

# Teacher's Mastersheet: Hungry Ghost Festival

As it comes up to Halloween in the UK, using the Chinese Hungry Ghost Festival as a subject topic is a fun way to link cultures, develop language skills, develop information-gathering skills and also review vocabulary learnt up to this point.

The materials provided are a guideline, and can be adapted however you may like. They have been designed to work best in a blended learning environment, in that they mix use of F2F and IT activities, but can equally be changed to be completely carried out online as an additional activity, or in class.

## Suggested Procedure

\*Divide your class into pairs, A & B. Student A has worksheet A, Student B has worksheet B. For now, As can work together in small groups, and Bs work together in small groups. \*

- Each group discusses the images they have- either of the offerings to the hungry ghosts (A), or the images of things that are taboo (B). They try and guess what the connections are, before looking up the vocabulary and matching to the pictures. With the new vocabulary, do they have any more clues as to what the pictures are about?
- **NB:** With the vocabulary I have deliberately used the verbs 做 and 给; I know they sound strange in the context, but I used them as they are more simple for students (and more common)- if you're not happy, please feel free to change the vocabulary!
- Each group then goes to the website provided (this could be homework), and find out the answers to the questions about what links all the images.
- Students get back into pairs, and A and B tell each other what they have learnt, and teach each other the new Chinese words.
- Still in pairs, they create 4 sentences each, based on the new vocabulary. They can work together or individually.
- Next, the whole class sees the new vocabulary and reads about the Hungry Ghost Festival.
- Students are then given two different paragraphs to read, A and B, about the first and last days of the festival. They then tell each other what they have learnt.
- Together they then complete the true or false (if you want to make this more dynamic, you could give them paper money to "bet" on how much they think they are right).
- Individually (or for homework online) they complete the questions.

## Resources



The Hungry Ghost Festival is one of several important festival days of Ghost Month (鬼月) — the seventh month of the Chinese lunar calendar. It is thought that the ghosts of Chinese ancestors are let out of hell on the first day of the month. It has been the scariest month of the year for thousands of years. They roam around looking for entertainment, and many fearful Chinese try to avoid swimming or being alone at night in case an enemy ghost comes after them.

The ghosts attack their enemies, and they might be angry or malicious in general. So the Chinese have certain traditions about what to do about the situation on the first day, the 14th or 15th for the Hungry Ghost Festival, and the last day of the special month.

The Hungry Ghost Festival is one of several traditional festivals in China to worship ancestors and is still very important in certain regions, and is also observed in other countries with large Chinese populations such as Singapore and Malaysia. The Buddhist name for the Hungry Ghost Festival is the *Yúlánpén* Festival (盂兰盆), and Taoists call it the Zhōngyuán Jié or Zhōngyuán Festival (中元节).

## The First Day of Hungry Ghost Month



On the first day of the month, people burn make-believe paper money outside their homes or businesses, along the sides of roads, or in fields. Sometimes, they go to temples for this task. On a trip to China during this time, you'll probably see people occupied with this activity or find the ghost money on the ground with ashes and remains. They want to give the ghosts the money they need during their special month. On some of these notes is printed the word “地狱” *diyù* which means "underworld prison" or 地府, *difū* meaning "underworld court" as that is where the souls are believed to be, being judged- the money will help them get a good result!

People also light incense and may make offer food to the hungry unhappy ghosts. People trust that the ghosts won't do something terrible to them or curse them after eating their their and while holding their money. They put up red painted paper lanterns everywhere including business and residential areas.

There are street ceremonies, market ceremonies, and temple ceremonies. During street and market ceremonies, people gather at the streets and markets to celebrate the festival. At temple ceremonies, monks in temples organize festive activities. Many believe it is important to appease the ghosts to avoid spiritual attack.

## The Last Day of Hungry Ghost Month

The last day of the seventh lunar month is marked with a special festival too. This is the day that the **gates of hell are closed up** again. People celebrate and observe this day in various ways. Many burn more paper money and clothing so that the ghosts can use these things in their hell society. The pictures and tablets of ancestors may be put away back on the shelves or hung back on the walls where they were before.

In order to drive the ghosts away, **Taoist monks chant** to make them leave. The ghosts are thought to hate the sound.



**Many families float river lanterns** on little boats in the evening. People make colourful lanterns out of wood and paper, and families write their ancestors' name on the lanterns. The ghosts are believed to follow the floating river lanterns away.

Special ceremonies are performed to avoid the anger of the ghosts such as putting the family's ancestral tablets on a table, burning incense and preparing food three times a day. The main ceremony is usually held at dusk. People put the family's ancestral tablets and old paintings and photographs on a table and then burn incense near them. Plates of food are put out for the ghosts on the table, and the people may kowtow in front of the memorial tablets and report their behaviour to their ancestors to receive a blessing or punishment. People also feast on this night, and they might leave a place open at the table for a lost ancestor.

They want to feed the hungry ghosts who have been wandering the land since the beginning of Hungry Ghost Month. It is thought that after two weeks of activity, they must be very hungry.

## Hungry Ghost Festival v Halloween

This festival comes during the full moon at the end of summer, similar to Halloween in Western countries or the Day of the Dead in Mexico, a time when people believe that there is a bridge between the dead and the living, so precautions must be taken to honour the dead. Halloween was originally a traditional holiday for Celts in Great Britain, who also believed that ghosts could cross the boundary between life and death.



True or False?

1. Swimming is believed to be dangerous during this time, as spirits can pull you under the water.
2. The Festival is only important to Taoists.
3. The spirits are supposed to be hungry because they are trapped between the human and spirit worlds and are unable to eat.
4. Hungry ghosts are believed to be those of people who lived a happy life.
5. You shouldn't wear high heels at this time, as it makes it easier for a spirit to possess you if your heel is lifted from the ground.
6. If someone calls your name, don't look back or respond as it might be a ghost calling you.
7. You should whistle loudly if you are outside.

(answers: 1:T, 2:F it's also important to Buddhists and in Folk history, 3:T, 4:F they are unhappy in life, or died a violent death, 5:T, 6:T, 7: F whistling attracts ghosts)

### Key Vocabulary

(Hungry) Ghost Month	鬼月 Guǐ yuè
Hungry Ghost Festival:	Yúlánpén (盂兰盆), Zhōngyuán Jié (中元节) common: 鬼节
Buddhism	佛教 Fójiào
Taoism	道教 Dàojiào
Paper money	纸钱 qián zhǐ
Burn	烧 shāo
Incense	香 xiāng
Lantern	灯笼 Dēnglóng

### Video

<https://youtu.be/wq308fmG0J8> (Hainan)

<https://youtu.be/ETavtQOXalk> (Hong Kong)

<https://youtu.be/pKxsINpKnxE> (Malaysia)

[https://youtu.be/Mue1YQI\\_g6I](https://youtu.be/Mue1YQI_g6I) (Singapore)

<https://youtu.be/ATOLf53PKuQ> (Singapore)

Sources: <http://www.chinahighlights.com/festivals/hungry-ghost-festival.htm>

<https://vulcanpost.com/584249/malaysia-hungry-ghost-festival-facts/>

<http://www.afs.org/blog/icl/?p=5324>

<http://www.chillisauce.co.uk/blog/opening-the-gates-of-hell-at-the-hungry-ghost-festival/>

<http://says.com/my/lifestyle/things-you-should-not-do-on-hungry-ghost-festival>