



## Chinese Envelope and Currency

**Grade Level:** Art 2-8, Social Studies 7th

**Time:** 1 hour

**Objective:** Students will create a Chinese envelope and design their own paper currency to go inside by using folding and drawing techniques so they will gain an understanding of Chinese New Year traditions and history of China's currency.

**I Can Statements:** I can: (1) fold origami paper symmetrically and precisely to create Chinese envelope to expected standards; (2) design my own currency; (3) use accurate vocabulary; (4) use tools safely and appropriately

### Georgia Standards of Excellence:

#### *Science:*

S2E2, S4E2, S6E2

#### *Art:*

2<sup>nd</sup> Grade: VA2.CR.3.a , VA2.CR.4.a, VA2.CR.5, VA2.CN.1.a-c, VA2.CN.2, VA2.CN.3

3<sup>rd</sup> Grade: VA3.CR.1.A, VA3.CR.3.a , VA3.CR.4.a, VA3.RE.1.a, VA3.CN.1.a-b, VA3.CN.2.a, VA3.CN.3

4<sup>th</sup> Grade: VA4.CR.1.a, VA4.CR.2.b, VA4.CR.3.a, VA4.CR.4.b, VA4.CR.5, VA4.RE.1a-b, VA4.CN.1.a-c, VA.CN.2.b, VA.CN.3

5<sup>th</sup> Grade: VA5.CR.1.a, VA5.CR.2.b.d, VA5.CR.3.a, VA5.CR.4.b, VA5.CR.5, VA5.RE.1.a, VA5.CN.1.a-d, VA5.CN.2, VA5.CN.3

6<sup>th</sup> Grade: VA6.CR.1.c, VA6.CR.2.a, VA6.CR.3.a-c, VA6.CR.4.b, VA6.CR.5.b, VA6.CR.6.d, VA6.RE.1a-c, VA6.RE.2.b, VA6.CN.1a-c, VA6.CN.3.c

7<sup>th</sup> Grade: VA7.CR.1.c, VA7.CR.2.a, VA7.CR.3.a-c, VA7.CR.4.b, VA7.CR.5.b, , VA7.CR.6.d, VA7.RE.1a-c, VA7.RE.2.b, VA7.CN.1a-c, VA7.CN.3.c

8<sup>th</sup> Grade: VA8.CR.1.c, VA8.CR.2.a, VA8.CR.3.a-c, VA8.CR.4.b, VA8.CR.5.b, VA8.CR.6.d, VA8.RE.1a-c, VA8.RE.2.b, VA8.CN.1a-c, VA8.CN.3.c

#### *Social Studies:*

Map and Globe Skills 10

7<sup>th</sup> Grade: SS7G9, SS7G12, SS7E5.a, SS7E8.a

**Background:** A tradition of the Lunar New Year, or Chinese New Year, bright red envelopes filled with money symbolizing good wishes and luck for the New Year are given to friends and family. Generally, the gift is given to younger generations by their parents, grandparents, relatives, and even close neighbors and friends. In Chinese culture the red color of the envelope symbolizes good luck, prosperity, energy, and happiness. Wrapping lucky money in red envelopes is expected to bestow more happiness and blessings on the receivers. It is impolite to open a red envelope in front of the person who gives it to you. At some companies, workers may also receive a year-end cash bonus tucked inside a

red envelope. Red envelopes are also popular gifts for birthdays and weddings. Red envelopes given at Chinese New Year are typically left unsigned, unlike a Western greeting card. For birthdays or weddings, a short message, typically a four-character expression, and signature are optional.

Cowrie shells were the earliest form of Chinese currency in use by 1200 BCE. Cowries are the most widely and longest used currency in history. They are the shell of a mollusk commonly found in the shallow waters of the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The shells made for an ideal form of money due to their small, attractive appearance that was easily carried. Northeast China did not have the same access to the cowrie shell and often used pieces of pottery, bones, stones, jade ext. At the end of the Shang Dynasty (1675 - 1029 BCE) shell money made from copper became popular and can be considered an early form of metal coins.

