

## **The Festival of the Mid-Autumn Moon**

Chinese Lesson Plan  
NCTA East Asian Seminar  
Winter 2008 Akron  
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### **Purpose:**

Traditions and rituals create a celebration of life that enriches one's cultural pride and sense of history. Knowledge about foreign cultures helps students gain an appreciation, respect, and interest in other countries.

### **Target Class:**

This project is intended for exploratory language classes (grades 7 or 8), a first year high school foreign language class (grade 9 or French I), or an international language club. After preparations, students from this group will share their lesson with primary grade students from a school within the district or at an event at the local library. This introduction of an Asian culture emphasizes the Standards of Peoples in Societies (Social Studies) and Connections and Communities (Foreign Language).

### **Essential Questions:**

1. What is the lunar-solar Chinese calendar? How is it determined?
2. What important holidays are celebrated in the Chinese culture?
3. What is the legend behind the Festival of the Mid-Autumn Moon? Who were Chang-e, Hou-yi, and the Jade Rabbit?
4. How and when is the Moon Festival celebrated?
5. What does the full roundness of the moon represent?
6. What are the cultural similarities and differences between American and Chinese autumnal celebrations?

### **Rationale:**

Students often celebrate holidays without understanding the rich origin or cultural significance of their own traditions nor do they consider other societies' rituals and customs. The Festival of the Mid-Autumn Moon will invite students to give thanks in a celebration of gratitude and reflect upon wishes for their families and friends in the year ahead. High school students from a foreign language class or international club will help introduce foreign cultures to elementary school students.

### **Materials:**

1. A lunar-solar Chinese calendar
2. Chinese restaurant placemats depicting the current year (2008 = the Year of the Rat)
3. A list of annual Chinese holidays and dates of celebration
4. Selected versions of the legend of Chang-e, the Moon Goddess, Hou-yi, and the Jade Rabbit

5. Symbolic foods and notes on what they represent, candles or incense, tea and cakes
6. Recipes for traditional foods shared during the Festival of the Mid-Autumn Moon
7. A moon cake built in a pyramid, candies, fruits
8. Chinese paper lanterns and thank you cards with cut out animals (previously made by language class or club or as a class project with the younger students)
9. Selected Chinese poems about autumn

**Activities:**

The research and preparation exercises will be completed by high school students from a foreign language class or international club within a three day time period or three activity club meetings and then shared and presented during a culmination celebration of the Festival of the Mid-Autumn Moon during a two hour visit to a third grade class at an elementary school in the local school district. The project could also be incorporated into the weeklong celebration of foreign language activities and culminate at the yearly event of International Night at the high school in March. This is an accumulated effort in teaching world languages and cultures across the curriculum and from an interdisciplinary approach.

1. Ask high school students to brainstorm and discuss traditional Chinese holidays and celebrations. Typically they will only be able to talk briefly about Chinese New Year. Ask why it is celebrated at a different time of year, other than December 31<sup>st</sup>.
2. Distribute Chinese restaurant placemats and allow students 5 minutes to find their birth year and “sign”. This will encourage them to think about the connection between the sun and the moon. They will also draw a connection between the “celestial stem” of names and the “earthly branch” based on the Chinese astrological zodiac. Ask students when the current year started and what their symbol is and with whom they are most attracted and why. Also ask students how this year is determined (2008 = the year of the rat), and what the subsequent year will be.
3. Give students a list of annual Chinese holidays and a more detailed account of the Festival of the Mid-Autumn Moon (celebrated on the eighth lunar month, fifteenth day). This will help explain why the eighth lunar month is usually not in August but in September.
4. Read several versions of the legend of the Chang-e, the Moon Goddess, Hou-yi, the Archer, and the Jade Rabbit, and discuss the Festival of the Mid-Autumn Moon. Choose one story that will be read to the younger children at the elementary school during the Festival.
5. Have students do further research via the Internet to find traditional foods eaten during this celebration (snails, peanuts, pomelos, taro, and moon cakes). Create matching cards that symbolize the items placed on the Moon Festival table.
6. Prepare moon cakes in the school home economics room, after school, with a group of students, following a simplified culinary taste that will appeal to young children. Collect items to display on the table during the festival, including paper lanterns.

