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# LIANG AND THE MAGIC PAINTBRUSH

Author: Demi

Publisher: Henry Holt

## THEME:

Exploring how art is integrated into many aspects of Chinese American culture shows us that art is an important part of everyone's life.

## PROGRAM SUMMARY:

Taken from a Chinese legend, a poor boy who longs to paint is given a magic paintbrush that brings everything he paints to life. LeVar takes a trip to New York City's Chinatown and visits a Chinese calligraphy expert, a stonemason who makes LeVar a name stamp, and a gourmet Chinese chef. He also takes viewers to the New York Institute of Technology where he is shown how to use computer graphics to create art. LeVar concludes his tour of Chinatown by participating in a traditional lion dance.

## TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:

Ask students what they would paint if they had a magic paintbrush that brought what they painted to life. Discuss why they chose those particular items to paint.

At the end of the story, the author says, "Nobody knows what became of Liang. Some say that he went back to his own village. Others say that he roamed the earth, painting for the poor wherever he went." Ask students where they think Liang went and what he did.

Discuss what it means to be "greedy." Have students recall instances from other stories and real life in which greediness has resulted in an undesirable outcome.

## CURRICULUM EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

Use this program as an introduction to a unit of study on China, incorporating the following activities (teachers will likely want to add their own ideas to these):

**Geography.** Locate China on a map of the world. Establish that China is a country on the continent of Asia. Compare its size to that of the United States. Have available some general nonfiction books about China for students to browse, looking for facts about the geography of China (e.g., the mountains, deserts, rivers, high plateaus of Tibet, etc.). Obtain a map of

China. As students find information about geographical features, find those areas on the map. Make note of the location of the Great Wall of China. Students might also enjoy working with individual outline maps. Older students can make their own map key and place locations and features on the map themselves. Younger students might work with a map that has the geographical features already in place, and they can add color (rivers, blue; deserts, brown; mountain regions, green, etc.)

**Literature.** With the assistance of the school library media specialist, collect some Chinese folktales and display them in the classroom. Have students read a folktale with a partner and then make a poster about their folktale. Provide time for each set of partners to share their posters with the class, so that everyone can become acquainted with the stories. After sharing the posters, discuss similarities with other stories they know and identify recurring characters or situations. Possible folktale retellings include: *Yeh-Shen* by Ai-Ling Louie (Philomel); *Lon Po Po* by Ed Young (Philomel), *Tikki Tikki Tembo* by Arlene Mosel (Holt); *Ling-Li and the Phoenix Fairy* by Ellin Greene (Clarion); *The Seven Chinese Brothers* by Margaret Mahy (Scholastic); *The Fourth Question* by Rosalind Wang (Holiday House); *Two of Everything* by Lily Toy Hong (Whitman); *Red Thread* by Ed Young (Philomel); *Little Plum* by Ed Young (Philomel); *The Emperor and the Kite* by Jane Yolen (Putnam); *How the Ox Star Fell from Heaven* by Lily Toy Hong (Albert Whitman); *The Empty Pot* by Demi (Henry Holt); *The City of Dragons* by Laurence Yep (Scholastic); and *The Dragon Prince: A Chinese Beauty & the Beast Tale* by Laurence Yep (HarperCollins).

**Cooking.** Enlist some adult volunteers to help with the preparation of Chinese foods. Use a wok. Serve tea, and eat with chopsticks.

**Math.** Tangrams are ancient Chinese puzzles. Read *Grandfather Tang's Story* by Ann Tompert (Crown) to the class. Duplicate tangram pieces for the students and have them create tangram animals or designs. Students might also enjoy learning to count to ten in Chinese. Jim Haskins' *Count Your Way Through China* (Carolrhoda) provides the numbers along with a pronunciation key, as well as additional information about China. If an abacus is available, students might enjoy exploring how to use it.

