

CELEBRATIONS

Dragon Boat Festival

Teacher's notes

Age: Teenagers/Adults

Level: Upper-intermediate-advanced (B2-C1)

Time: 60-90 minutes

Activity: In this lesson, students will:

1. read an article about the Dragon Boat Festival, focusing on the language involved;
2. watch videos about elements of the Dragon Boat Festival and retell what they see and hear;
3. relate other stories from their own culture that involve dragons;
4. talk about a famous poet from their country and his/her most well-known work.

Language focus: vocabulary related to the Dragon Boat Festival, and language for retelling and relating stories

Materials: one copy of the worksheet per student; internet access (for Task 4 only) either on mobile phones or computers

Note: The origin of this festival comes from a story about the death of a famous poet and what the local people did to appease his spirit after his death, so please be aware that this lesson mentions (but does not deal with in depth) both suicide and supernatural topics.

Procedure

1. Warmer

On their own or with a partner, students first write ten words they might use when talking about a dragon, e.g. *fierce, fire-spitting, winged, scaly, mythical*, etc. Then, in small groups of two to four, they compare their words. How many are the same? Collect the most frequently-occurring words on the board for the students to use in later discussion tasks.

2. Key words and expressions

Students first find and underline the key words in the article, then match them to the definitions in part c.

Note: The words (not their definitions) are in the order that they appear in the article.

Finally, in part c, after checking their answers, students should read the article, noting how the key words are used in context and decide whether they are part of a useful expression. If yes, they should underline not only the word, but the whole expression, e.g. went into *exile*, *feature* very strongly, *traced* back to, fall out of *favour*, *ward off* evil spirits, *spur* on his team.

Key:

- | | |
|---------------|--------------|
| 1. corrupt | 7. paddles |
| 2. dumplings | 8. slandered |
| 3. exile | 9. spur on |
| 4. favour | 10. traced |
| 5. feature | 11. waded |
| 6. intangible | 12. ward off |

3. Find the information

Students read the article and find the information to answer the questions.

Key:

1.
 - a. Qu Yuan.
 - b. 278 BC
 - c. He committed suicide by drowning himself in the Miluo River.
 - d. He couldn't bear the knowledge that the capital of Chu, where he had been a minister for the king, had fallen to the Qin army.
2. *Zongzi*s are rice dumplings. Villagers threw rice dumplings into the river after they were unable to save Qu Yuan as an offering to his spirit and to keep evil spirits and fish away.
The villagers raced along the river in their boats beating drums to frighten the evil spirits. This is reflected in today's Dragon Boat Race, in which the fierce dragons and drumming symbolically ward off evil spirits. The herbs also keep evil spirits away.

4. Video – passing on information

In this communicative activity, students first work with a partner and watch one of the videos. Ensure that the videos are divided up amongst the class and that students don't all watch the same video.

After watching the video they should talk with their partners and make notes of what they saw.

In the second part of the task, part b, students sit together with another pair of students who watched a different video. Using their notes they should tell the others what they saw in their video – what they found most interesting, what reflected the information that they already read in the article, etc.

Finally, in part c, students watch their videos again together with the other pair and reflect on how well they related what they saw in the previous part of this task.

If you are teaching a very small group, you could simply watch and discuss the videos with all the students together.

5. Discussion – dragons and poets

Find out if there are any myths or folk tales from the students' countries or cultures that involve dragons. Get them each to retell one of the stories as well as they can (or to look it up to jog their memory, and then retell it).

Students talk about a famous poet from their country – either from past or the present day. This might be a poet that they had to study at school. The students can recite the poem in their own language and explain in English what the poem is about, possibly even translating the first line or two.

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Exercise 1: Warmer

In the box below, write 10 words you might use when telling a story about a dragon.