7. At the elementary school, prepare a Moon Festival table with symbolic fruits, peanuts, candles or incense, and tea. Distribute cards that tell what the items represent and have younger students work in pairs with a high school student guide to match the item with the symbolic meaning.
8. Display paper lanterns in the shapes of rabbits, fish, birds, butterflies, and horses as decorations. Use the cutouts for the thank you cards or secret wishes and help elementary students write down their wishes for the school year or thank you notes for families and friends.
9. Celebrate the Festival of the Mid-Autumn Moon by sharing a moon cake pyramid (each round cake cut into fours), candies, and fruits.
10. Have high school students read aloud the story of Chang-e and selected Chinese poems about autumn. Although the younger children may not understand the words or even the meaning of the poems, they will enjoy the rhythm and melodic sounds, gaining an appreciation for language.

**Assessment:**

This is a non-graded learning activity to encourage high school students to share a foreign cultural event with primary grade students and to introduce them to an Asian celebration of gratitude and harmony.

**State Standards:**

Social Studies (Peoples in Societies: Compare cultural practices, products and perspectives of past civilizations in order to understand commonality and diversity of cultures

Foreign Languages (Connections and Communities: Investigate and report on concepts from across disciplines and provide information or services to individuals, the school or the community using knowledge of the target language or culture

**Resources:**

[chinatown.com/.au](http://chinatown.com/.au) (aisan silk lanterns)

[knowingfood.com](http://knowingfood.com) (recipes)

[china-window.com](http://china-window.com) (the moon festival poems)

[www.c-c-c.org](http://www.c-c-c.org) (Chinese cultural festival: characters for longevity or harmony)

[www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org) (Chinese traditions)

Good Luck Life: The Essential Guide to Chinese American Celebrations and Culture (Rosemary Gong) Harper Resource

Anthology of Chinese Literature, Vol II (edited and with an introduction by Cyril Birch) Grove Press

[webexibits.org/calendars](http://webexibits.org/calendars)

**POEMS:**

***#1 The Passer-through-the Walls (p. 452 Birch)***

Scorching and yet chilling  
Your traces are winds---  
All the walls, though cast in bronze,  
Prick up their ears,  
And as if attracted by curses  
They move in great multitudes toward you.

Every corner of darkness is pasted with your eyes.  
Your eyes are nets,  
Netting directions---directions toward you  
And directions leading away from you.

The Hunter lights up your window every night.  
Your window, sometimes widely open,  
Sometimes closed tightly;  
Sometimes it is darker when it is open than closed.  
Your eyes are filled with fluorescence, with yellow dust mist. . .

The Hunter says that only he has your key.  
The Hunter says if you happen to leave the window open  
He will gently close it for you. . .

***#2 Tune: "Sand and Sky": Autumn Thoughts (p. 17 Birch)***

Dry vine, old tree, crows at dusk,  
Low bridge, stream running, cottages,  
Ancient road, west wind, lean nag,  
The sun westering  
And one with breaking heart at the sky's edge.

***#3 Tune: "Partridge Sky" (p. 292 Birch)***

The creek purls lightly past the willow fringe,  
By the lacquered window she wakes to the doves' calling.  
The screen's vision of emerald hills draws down her brows,  
The mirror ripples to her glance, but autumn waits at her temples.

Try the brush of jade,  
Sip the jasper cup,  
Wake to compose your grief in verse, stop when the wine takes hold.  
Tomorrow when the blossoms fall and the last wild goose flies  
Make your chamber fast against the chill spring rain.

***#4 "The Mid-Autumn Moon" by Li Qiao***

A full moon hangs high in the chilly sky,  
All say it's the same everywhere, round and bright.  
But how can one be sure thousands of li away  
Wind and perhaps rain may not be marring the night?

*"The Yo-Mei Mountain Moon" by Li Bai*

The autumn moon is half round above the Yo-mei Mountain;  
The pale light falls in and flows with the water of the  
Ping-chiang River.  
Tonight I leave Ching-chi of limpid stream for the three  
Canyons.  
And glide down past Yu-chow, thinking of you whom I can not  
see.

**RECIPES:**

***#1 Mid-Autumn Moon Cake Recipe  
(by Yan Can Cook, Inc)***

Makes 2 dozen

1 can (17-1/2 ounces) lotus seed paste  
1/4 cup finely chopped walnuts

Dough

4 cups all-purpose flour  
1/2-cup non-fat dried milk powder  
3 teaspoons baking powder  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
3 eggs  
1 cup sugar 1/2 cup solid shortening, melted and cooled  
1 egg yolk , lightly beaten

1. Mix lotus seed paste and walnuts together in a bowl;  
set aside.

2. Sift flour, milk powder, baking powder, and salt  
together into a bowl. In large bowl of electric mixer, beat  
eggs on medium speed until light and lemon colored. Add  
sugar; beat for 10 minutes or until mixture falls in a thick  
ribbon. Add melted shortening; mix lightly. With a spatula,  
fold in flour mixture. Turn dough out on a lightly floured  
board; knead for 1 minute or until smooth and satiny. Divide  
dough in half; roll each half into a log. Cut each log into  
12 equal pieces.

