



THE LITTLE ROOSTER AND THE HEAVENLY DRAGON

A folktale from China.

In days long ago the Rooster had beautiful golden horns.
Every morning he would strut up and down in the yard calling
“LOOK at my golden HORNS!
LOOK at my golden HORNS!”
He was so proud of those horns.

One day as the Rooster was crowing,
the magnificent Heavenly Dragon came soaring down from the skies.

“Little Rooster, you have such *beautiful* golden horns!”

“Aren’t they marvelous?
I have the finest horns in the universe!”

“Little Rooster, I would like to ask you a favor.
I have been invited to a banquet at the Jade Emperor’s
palace in heaven tonight.
If I could wear your golden horns,
I would be the most magnificent creature there.
Do you think I could borrow yours horns?
Just for one night?”

“I don’t think so.
I *never* lend my horns to *anyone*.”

“But Little Rooster you can trust ME.
I am the magnificent Heavenly Dragon!”

“How do I know you will bring them back?
You might just stay up in heaven and never return.”

“If you aren’t sure you can trust me,
why not ask my cousin the Centipede.
He is your neighbor.
He lives right here in the farmyard.
You can trust *his word*.”

So Little Rooster called his neighbor, the Centipede.

“Centipede! Centipede!
Come over here and talk to me.”

Centipede began to wriggle his one hundred legs.

He came out from his hiding place and wobbled over to see what Rooster wanted.

“Centipede is this Dragon really your cousin?”

Centipede looked at the Dragon.

Dragon was glaring at Centipede.

Dragon looked VERY dangerous.

“Say YES,” he hissed.

“Yes,” whispered the little centipede.

“Can I trust him to bring back my horns?”

“Say YES,” hissed the Dragon.

“Yes,” whispered Centipede.

“Since you are my neighbor,

I trust you little Centipede.

All right, Dragon.

I will lend you my horns.

But bring them back **FIRST THING** tomorrow morning.”

The Rooster removed his golden horns.

He placed them on the head of the Dragon.

OFF flew the Dragon!

“Now *I* am the most magnificent creature in the universe!

SEE-E-E-E my GOLDEN HORNS!

SEE-E-E-E my GOLDEN HORNS!"

Dragon tossed his head proudly and flew back and forth through the air, showing off.

That evening, the Dragon wore the horns to the banquet at the Jade Emperor's palace in heaven.

How everyone did admire those golden horns.

The Dragon was so proud of his new adornments.

"Such horns belong on the head of a magnificent creature like myself . . . not on a puny little rooster!"

Next morning the Rooster was up early watching the skies.

He was waiting for the Dragon to return his horns.

"Bring back my HORNS!" he called to the skies.

"Bring back my HORNS!"

But the Dragon did not return.

He did not return that morning.

He did not return the next.

He NEVER returned.

To this day the Heavenly Dragon still wears those *beautiful* golden horns.

The Rooster was SO angry.

He called up the little Centipede.

"Centipede, you told me the Dragon would bring back my horns!

You lied to me!"

Rooster was so angry, he PECKED at Centipede and ate him up.

To this day, everytime Rooster sees a Centipede he PECKS at it and eats it up.

And every morning Rooster looks up to the skies and calls
“Bring back my HORNS!
Bring back my HORNS!
Bring back my HORNS!”

But the Heavenly Dragon never brings them back.

NOTES ON TELLING

When Rooster calls to the skies, his words should echo a crowing sound. “LOOK at my Golden HORNS!” and “BRING back my HORNS!”

Make much of the Dragon’s flight through the sky showing off his golden horns “See-e-e-e my Golden Horns!” and tossing his head proudly.

This story works well as tandem telling, story theater, or as a simple puppet play.

The “Jade Emperor” is ruler of heaven, surrounded by a pantheon of gods. To be invited to his banquet table is the highest honor.

