

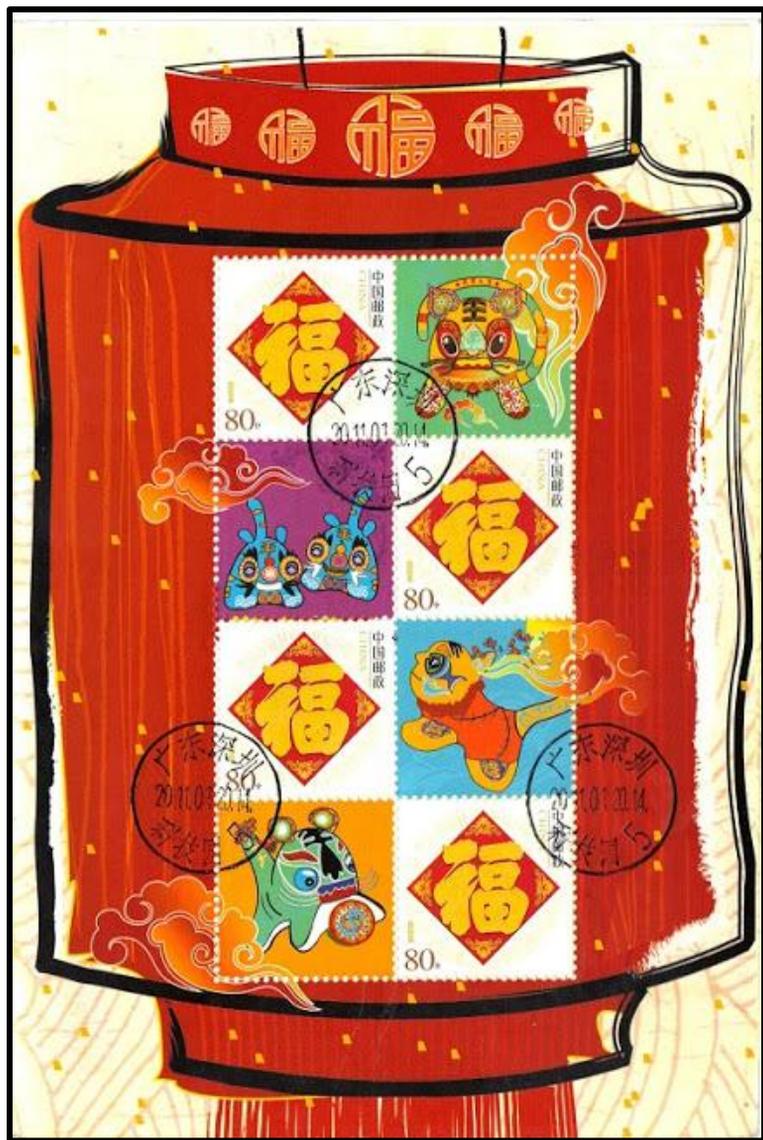
TOPICAL TIDBITS



January/February 2013

Volume 2 Issue 1

Chinese Lunar New Year



Happy New Year!

This issue of *Topical Tidbits* will share with you one of the stories telling how the Zodiac came to be. You will learn about some of the customs and traditions associated with Chinese Lunar New Year.

To compliment this issue about the Chinese Lunar New Year, use the link (below) to learn more about one of the other stories regarding the creation of the Zodiac. This website has an exhibit created by Mia Fillion, a young stamp collector and exhibitor. The Chinese Zodiac exhibit tells the story of the animals being invited to a great race by Buddha. Follow the 16 pages to learn the results of the race. Which animal came in first? A look at the exhibit will also treat you to a wide variety of stamps for each of the twelve zodiac animals.

<http://www.aape.org/exhibits.asp>

(The link to Mia's exhibit is the 9th one from the bottom of the page.)

In our culture, New Years is a time of reflection and to set new goals. You can get your New Year off to a great start when you resolve to work on your stamp collection. To help you, a free packet of stamps will be sent to youth eighteen years of age and under. Include a self-addressed stamped envelope and mail your request to: MaryAnn Bowman, Topical Tidbits, P.O. Box 1451, Waukesha, WI 53187.

CHINESE LUNAR NEW YEAR

In Western countries, New Year's Day always falls on January 1st. In China, it is the first day of the first month of the Lunar Calendar. This means that the date varies each year and can even fall at the end of January or in February. The celebrations begin on New Year's Eve and end 15 days later with the Lantern Festival. Chinese New Year has been celebrated for over 4,000 years and has many traditions associated with it.