Exercise 2: Key words and expressions

- a. Find and underline the key words in the box below in the article.
- b. Match the key words to the definitions.
- c. Read the article and note how the key words are used in context. Are they part of longer expressions? If yes, underline not only the word, but also the whole expression.

feature	trace	slander	corrupt	favour	exile
wade	dumplings	paddles	ward off	spur on	intangible

- 1. something that is dishonest, illegal, or immoral, done in order to gain money or power _____
- 2. small solid lumps of cooked food, usually made of flour and water or rice _____
- 3. a period of time in which you are forced to live or work away from the place that you prefer _____
- 4. support or admiration that you get from people _____
- 5. be an important part or aspect of something _____
- 6. not able to be touched or measured, and difficult to describe or explain _____
- 7. short poles that you push into the water in order to move a small boat such as a canoe. They are wide and flat at one or both ends. _____

8. something that is said (written or verbally) about you that is not true and is likely to damage your reputation _____
9. encourage someone to do something _____
10. discover the origin of something or how it developed _____
11. walk in or through water that is not very deep _____
12. do something to prevent someone or something from harming you _____

THE DRAGON BOAT FESTIVAL

The Dragon Boat Festival is celebrated on the fifth day of the fifth month of the Chinese lunar calendar, which usually falls in May or June. The festival is celebrated over a three-day period during which schools and businesses are closed. This public holiday is one of the busiest times to travel in China as many people use the time off work as an opportunity to visit their families over the long weekend.

The festival is not actually about dragons at all, although boats do feature very strongly, especially in the competitive dragon boat races which draw huge crowds where ever they take place all over China, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia and increasingly in many other countries around the world.

The roots of the Dragon Boat Festival are usually traced back to the suicide of China's most famous poet, Qu Yuan. The events took place during China's Warring States Period when Qu Yuan was a minister serving the King of the state of Chu. After being slandered by corrupt officials and falling out of favour with the king, Qu Yuan left the capital and went into exile where he wrote what is now considered to be some of China's most patriotic, visionary and famous poetry. In the year 278 BC, after hearing that the Chu capital had fallen to the Qin army, Qu Yuan waded out into the Miluo River and drowned himself. Local villagers paddled furiously out into the river but were unable to save him.

Later, the villagers went back out on the river in their boats and threw rice dumplings into the river as both an offering to Qu Yuan's spirit and to keep the fish and evil spirits away from his body. They continued racing along the river beating drums to frighten off the evil spirits.

This is the reason that rice dumplings, known as *zongzi*, are a major part of the Dragon Boat Festival today. These triangular sticky rice treats come in both sweet and savoury varieties and are usually wrapped in bamboo leaves or rice paper.

Other customs associated with the Dragon Boat Festival are the hanging of mugwort and calamus herbs over the front door of houses to keep out evil spirits. During the festival many people wear decorative sachets of herbs around their necks for the same reason. These herbs provide an additional benefit as they keep annoying insects such as mosquitos away.

But of course, the main focus of the holiday is the races and the dragon boats themselves. These are typically long wooden boats decorated with a fierce dragon's head at the front end and the dragon's scaly tail at the other. The boats are human-powered to the finishing line by rowers with paddles. One member of each team sits at the front of the boat and beats a drum to ward off evil spirits and to spur his team on to win the race.

In 2009, the Dragon Boat Festival was added to the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

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Exercise 3: Find the information

1. Answer the questions with information from the article. Find:

a. The name of the poet.

b. The year that he died.

c. Where and how he died.

d. Why he died.

2. How are *zongzi*, dragon boats, drums and herbs connected to the story of the poet's death and today's Dragon Boat Festival?

Exercise 4: Video – passing on information

a. Watch one of the videos below with a partner. Discuss:

- What can you see?
- Does the video show the same things that you read about in the article?

Video 1: Dragon boat races in Hong Kong.

'2017 Stanley Bay Dragon Boat Race': www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7u1LFBpmVY

Video 2: Dragon boats and dragon boat racing around the world.

'How the world celebrates the Dragon Boat Festival 2018': www.youtube.com/watch?v=uCbK04mU5aI

Video 3: How to make *zongzi*.

'Learn how to make jujube Zongzi for the Dragon Boat Festival': www.youtube.com/watch?v=zz9Nsgfhi6E

Video 4: The many aspects of the Dragon Boat Festival.

'Dragon Boat Races Celebrate China's Ancient Past': www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIPEXNPYPwQ

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- b. Now form a group with another pair of students who watched a different video. Tell them about what you saw on your video.**
- c. Watch both videos again, together. How well did the other pair retell their video?**

Exercise 5: Discussion – dragons and poets

Discuss:

- Are there any myths or folk tales from your country that involve dragons?
- Who is your country's most famous poet?
- What is his or her most famous poem?