**Art.** Kites are significant to Chinese culture. As students look through books, they will see examples of kites. Have students design and make a kite, using Chinese motifs (e.g., fish, dragons, etc.). Another possibility is for students to make a lion mask. Have them look at pictures of the Lion Dance for ideas of how they might decorate their masks. Chinese paper cuttings are another project.

**Research.** Animals, inventions, festivals, and symbols of Chinese culture make appropriate research topics. Have students work in small groups or with partners to find information about such animals as the giant panda, the red panda, silkworms, the Chinese alligator, golden monkeys, tigers, snow leopards, and others. The Chinese are credited with many inventions, including paper, firecrackers, wheelbarrow, gunpowder, kites, the compass, water clocks, and other items. After students have completed their research, have them make sketches of the animals, write factual captions and glue them to a large outline map of China. They could make sketches of inventions on a long piece of paper rolled into a scroll (another Chinese invention). Students investigating festivals might make a mural featuring some three-dimensional designs that reflect aspects of the celebration and cultural symbols.

**Games.** Play the dragon game. Go to a large space such as a playground or gym and divide the class in half. Each half forms a “dragon” with one student as the dragon’s head and one as the tail. The other players make up the body and line up after the head with their hands on the shoulders of the person ahead. At the signal to move, the dragon’s head tries to catch the tail. If the head succeeds, the game starts again in the same position. If the body breaks apart, however, the head moves to the tail position and the next person in line becomes the dragon’s head.

**RELATED THEMES:**

Asian cultures  
Chinese New Year  
ethnic traditions

**RELATED READING RAINBOW PROGRAMS:**

Program #39 — The Paper Crane  
Program #102 — Borreguita And The Coyote  
Program #55 — Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters  
Program #10 — The Gift Of The Sacred Dog

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Demi (born Charlotte Dumaresq Hunt) was strongly influenced by an extended family of American artists. She studied in Mexico and Los Angeles and traveled to India on a Fulbright scholarship. From there, she settled in New York and began her career as an illustrator. Chinese art influences her work. She paints on silk and uses traditional ingredients in her paints, even adding powdered jade “for good fortune.” According to Demi, “To capture life on paper is magic. To capture life on paper was the aim of Chinese painters. That is my aim, too.”

**BOOKS REVIEWED BY CHILDREN:**

EMMA  
by Wendy Kesselman, illus. by Barbara Cooney (Doubleday)

BEN’S TRUMPET  
by Rachel Isadora (Greenwillow)

IF YOU TAKE A PENCIL  
by Fulvio Testa (Dial)

**SUPPLEMENTARY BOOKLIST:**

FESTIVALS OF THE WORLD: CHINA  
by Colin Cheong (Gareth Stevens)

SAM AND THE LUCKY MONEY  
by Karen Chinn, illus. by Cornelius Van Wright & Ying-Hwa Hu (Lee & Low)

THE PAPER DRAGON  
by Marguerite W. Davol, illus. by Robert Sabuda (Atheneum)

HAPPY NEW YEAR!/KUNG-HSI FA-TS’AI!  
by Demi (Crown)

WHEN PANDA CAME TO OUR HOUSE  
by Helen Zane Jensen (Dial)

THE MAGICAL DRAWINGS OF MOONY B. FINCH  
by David McPhail (Doubleday)

THE LAST DRAGON  
by Susan Miho Nunes, illus. by Chris Soentpiet (Clarion)

MOON FESTIVAL  
by Ching Yeung Russell, illus. by Christopher Zhong-Yuan Zhang (Boyd’s Mills)

CHIN CHIANG AND THE DRAGON’S DANCE  
by Ian Wallace (Atheneum)

LION DANCER: ERNIE WAN’S CHINESE NEW YEAR  
by Kate Waters & Madeline Slovenz-Low, photos by Martha Cooper (Scholastic)

CHINESE MOTHER GOOSE RHYMES  
selected by Robert Wyndham, illus. by Ed Young (Philomel)

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