

Lotus Lantern Festival

Elementary through High School

Written and illustrated by Stephanie Kao

SUBJECT AREA:

History-Social Sciences and Visual Arts

OBJECTIVES:

Students will

- learn that Buddhism is a religion founded by an enlightened young Indian prince who became the Buddha.
- learn how the Buddha's birthday, a national holiday, is celebrated in Korea.
- discuss how the lotus flower is symbol of purity and wisdom.
- construct a lotus blossom lantern.

MATERIALS:

Poster board, pink and green crepe paper, white paper, lantern frame stencil, lotus petal stencil, pencil, markers, wire, scissors, hole punch, and tape (preferably Scotch transparent tape). Alternatively, the lantern frame can be made using a large tissue box, ruler, and compass.



Lotus lanterns are unique to Korea and are made in celebration of the Buddha's birthday. Photo by Kaz Tsuruta.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS:

Buswell Jr., Robert E., *The Zen Monastic Experience: Buddhist Practice in Contemporary Korea*. New Jersey: Princeton Press, 1992.

Korean Buddhist Chogye Order, *What is Korean Buddhism?* Seoul: Korean Buddhist Chogye Order, 2002.

SUGGESTED WEBSITES FOR STUDENTS:

Buddha's Birthday Celebration Committee, in *Lotus Lantern Festival (updated 2003)*
<http://www.llf.or.kr/eng/>

Todd Thacker, "Enlightened Tradition," in *Korea Now: Biweekly Magazine*, Sept. 2003
http://kn.koreaherald.co.kr/SITE/data/html_dir/2002/06/07/200206070036.asp#top

DESCRIPTION:

The Lotus Lantern Festival, also known as Yeondeunghoe or the "Feast of Lanterns," is one of the most celebrated Buddhist ceremonies held in Korea. On the eighth day of the fourth lunar month (late April or early May of the Roman calendar), hundreds of thousands of candlelit paper lanterns are raised throughout the country to commemorate the Buddha's birthday. In addition to the popular eight-sided lantern painted with Buddhist symbols of longevity and good fortune, lanterns are also constructed in various shapes and sizes based on themes of birth—including turtles, watermelon, fish, and ducks. These decorative lanterns are suspended in the front of every household, one lantern for each family member, with their names and prayers written on narrow sheets of white paper that sway gently from the base of the lanterns.

The tradition of celebrating the Buddha's birthday in conjunction with the lantern festival dates to the Goryeo dynasty. This ceremony, which became a Korean national holiday in 1975, honors the great teachings of a young Indian prince named Siddhartha Gautama, who lived nearly 2,500 years ago and gave up his royal life in search of a way to end suffering in the world. After years of searching, the prince found enlightenment, or perfect understanding, and became the Buddha, which means the "Enlightened One."

In Korean Buddhist temples, preparation for this special day begins one week before the event. During this time, monks carefully repair lanterns used in the previous year's festivities while also creating new decorative ones. The most cherished type of lantern made by the monks is the delicately crafted lotus lantern. The lotus flower, a symbol of purity and wisdom, holds special significance in the Buddhist tradition. The flower, whose strong roots allow it to rise from the mud and blossom with great beauty, represents the individual who overcomes greed and hatred to find enlightenment.

On the morning of the Buddha's birthday, monks begin stringing row upon row of lanterns to adorn pathways surrounding the temple. The lanterns hang along the walkways of the inner courtyards. The monks then sweep the temple grounds in expectation of the arrival of the public, who are invited on this day to tour the monastery. When visitors arrive, they are invited to purchase a lantern and follow the Buddhist tradition of asking a monk to write a merit certificate in honor of a visitor's family members and/or deceased relatives. The monk writes the family names in calligraphy on the certificate and pastes it so that it hangs from bottom of the lantern. This offering to the Buddha is said to contribute to the good fortune of the family. In the evening, family members return to the temple to light their lanterns, light incense, and pray. The culmination of the event occurs as chanting monks light the candles one at a time in each of the remaining lanterns to illuminate the temple.

PROCEDURE:

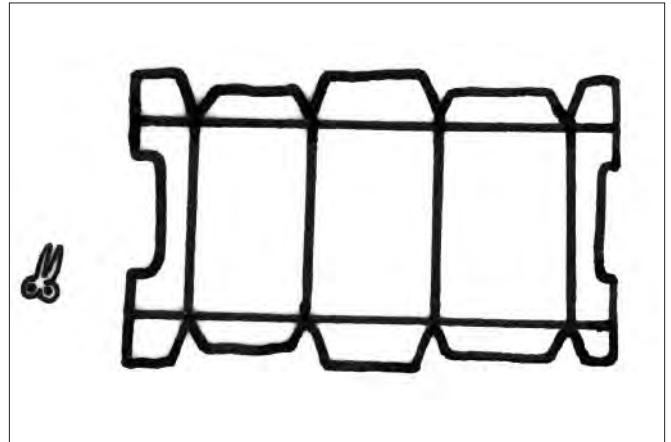
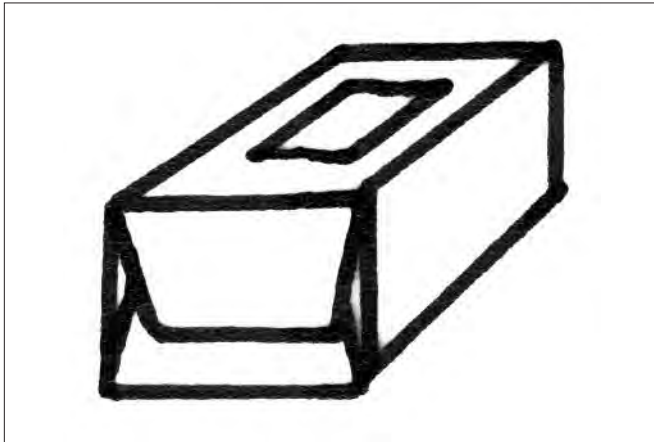
Locate Korea on a map. Introduce a general history of the life of Indian prince Siddhartha Gautama, who became the Buddha. Discuss with students how the teachings of the Buddha spread from India through Central Asia and China; and how these teachings arrived in Korea in 372 CE. Explain how the Buddha's birthday is celebrated in Korea. Have students research the Lotus Lantern Festival using the internet. Discuss the symbolism of the lotus flower in Buddhism. Compare and contrast this ceremony to those celebrated in the United States.