Round copper coins with a hole in the middle, or *huan* cash, were used in the warring states period (475-221 BCE). *Huan* cash evolved to *ban liang qian* in the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BCE). The first Emperor of China, Qin Shi huan (259-210 BCE), did away with all former types of currency and implemented the copper coin as China's official currency. The coins later became nicknamed *Fangkong* (square hole) due to its round shape with a square hole in the center of the coin. Letters often marked the coins, representing the region title in different dynasties. In ancient China people believed that heaven was round and earth square, an influencing factor for the shape of the coin. For more expensive transactions, silver and gold ingots often in the shape of an origami boat were used.

The first bank notes ever used by any nation appeared in 118 BCE in China in the form of one-foot-square pieces of white deerskin with colorful borders. This leather currency was exchanged for goods, marking one of the first systems of commerce. The Chinese were also the first culture to introduce paper money in 806 CE, and it was used until around 1455 CE when paper money disappeared from use in China for several hundred years. *Jiao Zi* was the first common paper currency, used in the early North Song Dynasty (960 – 1127 CE). With increasing trade came a greater need for a lightweight and conveniently portable currency. The Chinese used paper money was used for centuries before Europeans started using paper money. Europe's first examples of using paper money date back to the writings of the explorer Marco Polo in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Today, there are 4 forms of currency used in China today: the *renminbi*, which translates to People's Currency and abbreviated RBM, a derivative of the yuan and the official currency of mainland China; the *yuan*, abbreviated CNY, the most widespread currency; the Hong Kong dollar; and the Macanese *pataca* used in Macau. Chinese banknotes often come in 1, 5, 10, 20, 50, 100 yuan denominations. On the front of the bank note is a picture of Chairman Mao, Chinese communist revolutionary leader, and on the back, there are one of six different tourist locations. On the 100-yuan note is the Great Hall of People, the meeting venue to of the National People's Congress and the Chinese Parliament in Beijing. On the reverse side of the 50 yuan is the Potala Palace in Lhasa, the former spiritual center of Tibet and residence of the Dalai Lama. On the back of the 20 is the Li River, with tall limestone mountains, rice fields, and bamboo groves. On the back of the 10 is the Three Gorges along the Yangtze River. On the back of the 5 is Mount Tai, one of the five sacred mountains in mainland China and an important place of worship. On the back on the 1 yuan is the West Lake with three man-made islands called the "Three

Ponds Mirroring the Moon”. The banknotes also contain a security strip, areas of raised texture and watermarks to make it harder for the money to be forged.



Sources:

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/article/history-money/>

<https://www.mint.com/the-best-resources-on-the-history-of-chinese-currency>

<https://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/culture/chinese-ancient-currency.htm>

### Vocabulary:

*ban liang qian* — first unified currency in China in the Qin Dynasty (221-206BCE). A round copper coin with a square cut out of the middle.

*Chinese New Year* — the Chinese festival that celebrates the beginning of a new year on the traditional Chinese calendar or lunar calendar

*Lunar Calendar* — a calendar based on the phases of the moon

*Gregorian Calendar* — a calendar that is based on the movement of the Earth around the sun.

*renminbi* — which translates to People’s Currency and abbreviated RMB, a derivative of the yuan and the official currency of mainland China

*symmetry* — the quality of being made up of exactly similar parts facing each other or around an axis.

*watermark* — An image seen in a sheet of when held up to the light. Watermarks are created by weaving a design in fine wire on the upper side of the mold screen. The design is slightly raised off the surface in relief. When a sheet of paper is pulled the pulp sits thinner on the raised area, resulting in varying density of the fibers in the paper. Once dry, the thinner area of the paper is more translucent when held up to light. Usually the design is a logo or other image.