3. To shape each moon cake, roll a piece of dough into a  
ball. Roll out on a lightly floured board to make a 4-inch  
circle about 1/8-inch thick. Place 1 tablespoon of lotus  
seed paste mixture in center of dough circle. Fold in sides  
of dough to completely enclose filling; press edges to seal.

Lightly flour inside of moon cake press with 2-1/2 inch diameter cups. Place moon cake, seam side up, in mold; flatten dough to conform to shape of mold. Bang one end of mold lightly on work surface to dislodge moon cake. Place cake on ungreased baking sheet. Repeat to shape remaining cakes. Brush tops with egg yolk.

4. Bake in a preheated 375 degree F. oven for 30 minutes or until golden brown. Transfer to a rack and let cool.

## **#2 Mooncakes**

- \* Filling:
- \* 1 pound red azuki beans
- \* water
- \* 3/4 cup lard or oil
- \* 1-3/4 cups sugar
- \* Water-Shortening Dough:
- \* 2 cups flour
- \* 5 tablespoons lard
- \* 10 tablespoons water
- \* 1/4 teaspoon salt
- \* Flaky Dough:
- \* 1 cup flour
- \* 5 tablespoons lard
- \* red food coloring for design

### PREPARATION:

Filling Instructions: Soak red beans in water to cover 2 hours. Drain and discard the water. Cover with 8 cups fresh water and bring to a boil, then simmer over low heat 1-1/2 hours or until skins open.

Strain the beans and discard the skins. Place the strained beans in several layers of cheesecloth and squeeze out any excess water.

Place in a saucepan with the lard or oil and the sugar. Cook, stirring continuously, until almost all the moisture has evaporated. Let cool.

Dough Instructions: You will need 2 cups of filling for the mooncakes. Divide this into 20 portions and shape into balls. Mix ingredients for the water-shortening dough and the flaky dough separately until smooth. Divide each dough into 20 equal portions.

Wrap one portion of flaky dough inside each portion of water-shortening dough. Roll out each piece of dough, then fold in thirds to form three layers. Roll out again, and once more fold in thirds to form three layers.

Flatten each piece of dough with the palm of your hand to form a 3" circle. Place one portion of filling in the center. Gather the edges to enclose the filling and pinch to seal. Place the filled packet in the mold, gently pressing to fit. Invert and remove the mold.

Dilute red food coloring with water and pour onto a damp paper towel on a plate. Take some food coloring onto the cookie-design stamp, then press on top of the mooncake. Repeat process for remaining mooncakes. Arrange mooncakes on a baking sheet. Bake 20 minutes at 350 degrees. Let cool before serving.

## **Legends of the Mid-Autumn Festival**

### *Houyi and Chang'e*

While Westerners may talk about the "man in the moon", the Chinese talk about the "woman in the moon". The story of Chang'e and her flight to the moon, familiar to most Chinese citizens, is a favourite subject of poets. Unlike many lunar deities in other cultures who personify the moon, Chang'e lives in the moon. Tradition places Houyi and Chang'e around 2170 BC, in the reign of the legendary Emperor Yao, shortly after that of Huang Di.

There are so many variations and adaptations of the Chang'e legend that one can become overwhelmed and utterly confused. However, most legends about Chang'e in Chinese mythology involve some variation of the following elements: Houyi, the Archer; Chang'e, the mythical Moon Goddess of Immortality; an emperor, either benevolent or malevolent; an elixir of life; and the Moon:

### *Houyi, the archer*

There are at least 6 variations to this story where Houyi was an archer.

Version 1: Houyi himself was an immortal, while Chang'e was a beautiful young girl, working in the Jade Emperor's (Emperor of Heaven) (玉帝 pinyin:yùdì) Palace as the attendant to the Queen Mother of the West (wife of the Jade Emperor), just before her marriage. One day, Houyi aroused the jealousy of the other immortals, who then slandered him before the Jade Emperor. Houyi and his wife, Chang'e, were subsequently banished from heaven, and forced to live by hunting on earth. He became a famous archer.

