

Ten Lessons from The Love of China School Programs

1. **Country**—China is one of the five oldest countries in the world: more than five thousand years old. There are fifty two minorities in China. I explain that there are many different dialects and costumes and culture for each minority.
2. **Holidays**—There are two main holidays in China: Chinese New Year in February and the Moon Festival in the Fall. The Spring semester is a good time to introduce Chinese New Year, and the Chinese Moon Festival occurs during the Fall semester. Chinese New Year is celebrated with many traditions, such as the *hong bao*, or red envelope: a red paper envelope with money inside, a symbol of good luck. The *hong bao* is usually given by elders to children on Chinese New Year's Eve, to wish them have a great new year. The Chinese Moon Festival is also an important holiday for Chinese society. The full moon means “reunion”, and families traditionally get together at Chinese Moon Festival, even if some members must travel a long way to return home. On this day, people need to eat “moon cake”, a delicious cake whose round shape means “together as a circle, and never apart”.
3. **Place**—China and Taiwan are located in Asia, across the Pacific Ocean from the U.S. I have a poster that shows the relative positions of the countries on a World map. I also explain the great distance between China and the U.S. by telling the students that it takes 17 to 21 hours to fly between them.
4. **Time**—Because China is on the other side of the Earth, there is a time difference of about 12 hours. The days and nights in China are the opposite of Austin: when American children are in school, children in China are already in bed. I explain that we are all part of the same world: everyone shares the same sun, but we have to take turns with it!
5. **Music**—Chinese musical instruments are very different from those in the West, so the music sounds different and the melodies are different too. I introduce a popular Chinese children's song: “Jasmine Flower”. It is as common in China as “Old MacDonald” is in the U.S. The “Jasmine Flower” song was used in the 2002 winter Olympics closing ceremonies.
6. **Dance**—Though there are thousands and thousands of dances in China, they are usually classified into three main styles.
 - a. **Traditional Chinese dance**—to show the girl's gracious movement (for example, the Ribbon Dance, Drum Dance, Fan Dance, and so on). I demonstrate a traditional dance that includes elements of the Ribbon Dance, Fan Dance, and Silver Platter Dance. Students are able to see the beautiful ribbons make pictures in the sky as pretty as fireworks. I also explain how the Chinese use the silver platter in daily life, and how it becomes a part of dance. Most Chinese dances are based on different life styles: dance is a great way to reflect people's true life stories.
 - b. **Chinese Kung Fu** (for example, the Young Soldier dance, and dances using the spear, sword, flag, “Iron Fan”, silver stick. etc.). For the students to experience Chinese Kung Fu dance, I invite them to the stage to learn

the hand movements. For girls, this is the “butterfly fingers”: with the thumb touching the third finger, the shape of the hand looks like a butterfly. For the boy, the “tiger mouth” hand and fist: open hand with the four fingers together and the thumb at a right angle, making an “L” shape that we call “tiger mouth”. Touching the palm of the “tiger mouth” hand with the fist of the other hand is the man’s traditional style of greeting.

- c. **Minority dances**—there are many different styles of dance performed by the minorities in China, but time doesn’t permit me to go into much detail on these during a typical school program.
7. **Language**—learning a second language is one of the important aspects of education for a global future. The Chinese official language is Mandarin. I greet the students in Mandarin, and let them experience the tone and the sounds. *Ni hao* (how are you), *hao* (good), *xie xie* (thank you), and the first few numbers are very common and easy words to learn. The kids can use them when they go to a Chinese store or restaurant, such as telling the owner that the food is “*hao*” (good). I also teach them to say a very common Chinese New Year greeting: *gongxi gongxi* (congratulations). Chinese people will be very happy to hear it, because it has a meaning of blessing.
8. **Symbolism of Animals**—in Chinese dance, the Lion Dance and Dragon Dance are very popular at Chinese festivals. Both are meant to bring good luck and scare away evil. The Lion Dance is much more common in the U.S. because the lion costume is smaller than the dragon and easy to ship to this country. But many people confuse the two, and incorrectly call the lion the dragon. I always bring a small Lion Dance mask to show the student, and tell them the difference between the lion and the dragon. I also show some of the Lion Dance movements, and explain their meanings.
9. **Color**—For the Chinese, red symbolizes good fortune. The red lantern is a good way to explain this. I have a red lantern to show the students, and I tell them how the Chinese used it before electric lighting. I explain that when people hang up many red lanterns in front of the house, everyone will know that the family has good news, such as a wedding, newborn baby, or job promotion. Red lanterns are also used on all of the Chinese holidays.
10. **Clothing**—Tang dynasty style is the latest popular costume in China. I wear a Tang style costume to let the children see the real thing: the silk fabric, the cut, the stitching, and the pattern of the embroidery. The costume I wear has some large flowers, which symbolize richness in Chinese.

During the program, I may also mention that May is Asian Pacific American (APA) Heritage Month—a celebration of Asians and Pacific Islanders in the United States, dedicated as such by President George H. W. Bush in May of 1990. May was chosen to commemorate the immigration of the first Japanese to the United States on May 7, 1843, and to mark the anniversary of the completion of the transcontinental railroad on May 10, 1869. The majority of the workers who laid the tracks were Chinese immigrants.

I may also mention that the Games of the XXIX Olympiad were held in China in 2008.