**Materials:** Each student will need: 1 sheet of decorative or red paper for the envelope, scissors, ruler, bone folder (optional), string, glue stick, blank paper to sketch money design on, rectangular paper for money, pencil, and colored pencils to decorate final copy.

**Preparations:** prepare sheets of decorative paper that are appropriately sized for each student and at least 2 rectangles of paper students can use to sketch paper money design on (for practice and final version). Cut string to length that is long enough to wrap around envelope and tie in a bow.

**Critical Thinking Questions** (1) How is the Lunar Calendar different from the Gregorian calendar? (2) What are some Chinese New Year traditions? What are some American New Year traditions? How are they the same and different? (3) Are all envelopes folded the same? How can they be folded differently? (4) What are some early forms of currency? Was that currency the same for an entire nation? (5) Why would a standardized form of currency be beneficial? (6) How does a standard currency allow for increased exchange of goods and promote trade? (7) How does differing currency affect international trade?

**Introduction:** Instructors will introduce background information about the history of the Chinese envelope, Chinese New Year festival, and history of Chinese currency. Instructor will go over features of Chinese *renminbi*. Then the instructor will go over project vocabulary with students. Demonstrations will then be done showing students how to symmetrically fold paper to create a Chinese envelope, glue along fold edges, and tie around envelope. Then instructors demonstrate designing individual paper money so students will have their own currency to include in the envelope.

The following can be used as an instructional guideline:

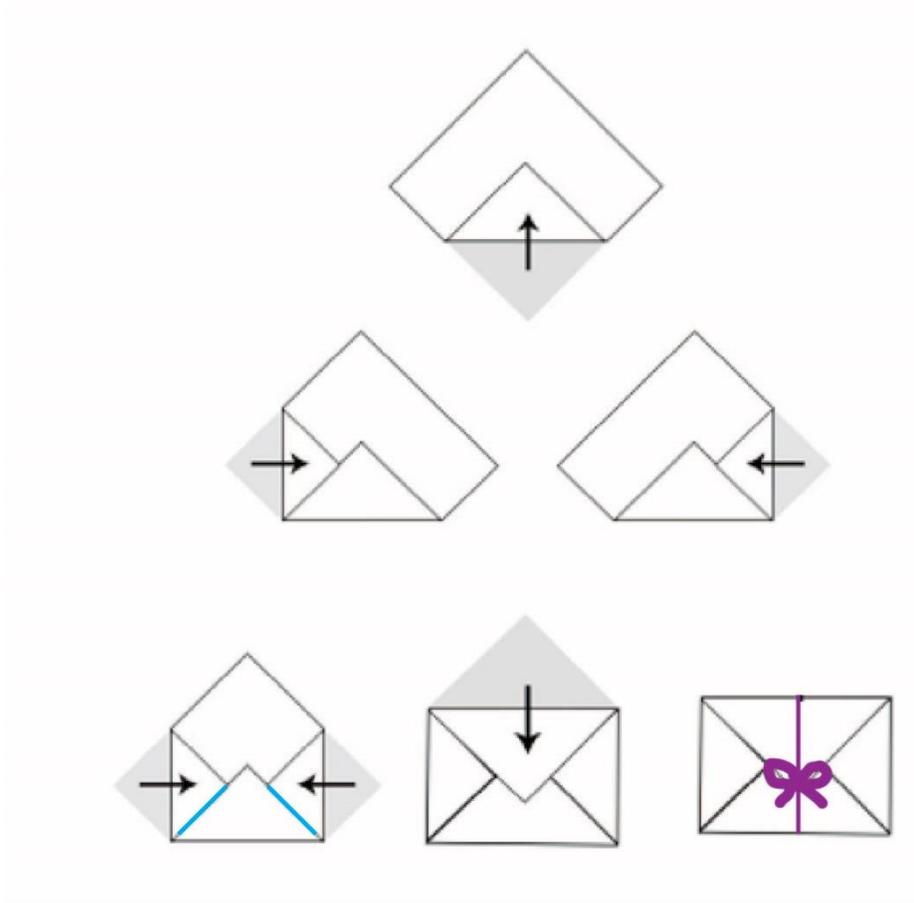
1. A tradition of the Lunar New Year, or Chinese New Year, bright red envelopes filled with money symbolizing good wishes and luck for the year ahead are generally given to younger generations by parents, relatives, and friends. In Chinese culture, the red color of the envelope symbolizes good luck, prosperity, energy, and happiness. Wrapping lucky money in a red envelope is expected to bestow more happiness and blessings on the recipient.
2. Chinese New Year is normally celebrated when there is a new moon that appears between 21<sup>st</sup> of January and 20<sup>th</sup> of February, so the date of the celebration changes every year. Why isn't Chinese New Year celebrated on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January? The Chinese use a different calendar, called the Lunar Calendar, which is based on the phases of the moon. In the West, the Gregorian calendar, based on the movement of the Earth around the sun, is used. New Years in America is celebrated on January 1<sup>st</sup> since that is the first day of the year in the Gregorian calendar.
3. China was the first culture to use paper money as currency in 806 CE. There were many different forms of currency before paper money. What are some early forms of currency used? The first Chinese currency was cowrie shells, in use by 1200 BCE, and later bronze cowrie shells. Copper coins called *ban liang qian*, in the Qin Dynasty (221-206BCE), eventually replaced all other forms of currency. The coins were round with a square cut in the middle. Why would a standardized form of currency be beneficial? How would it increase trade of goods? Later, a lighter, easier to carry currency emerged: a bank note made from white, deer leather and colorfully decorated around the edges. The bank notes were later replaced by paper money. What are the benefits to using paper money? What are the challenges?
4. The official currency of mainland China is the *renminbi*, which translates to the People's Currency, and is abbreviated as RBM, a derivative of the yuan; the yuan, abbreviated to CNY, which is the most widespread currency. On the front of the currency is a picture of Chairman Mao, Chinese communist revolutionary leader, and on the back, there are one of six different