The centipede is one of the “five poisonous insects” which are exterminated on the 5th day of the 5th month. The cock is the centipede’s primary enemy. Use this story for your Double Fifth program (see p. 101) as well as here. Leslie Bonnet’s version of this story uses an earthworm for Cock’s barnyard enemy and I have always told this story using an earthworm. “Little Earthworm! Little Earthworm! Come out of the ground and talk to me!” says my Rooster. However in researching for the tale notes I discovered that Wolfram Eberhard’s original text speaks of a “millipede” and specifically notes the association with Double Fifth. Since most sources describe the five poisonous insects as including a “centipede,” I have used that insect for this version. See my notes for the Double Fifth celebration for more information about the “five poisonous insects” tradition.

COMPARATIVE NOTES

This tale is elaborated from a variant in Leslie Bonnet’s, *Chinese Folk and Fairy Tales* (New York: Putnam, 1958), pp. 111–114. Bonnet’s version is based on Wolfram Eberhard’s version in *Folktales of China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), pp. 5–6, “Why Does the Cock Eat the Millipede?” Other variants appear in Roger Lancelyn Green’s *A Cavalcade of Dragons* (New York: Walck,

1972), pp. 157–160 and in a picture book by Ed Young, with Hilary Beckett, *The Rooster's Horns* (New York: Collins and World, 1978).

For tales of other animals borrowing and not returning see Margaret Read MacDonald's *The Storyteller's Sourcebook* A2241 *Animal characteristics: borrowing and not returning*. This source cites a Mayan tale in which a turkey borrows a whippoorwill's feathers to wear to the king's election, a Japanese tale in which a cricket borrows an earthworm's voice, and a Russian tale in which a wagtail borrows a wren's tail to wear to a wedding. Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* cites variants of A2241 from India, Finland, Japan, Rhodesia, Ekoi, and Menomoni sources. *The Types of the Folktale* by Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson lists Finnish, Irish, French, Catalan, German, Polish, and Puerto Rican variants under Type 234 *The Nightingale and the Blindworm*. Each has one eye. The nightingale borrows the blindworm's eye and then refuses to return it. Since then, she has two eyes, the blindworm none. The latter is always on a tree where a nightingale has her nest and in revenge bores holes in the nightingale's eggs. Reference to this tale appears also in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Act III, line 31. Type 235 *The Jay Borrows the Cuckoo's Skin and Fails to Return It* is found in Finland, Lithuania, Ireland, Germany, Russia, and Indonesia.

NEW YEAR IN THE CHINESE TRADITION

The New Year officially begins with the first new moon after the sun enters Aquarius. This can occur between January 21 and February 9. Families gather to dine on special dishes on New Year's Eve and the head of the family pays respect to the family's ancestors. At midnight the din of firecrackers being set off all over town raises such a ruckus that all evil spirits are frightened away. On New Year's Day families begin visits to friends and relatives. Piles of round, golden oranges or tangerines symbolizing wealth and good luck are found in every house and are carried as gifts. Children are presented with red paper packets embossed with gold good luck symbols and containing small gifts of money. Above each door a good luck symbol painted in gold on red paper invites good luck for the coming year. To celebrate the holiday, martial arts groups may roam the streets performing lion dances and collecting money for charity. A New Year's parade may be held featuring a dragon dance, exciting drumming, and more firecrackers! The New Year season extends until Moon 1, Day 15. In many areas the fifteenth day is celebrated with a Lantern Festival. Children parade carrying paper lanterns. Or the festival

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may include more dragon dancing, fireworks, and feasting. The New Year traditions vary throughout China and in the many overseas Chinese communities.

SUGGESTIONS FOR A NEW YEAR CELEBRATION

Tell: "The Little Rooster and the Heavenly Dragon"

or "The Small Yellow Dragon" (pp. 89-99)

or "The Clever Daughter-in-Law" (pp. 137-145)

Decorate the room with good luck symbols traced in gold on red paper. Most books about Chinese New Year will show these.

Practice the Chinese words for "Happy New Year," "Gung Hay Fat Choy" and show the characters for these words in Chinese (below).