Preparations for the holiday begin a few weeks before. Houses are cleaned from top to bottom to get rid of any bad luck from the old year. On New Year's Day, all brooms are put away so that the good luck of the new year isn't accidentally swept away. Then oranges and tangerines, symbols of abundant happiness, are set out. Flowers or a blooming plant are also displayed. These are symbols of rebirth and new growth. Red banners with good wishes are hung. The color red is a symbol of vitality and happiness. Large amounts of food are prepared for family and other visitors. Many of these foods have special meanings. For example, uncut noodles are a sign of long life.

Another tradition for Chinese Lunar New Year is for adults to present children with small red envelopes called, "hong bao." Inside is money which helps bring prosperity into the new year. The amount of money in the envelope is always an even number, because odd numbers are associated with the cash that is given at funerals. The number eight is considered lucky since the word "eight" sounds similar to the Chinese word "wealth." A common gift amount is \$8.00.

The dragon (and sometimes a lion) dance is a very important tradition for Chinese New Year. It's thought to bring luck and happiness. The creature is made out of light-weight materials like papier-mâché and bamboo. It is brought to life by two dancers – one moving the head and the other the body and tail. Sometimes more people are needed to help. Three musicians follow the dragon while playing the drum, cymbals, and gong.

Firecrackers are part of every Chinese Lunar New Year celebration. It is believed that the noise of the fireworks scares away evil spirits and misfortune and prevents them from coming into the New Year.



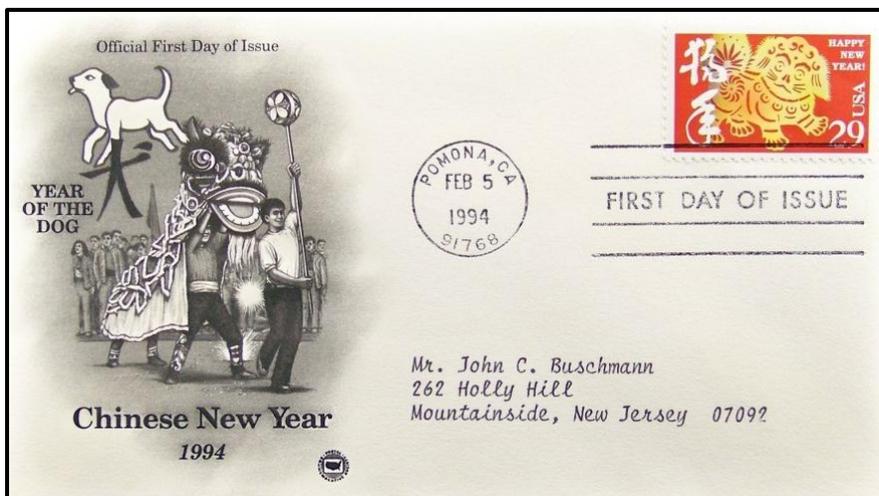
Children decorating their house.



Firecrackers are very noisy!



The dragon dance is always exciting.



This first day cover from 1994, the year of the dog, shows a parade.

CHINESE LUNAR NEW YEAR COUPLETS

A *chunlian* is a special type of Chinese poem with only two lines (a couplet). It is hung on either side of the front door and sometimes across the top of the door as a temporary decoration for the New Year's festival. Each line is written vertically with black ink on a strip of red paper. The first line is placed on the right side of a doorway, and the second line is placed on the left. These poems are happy messages describing the beauty of spring and wishing everyone good luck for the coming year. They also help ward off evil spirits. Here is an example of a *chunlian*:

*May you be blessed with peace and safety in all seasons.
May you be blessed with peace and safety wherever you are.*

Maybe you could try writing your own and hanging them on either side of your front door!



This stamp from Taiwan shows fireworks in a doorway. On either side are traditional New Year's couplets. These convey the idea that "with spring comes good fortune."



In this painting a man is making *chunlian*s in his village.

THE STORY OF THE CHINESE ZODIAC

The Chinese calendar follows a 12-year pattern with each year named after an animal. There are several stories that explain how this came about. One version tells of the Jade Emperor inviting all the animals to join him for a New Year celebration. Only 12 animals came. To reward the ones that did come, the emperor named a year after each of them in the order that they arrived. The first to arrive was the Rat, followed by the Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Sheep, Monkey, Rooster, Dog and last of all, the Pig. People are believed to have the character traits of that year's animal depending on which year they were born. On the following page is a chart of the Chinese Zodiac. Have fun finding out which is your animal!