culturally important locations. The banknotes also contain a security strip, areas of raised texture, watermarks, and coloration to make it harder to forge money. Who are different influential people you could feature on your paper money? What culturally important location could you illustrate on the back? What are other design elements you can add? What elements can you add for security purposes? What will the denomination of the paper money be?

### **Procedures:**

1. Students will cut red/decorative paper into a square. This can be done by measuring with a ruler to make all sides an equal length.
2. (Refer to illustration below for guidance) Students will take the bottom corner a little more than half-way up and fold it flat. A bone folder can be used to sharpen crease.
3. Students will bring side corners to the middle and crease, overlapping the bottom fold. Unfold.
4. Glue side-edges of bottom corner fold, students will then re-fold side corners in.
5. Students will fold top corner down, completing the envelope. Leave unsealed.
6. Students will use rectangle of sketch paper to plan front and back of their own paper money. Remember to include the denomination amount.
7. Draw final version of design on fresh sheet of drawing paper.
8. Color both sides of paper money.
9. If there is extra time, design additional paper money denomination, or make additional paper money of same denomination
10. Place money in envelope.
11. Students will tie envelope shut with string.
12. Wrap up Questions: When do the Chinese celebrate the new year? What is the purpose behind the tradition of giving red envelope full of money? Are there other similar cultural traditions? Why or why not? What are some early forms of currency? Why would a standardized form of currency be beneficial? How does a standard currency allow for increased exchange of goods and promote trade? How does differing currency affect international trade?
13. Students will reflect on work, and take time to discuss essential questions. Students will articulate reasons why the Chinese culture makes and gives away red envelopes. Students will identify universal themes related to the red envelopes in works of art from diverse cultures, both past and present. Students will evaluate their own artwork through verbal discussion with other students discussing topics such as craftsmanship, individual design, symbolism, and cultural relevance

**Sample:**



**Extensions:** Have students design additional denominations of paper money. Have students write a paper about the history of a country's currency.