle Master: Step right up, step right up! Each riddle hangs from a lantern. Solve one and you win a prize. This is deng mi, the lantern riddle, a game as old as the festival itself!

Bao: I want to try! Give us a riddle, Riddle Master!

Riddle Master: Very well, here is one for you. 'I have a face and two hands, but I have no arms and no legs. All day long I tell you something. What am I?'

Bao: Ooh! Ooh! I know it! A clock! A clock has a face and two hands!

Riddle Master: Correct! What a clever boy! Here is your prize, a sweet sugar candy.

Townsperson 1: Try this lantern's riddle next. I will warn you, this one fooled me all evening long!

Riddle Master: Listen closely, then. 'It comes just once a year, all round and shining bright. Look up, look high above you, on this very night. What is it?'

Mei: The full moon! It is the first full moon of the new year!

Riddle Master: Wonderful, simply wonderful! You have sharp eyes and a quick mind, little one.

Neighbor Lin: The Chen children are too clever for you tonight, Riddle Master!

Riddle Master: (laughing) So they are, so they are! That is the joy of the festival.

Scene 5 — The Moon Rises

The town square, growing quiet. A great round moon begins to climb above the rooftops.

Townsperson 2: Everyone, everyone, look up! The moon is climbing over the rooftops at last!

Narrator 1: The whole busy square slowly grew quiet as the great round moon rose high above the glowing lanterns.

Grandma Chen: There it is, my dears. Round and full and bright, just like the tangyuan we shared together tonight.

Grandpa Chen: When the new year first began, fifteen days ago, we hoped for a good and happy year. Tonight, standing under this full moon, we celebrate that we are all here together.

Bao: Grandpa, can we light our own lanterns now?

Mei: Make a wish first! I am wishing for my little rabbit lantern to glow the very brightest of them all!

Narrator 2: One by one, the Chens lifted their glowing lanterns up toward the round and shining moon.

Neighbor Lin: Oh, look how the whole town shines! Hundreds and hundreds of little lights, like the stars themselves have come down to earth.

Grandma Chen: This, my dear ones, is how we say goodbye to the new year holiday. We end it with light, with sweetness, and most of all, with family.

Narrator 1: The lanterns drifted and glowed, the moon shone round and full above them, and the Lantern Festival brought the new year to a joyful close.

All: Happy Lantern Festival! Yuanxiao kuaile!

Props & Costumes (Optional)

- Paper or real lanterns to hang across the stage front (rabbit, fish, and dragon shapes are wonderful if you can make them).
- A large round yellow paper 'moon' on a string for the rising-moon moment.
- A bowl and some white craft pom-poms or paper balls to be the tangyuan being rolled.
- Small paper slips with simple riddles written on them, tied to the lanterns.
- A few wrapped candies for the Riddle Master to hand out as prizes.
- Optional: simple aprons for Grandma and the cooks, and a vendor's sash for the Lantern Maker.

Director's Note

The Lantern Festival, or Yuanxiao Jie, falls on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month and marks the very end of the Lunar New Year season. This script gently teaches three real traditions: making and carrying lanterns, eating sweet tangyuan, and solving lantern riddles called deng mi. Keep the family scenes warm and conversational, and let the market scenes get loud and playful. The riddles are a gift to your audience: pause after each one so the watching students can shout out their guesses before the characters answer. Cast warm, expressive readers as the grandparents, since they carry the meaning of the night.

Pronunciation Guide

元宵节 *Yuánxiāo Jié* — the Lantern Festival, on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month; 'ywen-shyaow jyeh'

灯笼 *dēnglong* — lantern; 'dung-loong' (the second part is said lightly)

汤圆 *tāngyuán* — sweet glutinous rice balls eaten at the festival; 'tahng-ywen'

灯谜 *dēngmí* — lantern riddle, written on a slip and hung from a lantern; 'dung-mee'

满月 *mǎnyuè* — full moon; 'mahn-yweh'

月亮 *yuèliang* — the moon; 'yweh-lyang' (the second part is said lightly)

团圆 *tuányuán* — family reunion; coming together as a whole; 'twan-ywen'

芝麻 *zhīma* — sesame, as in the sweet black sesame paste; 'jr-mah'

红灯笼 *hóng dēnglong* — red lantern; 'hoong dung-loong'

春节 *Chūnjié* — the Spring Festival, the Chinese name for the Lunar New Year; 'chwun-jyeh'

元宵快乐 *Yuánxiāo kuàilè* — Happy Lantern Festival; 'ywen-shyaow kwai-luh'

Performance Tips

- Let the Riddle Master play straight to the audience, pausing after each riddle so the watching students can call out their own guesses before the answer.
- Give the family members soft, warm, everyday voices, and give the Lantern Maker and Riddle Master big, sing-song, market-caller voices for contrast.
- Raise the paper moon very slowly during the quiet moment in Scene 5, and have the actors lower their voices as it rises.
- Have everyone lift their lanterns together on the final cheer for a bright, joyful finish.
- If you can safely dim the lights for the final scene, the glowing lanterns will make the ending feel magical.

After the Performance: Discussion Questions

1. The Lantern Festival comes on the fifteenth and last day of the Lunar New Year. Why do you think people end such a big celebration with lights and lanterns?
2. Grandma says the round tangyuan stand for the family being together. What foods does your family eat for special days, and what do they mean to you?
3. Lantern riddles, or deng mi, are a festival game. Why do you think solving riddles together is a fun way to celebrate with a whole town?
4. Grandpa says a full, round moon stands for a whole, happy family. What other round things in the story carry that same idea of being whole and together?
5. If you could design and carry your own lantern for the festival, what shape would it be, and what wish would you put inside it?