

Our Family Dragon

By Rebecca Lim
Illustrated by Cai Tse



A glorious celebration of love, family and the Lunar New Year.

RECOMMENDED FOR

2 – 6 (Lower Primary)

THEMES

Family, cultural traditions, celebration, siblings, Lunar New Year, Spring

Festival, zodiac animals, lion dancing, Chinese New Year, Year of the Dragon

ISBN (AUS)

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SYNOPSIS

I can't wait till the dragon gets here!

It's New Year's Eve – the Lunar New Year. We are in Australia, but Bàba says people around the world have celebrated it for thousands of years. It's my very favourite time. *Especially* when the dragon is coming.

A gorgeous story that celebrates family, tradition and the magic of the season.

AUTHOR MOTIVATION

'*Our Family Dragon* is written for children who walk in two worlds and celebrate two new year events each year – the standard 1 January “Western” or Gregorian calendar New Year, and the Lunar New Year. While written and illustrated by Chinese-Australian creators, *Our Family Dragon* references other Asian cultures and First Nations families, who have always been here. It's also for children generally – to indicate the world is a diverse and interesting place, and to help them learn about cultures that are maybe far removed from their own.'

Rebecca Lim

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rebecca Lim is an award-winning Australian writer, illustrator and editor and the author of over twenty books, including *Tiger Daughter* (a CBCA Book of the Year: Older Readers and Victorian Premier's Literary Award-winner), *The Astrologer's Daughter* (a Kirkus Best Book and CBCA Notable Book) and the bestselling *Mercy*. Her work has been shortlisted for the Prime Minister's Literary Awards, NSW Premier's Literary Awards, Queensland Literary Awards, Margaret and Colin Roderick Literary Award and Foreword INDIES Book of the Year Awards; shortlisted multiple times for the Aurealis Awards and Davitt Awards; and longlisted for the Gold Inky Award and the David Gemmell Legend Award. Her novels have also been translated into German, French, Turkish, Portuguese, Polish and Vietnamese. She is a co-founder of the Voices from the Intersection initiative to support emerging young adult and children's authors and illustrators who are First Nations, People of Colour, LGBTIQ+ and/or living with disability, and co-editor of *Meet Me at the Intersection*, a groundbreaking anthology of YA #OwnVoice memoir, poetry and fiction.



Photo by Eugenia Lim

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Cai Tse is a Chinese Australian illustrator based in Sydney. She is an active practitioner of both lion and dragon dance, and has represented her team and country in international lion dance competitions. Her work aims to represent the global lion dance community in the larger conversation of comics and art media. Cai publishes a comedic webcomic called *Under the Lion* that reveals and pokes fun at the various situations her team finds themselves in as lion dancers.

IN-CLASS DISCUSSIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Pre-reading activity

- Brainstorm the concept of celebrations and ask students to describe a celebration they particularly enjoy. Expect to hear a diverse range of answers which might include Christmas, birthdays, Diwali and Eid. Discuss the fact that each of these celebrations is unique but all share a common feature in families and friends coming together to share food and gifts.

Cover

- Hold up the copy of *Our Family Dragon* and ask the class if they can guess the name of the celebration described in this story. Ask students what elements on the cover told them that it is about Lunar New Year. [You may want to consider covering the book's subtitle, *A Lunar New Year Story*.] If Lunar New Year wasn't mentioned in the pre-reading discussions now is a great time to talk about it in terms of when it is celebrated (January or February) and where (in many countries around the world). Mention that there are 12 animals in the Chinese zodiac [Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Goat, Monkey, Rooster, Dog, and Pig] as well as five elements (wood, fire, earth, metal/gold and water) and that it takes 60 years (12x 5) for one complete astrological cycle. Ask students to examine the cover to see if they can guess another animal that might be in the Chinese zodiac (Hint: Rabbit).

Comprehension

Read the story through slowly and after finishing ask the following comprehension questions:

- What is the zodiac animal signifying the new year in the story?
- What is the zodiac animal signifying the old year in the story?

- What special thing will the boy receive from older friends and relatives during Lunar New Year?
- How long will Lunar New Year celebrations last?
- Other than eating, what sort of things will the family do around their table?
- Name at least one special food prepared for Lunar New Year.
- What decorations do people put up for Lunar New Year?
- A clean home is important to have during Lunar New Year. True or False?
- Name one or more of the other Lunar New Year traditions mentioned in *Our Family Dragon*.

Chinese Zodiac

- Turn to the book's endpapers (the pages on the inside of the front and back covers) and explain that each of the animals shown there represent a year in the Chinese zodiac. Ask students to identify and make a list of the twelve animals in the zodiac. Older students might like to find out which animal represents the year they were born in by reading an article entitled, *Which Lunar New Year Animal Are You Like?* on the US National Geographic for Kids website. Ask them to note the characteristics of 'their' animal and whether they think they share any characteristics with the animal. NB: Zodiac animals can vary from one culture to another. Vietnamese people, for example, have a cat instead of a rabbit. Thai people have a 'naga' (a mythical creature) in place of a dragon.

Maths

- There are twelve animals and five elements in the Chinese zodiac. That means that it takes sixty years for the Chinese calendar to complete a cycle, as $12 \times 5 = 60$. So, 1940 was the Year of the Gold Dragon, 1952 the Year of the Water Dragon, 1964 the Year of the Wood Dragon, 1976 the Year of the Fire Dragon, 1988 the Year of the Earth Dragon and 2000 returns to the Year of the Gold Dragon. Questions for younger students:

- When will it be a Year of the Dragon again if the last one was in 2012? [Hint: $2012 + 12 = 2024$]
- If 2028 is the next Year of the Monkey, when was the last Year of the Monkey? [Hint: $2028 - 12 = 2016$]
- If 2012 was the Year of the Water Dragon, when will be the next Year of the Water Dragon? [Hint: A full calendar cycle of 12 animals and 5 elements: $12 \times 5 = 60$, $2012 + 60 = 2072$]

Solar versus lunar calendars

Point out the book's subtitle, *A Lunar New Year Story*, and ask students to explain what a lunar new year is? Watch the How the Moon Makes Calendars video on YouTube to answer the following questions:

- What is the name of the most commonly-used calendar? [Gregorian]
- How is this calendar calculated? [Rotation of the Earth around the Sun]
- Using this calendar means that Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter are always in the same months? True or False [True]
- The lunar calendar is calculated by the cycles of what object in the sky? [Moon]

Make a lucky charm

SBS Learn has a great online site to show you and your students how to make a special Lunar New Year lucky charm to ward off bad spirits and bring good luck to your home or classroom. Simply type in SBS Learn Celebrate Lunar New Year 2022 in your browser to find out more.

Incursion

Invite a Lion Dancing troupe to perform at your school during Lunar New Year.