Now at this time, there were 10 suns that took turns to circle the earth – one every 10 days. One day, all 10 of the suns circled together, causing the earth to burn. Emperor Yao, the Emperor of China, commanded Houyi to shoot down all but one of the suns. Upon the completion of his task, the Emperor rewarded Houyi with a pill that granted eternal life, and advised him: "Make no haste to swallow this pill; first prepare yourself with prayer and fasting for a year". Houyi took the pill home and hid it under a

rafter, while he began healing his spirit. While Houyi was healing his sprit, Houyi was summoned again by the emperor. Chang'e, noticing a white beam of light beckoning from the rafters, discovered the pill, which she swallowed. Immediately, she found that she could fly. At that moment, Houyi returned home, and, realizing what had happened, began to reprimand her. Chang'e flew out the window into the sky.

With bow in hand, Houyi sped after her, and the pursuit continued halfway across the heavens. Finally, Houyi had to return to the Earth because of the force of the wind. Chang'e reached the moon, and breathless, she coughed. Part of the pill fell out from her mouth. Now, the hare was already on the moon, and Chang'e commanded the animal to make another pill from it, so that she could return to earth to her husband.

As of today, the hare is still pounding herbs, trying to make the pill. As for Houyi, he built himself a palace in the sun as "Yang" (the male principle), with Chang'e as "Yin" (the female principle). Once a year, on the 15th day of the full moon, Houyi visits his wife. That is why, that night, the moon is full and beautiful. [1]

This description appears in written form in two Western Han dynasty (206 BCE-24 CE) collections; Shanhaijing (Classic of the Mountains and Seas, a book of travels and tales), and Huainanzi (scientific, historical and philosophical articles, named for the Prince of Huai). [2]

Version 2: The story took place around 2170 BC. The earth had ten suns at that time. They burned the ground. No crops can grow so that people suffered of the infertile. Houyi sympathized to the human, so he decided to shoot down the sun but leave one to benefit the human. After he shot down the suns, he became the hero. He had a beautiful wife names Chang'e, they lived happily together. Houyi had a lot of prentices; they followed him to learn hunting. One day, on Houyi's way back home the immortals emperor gave Houyi a pill for granted eternal life as a reward to shot down the sun. He warned Houyi, "Make no haste to swallow the pill." But Houyi loved Chang'e very much and did not want to leave her, so he gave the pill to Chang'e and let her store the pill in a safe place. Chang'e putted the pill in her jewelry box. But one of Houyi's prentices Peng discovered this secret. He decided to steal the pill. One day Houyi and other prentices went to the mountain. Peng pretended he was sick so that he can stay at home. When all the people went to the mountain but Chang'e stayed at home. He intruded in Chang'e's room and forced her to give him the pill. Chang'e knew she cannot fight over Peng, so she swallowed the pill immediately. After she swallowed the pill, she felt herself was floating in the air and flying far and far away. She did not want to leave her husband, so she stopped at the moon

which is closest to the earth. After Houyi knew what happened, he was very angry and painful. He looked up to the night and called Chang'e's name. He discovered that inside the moon there is a lady's shadow looks like Chang'e, so he ran and ran and tired to reach the moon. He failed due to the wind.

Version 3: The earth once had ten suns circling over it, each taking turn to illuminate the earth. One day, however, all ten suns appeared together, scorching the earth with their heat. Houyi, a strong and tyrannical archer, saved the earth by shooting down nine of the suns. He eventually became King, but grew to become a despot.

One day, Houyi stole the elixir of life from a goddess. However, his beautiful wife, Chang'e, drank it in order to save the people from the her husband's tyrannical rule. After drinking it, she found herself floating, and flew to the moon. Houyi loved his divinely beautiful wife so much, he did not shoot down the moon.

Version 4: Another version, however, had it that Chang'e and Houyi were immortals living in heaven. One day, the ten sons of the Jade Emperor transformed into ten suns, causing the earth to scorch. Having failed to order his sons to stop ruining the earth, the Jade Emperor summoned Houyi for help. Houyi, using his legendary archery skills, shot down nine of the sons, but spared one son to be the sun. The Jade Emperor was obviously displeased with Houyi's solution to save the earth. As punishment, he banished Houyi and Chang'e to live as mere mortals on earth.

Seeing that Chang'e felt extremely miserable over her loss of immortality, Houyi decided to journey on a long, perilous quest to find the pill of immortality so that the couple could be immortals again. At the end of his quest, he met the Queen Mother of the West, who agreed to give him the pill, but warned him that each person would only need half a pill to regain immortality.

Houyi brought the pill home and stored it in a case. He warned Chang'e not to open the case, and then left home for a while. Like Pandora in Greek mythology, Chang'e became curious. She opened up the case and found the pill, just as Houyi was returning home. Nervous that Houyi would catch her, discovering the contents of the case, she accidentally swallowed the entire pill, and started to float into the sky because of the overdose. Although Houyi wanted to shoot her in order to prevent her from floating further, he could not bear to aim the arrow at her. Chang'e kept on floating until she landed on the moon.