THE CHINESE ZODIAC

Rat



1936, 1948, 1960, 1972, 1984, 1996, 2008
You are known for being cheerful and kind. You are generous with those you love. Rat people love to gossip. That can cost them many friendships if they are not careful.

Ox



1937, 1949, 1961, 1973, 1985, 1997, 2009
You are easy going and have a great deal of self-assurance. You love deeply and share your strength with those you love.

Tiger



1938, 1950, 1962, 1974, 1986, 1998, 2010
You are powerful, aggressive, and courageous. You can also be rebellious and unpredictable, but at the same time protective and sympathetic.

Rabbit



1939, 1951, 1963, 1975, 1987, 1999, 2011
You are friendly, outgoing and prefer the company of others. You also prefer to avoid conflict. Everyone enjoys being around you.

Dragon



1940, 1952, 1964, 1976, 1988, 2000, 2012
You are honest, full of energy, stubborn, loyal, strong, and protective. You are incredibly lucky and smart. You are a perfectionist.

Snake



1941, 1953, 1965, 1977, 1989, 2001, 2013
You are wise and focused. You can't help but do your best because you hate to fail at anything. You believe everyone should lend a helping hand.

Horse



1942, 1954, 1966, 1978, 1990, 2002, 2014
You have loads of energy and love adventure. You are quick-witted and popular. You like to take charge. You have a hard time keeping secrets.

Sheep



1943, 1955, 1967, 1979, 1991, 2003, 2015
You are elegant, wise, gentle, shy, and compassionate. You can be bossy, but that's because you're worried things will not get done correctly.

Monkey



1944, 1956, 1968, 1980, 1992, 2004, 2016
Moving from one group of friends to another, you love to have a good time. You are clever and have a good sense of humor. You are good with money, but sometimes spend it foolishly on luxuries.

Rooster



1945, 1957, 1969, 1981, 1993, 2005, 2017
You are proud, and alert. You're a deep thinker and a good speaker. You like to stay close to home. You have a sense of style that sets you apart. You are very organized.

Dog



1946, 1958, 1970, 1982, 1994, 2006, 2018
You're a great listener and good at keeping secrets. You're loyal to your friends and have a keen sense of right and wrong and stick to what you believe in. You always try to do your best. You cannot stand injustice.

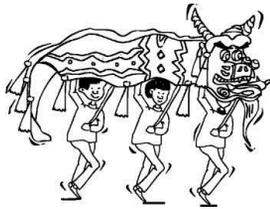
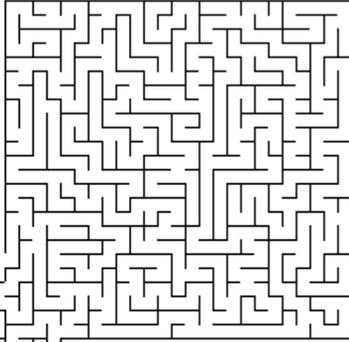
Pig



1947, 1959, 1971, 1983, 1995, 2007, 2019
You are intelligent, sincere, brave, popular, and love to help people. You enjoy getting together with groups and helping out. You are often late and forgetful.

CHINESE NEW YEAR FUN

Can you help the children get to the parade?



MOON PHASE CHART

Chinese New Year is celebrated on the first day of the first moon according to the lunar calendar. The Chinese use the moon and its cycles to measure the year. The first night of the festival is usually the darkest, but as the days progress, the night sky gets lighter and lighter. By the 15th day, when the Lantern Festival is celebrated, the sky is very bright because there is a full moon. Keep track of the moon phases on the chart below for one month.

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thur.	Fri.	Sat.
○	○	○	○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○	○	○	○



2013 is the Year of the Snake. This stamp, showing firecrackers, can be found at your local post office or at www.usps.com.

Chinese Lanterns:

Chinese Lunar New Year ends with the Lantern Festival. Children visit temples at night carrying paper lanterns. Here is how to make your own lantern. Have fun decorating it anyway you like. Using glitter will give it extra sparkle.



© 2012 auntannie.com

Chinese paper lantern graphic used with permission from <http://www.auntannie.com>



Chinese New Year