Prepare a pile of tangerines or oranges to admire. Eat them during your celebration.

Talk about the Chinese zodiac. Let each child find out which horoscope sign they were born under.

Expand your storytime with tales about the animal honored in this year . . . i.e. The Year of the Monkey, The Year of the Rat, etc.

Pass out red paper packets. You can purchase these in Chinese gift shops, or you could fold them from bright red paper. King County librarian, Joyce Wagar, asks

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CELEBRATE THE WORLD

the children to give their birth year when they sign up for her program. She locates a penny minted in the year of each child's birth and presents this to the child in the red paper packet. Note however that the gift of a single small coin could be considered bad luck in Chinese tradition.

Make a paper dragon puppet.

See also: Double Fifth, p. 101; Mid-Autumn Feast, p. 146.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS HOLIDAY

See entries for China, Hong Kong, Mauritius, Taiwan, and People's Republic of China under "Moon 1, Days 1-15: The New Year" in *Folklore of World Holidays* by Margaret Read MacDonald (Detroit: Gale Research, 1992).

Chinese Festivals in Hong Kong by Joan Law and Barbara E. Ward (Hong Kong: South China Morning Post, 1982.) Color photos and fascinating comments.

Chinese New Year: Fact and Folklore by William C. Hu (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ars Ceramica, 1991). Four hundred pages of information, including recipes.

Fun with Chinese Festivals by Tan Huay Peng. Illus. by Leon Kum Chuen (Union City, Calif.: Heian International, Inc., 1991). Humorous and informative publication prepared by two Singapore cartoonists.

BOOKS TO SHARE WITH CHILDREN

Chin Chiang and the Dragon's Dance by Ian Wallace. Illus. by author (New York: Atheneum, 1984). Set in Vancouver, British Columbia's Chinatown. A young boy lacks the confidence to carry the dragon's tail in the New Year parade. An old woman janitress gives him the courage to dance. The book has been criticized for implying that the old woman could take his role in the dragon dance, apparently an inaccurate plot line.

"The God That Lived in the Kitchen," "Guardians of the Gate," "The Painted Eyebrow," and "Ting Tan and the Lamb" in *Tales of a Chinese Grandmother* by Frances Carpenter (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1937).

The Chinese New Year by Cheng Hou-tien. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976). Descriptions of "The Little New Year" . . . a time of preparation; "The

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Five Days of Chinese New Year"; and "The Lantern Festival" . . . a feast of the first full moon which concludes the New Year season. Illustrated in papercuts by the author. Includes the Chinese zodiac. (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1976).

Chinese New Year by Tricia Brown, photographs by Fran Ortiz. (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1987). Black and white photographs and clear text show a Chinese family in San Francisco preparing for New Year and celebrating.

Lion Dancer: Ernie Wan's Chinese New Year by Kate Waters and Madeline Slovenz-Low. Photographs by Martha Cooper. (New York: Scholastic, 1990). New Year's Eve and New Year's Day with Ernie Wan, his family, and his father's Kung Fu school in New York City. His father's school performs Lion Dances for the New Year Parade and Ernie and his little sister have been trained to dance with their own smaller lion. An excellent book to share the excitement of children at New Year with your class.

PICTURE BOOKS ABOUT THE ZODIAC

The Rat, the Ox, and the Zodiac: A Chinese Legend by Dorothy Van Woerkom. Illus. by Errol Le Cain (New York: Crown, 1976).

Why Rat Comes First: The Story of the Chinese Zodiac by Clara Yen (San Francisco: Children's Book Press, 1991).



BENIZARA AND KAKEZARA

A folktale from Japan.

There once was a girl named Benizara.

Benizara means “crimson plate.”

Benizara lived with her stepmother and a stepsister named Kakezara.

Kakezara means “broken plate” and the two girls were much like their names.

As so often happens in these old tales, Benizara’s stepmother treated her poorly.

Benizara was made to do all of the work around the house, and she was given only old clothes to wear.

Kakezara was given every beautiful thing she wanted.