While she became lonely on the moon without her husband, she did have company. A jade rabbit, who manufactured elixirs, also lived on the moon.

Version 5: In a popular school version, Houyi was a lazy boy who did nothing but to practice his archery. He practiced day and night until he became the greatest archer in the world. One day, the ten suns all assembled around the earth. Their presence destroyed all vegetation, and hundreds of thousands were perishing. The emperor, who was desperate, offered his crown to anyone who could shoot down the suns. Houyi answered his call. He shot down nine of the suns, and as he pulled his bow to shoot the last one, the emperor stopped him. Saying the earth must have one sun. Houyi then became the emperor. He was pampered to the extent that he wanted to be emperor forever. He called his advisors to look for a way to make him immortal. His advisors found a way. They found a recipe for the Pill of Immortality. It required 100 adolescent boys to be ground into a biscuit like a pill. Every night he was supposed to grind one boy. On the hundredth night, his wife Chang'e could not bear to watch her husband become the tyrannical dictator for eternity. She prayed to Xi Wang Mu for help. She stole the pill, with Houyi shooting arrows at her, and flew to the moon grabbing a rabbit to keep her company.

Version 6 A different version, long story short, is that Chang'e was a goddess. She fell in love with a farmer, Houyi, and he fell in love with her, not knowing she was from the heavens up above. Soon he had found out and the gods from heaven were furious of them because it was forbidden for a god or goddess to fall in love with a human. They had a child together but she still had to leave both her beloved husband and child behind during mid-autumn. She would represent the sun, he would represent as the moon and the child would represent as the stars. Taken pity over them, they are only allowed to see each other every mid-autumn.

#### *Houyi, the builder*

Houyi, a famous builder, built a beautiful jade palace for the Goddess of the Western Heaven (also called the Royal Mother). In appreciation, she gave Yi a special pill that contained the magic elixir of immortality. But with it, came the condition and warning that he may not use the pill until he had accomplished certain self-purification.

His wife, Chang'e, was a beautiful but inquisitive woman. One day, she discovered the pill, and without telling her husband, swallowed it. The Goddess was very angry, and as a punishment, banished Chang'e to the moon where, according to the legend, she can be seen at her most beautiful, on the night of the bright harvest moon. This holiday is always

celebrated during the time when the moon is at its fullest. Children gather around, climbing hills and mountains to be able to see the moon so their wish can be granted

#### *The Hare - Jade Rabbit*

According to tradition, the Jade Rabbit pounds medicine, together with the lady, Chang'e, for the gods. Others say that the Jade Rabbit is a shape, assumed by Chang'e herself. You may find that the dark areas to the top of the full moon may be construed as the figure of a rabbit. The animal's ears point to the upper right, while at the left are two large circular areas, representing its head and body. [1]

In this legend, three fairy sages transformed themselves into pitiful old men, and begged for food from a fox, a monkey, and a hare. The fox and the monkey both had food to give to the old men, but the hare, empty-handed, jumped into a blazing fire to offer his own flesh instead. The sages were so touched by the hare's sacrifice and act of kindness that they let him live in the Moon Palace, where he became the "Jade Rabbit".

#### Overthrow of Mongol rule

According to a widespread folk tale (not necessarily supported by historical records), the Mid-Autumn Festival commemorates an uprising in China against the Mongol rulers of the Yuan Dynasty (1280-1368) in the 14th century. As group gatherings were banned, it was impossible to make plans for a rebellion. Noting that the Mongols did not eat mooncakes, Liu Bowen of Zhejiang Province, advisor to the Chinese rebel leader Zhu Yuanzhang, came up with the idea of timing the rebellion to coincide with the Mid-Autumn Festival. He sought permission to distribute thousands of moon cakes to the Chinese residents in the city to bless the longevity of the Mongol emperor. Inside each cake, however, was inserted a piece of paper with the message: "Kill the Tatars on the 15th day of the Eighth Moon" On the night of the Moon Festival, the rebels successfully attacked and overthrew the government. What followed was the establishment of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), under Zhu. Henceforth, the Mid-Autumn Festival was celebrated with moon cakes on a national level.

#### **Symbolic Items & Meanings**

Gourds = long-lasting togetherness

Apples = peace

Pomegranates = many children (from seeds)

Asian pears, persimmons, grapes, peaches, melons = round moon-shaped fruits

Soybean plants = heavenly cassia tree

Peanuts = long life

Coconuts = promote a healthy face and figure

Watermelon = many children (from seeds)