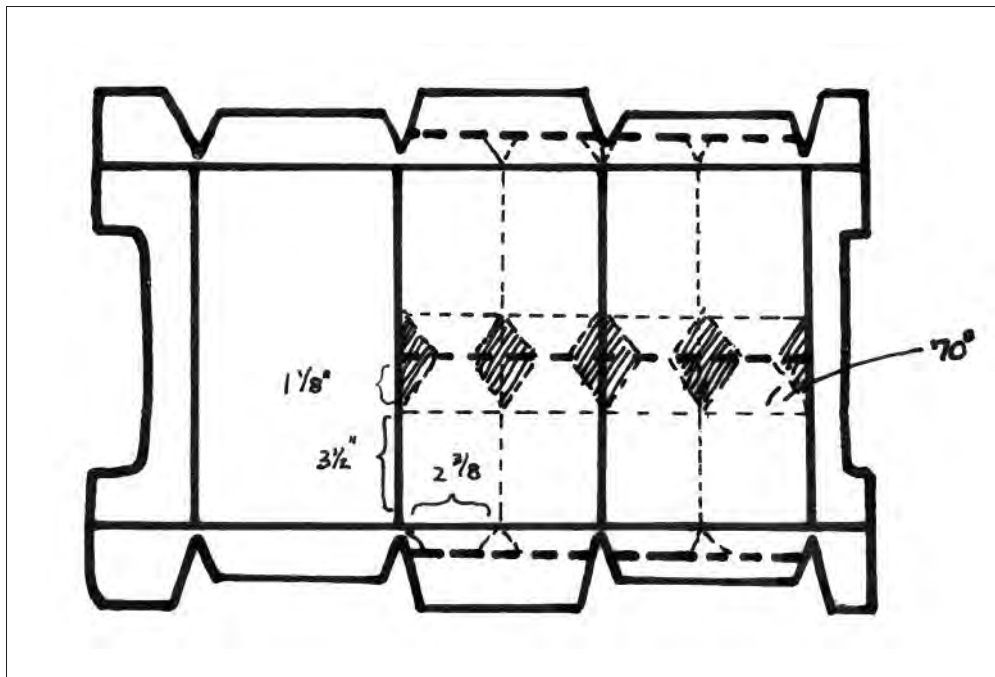
ACTIVITY:

1. Using a pencil, trace the lantern frame stencil twice on the poster board. Cut out the shapes with scissors, and tape them together to form a row of eight connected panels. (Please note that the stencil provided needs to be enlarged 200 percent.)

An alternate method for making a lantern frame is to use a large tissue box as described below (see illustration):

- a. Cut open one large tissue box lengthwise.
- b. Place the lantern frame stencil on top of the tissue box. Trace the stencil twice, one tracing directly above the other.
- c. Cut out the shapes and tape them together to form a row of eight connected panels. Each panel should be octagonal. See the dimensions below.



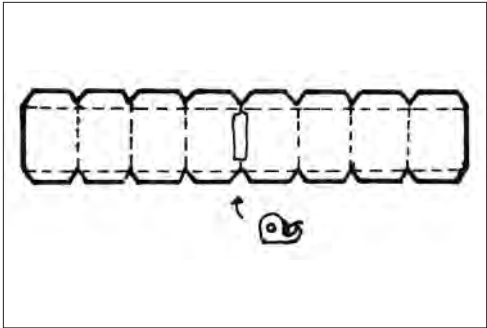


2. Tape the ends of the row of panels together so that they form a cylinder. At the bottom and top of the cylinder, gently fold the top and bottom of each octagonal panel over at an angle and tape together. The frame should now have the appearance of a small ball.
3. Fold the pink crepe paper along the grain of the paper. Using the lotus petal stencil, draw and cut out petals for the lantern. Gently fold over and pinch the bottom of each petal to give it a concave shape.
4. Starting from the top, tape rows of pinched paper petals onto the frame until it is covered.
5. Next, cut the green crepe paper along the grain to form five large petals (slightly larger than the lotus petals) and tape them to the bottom of the frame. Using the hole punch, make two holes on opposite sides at the top of the frame. Tie a wire through the holes to create a hanger for the lantern. Using markers on a small rectangular piece of white paper, have students write their wishes and the names of their immediate family members and/or deceased relatives. Finally, tape this paper to the bottom of the lantern so it dangles when the lantern hangs.

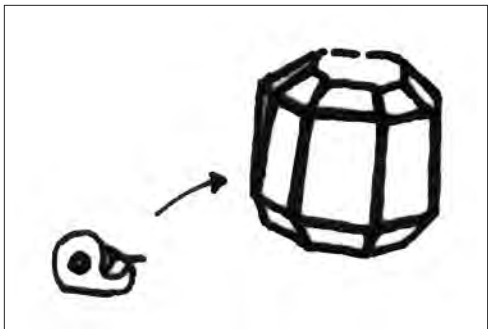
LOTUS LANTERN ACTIVITY



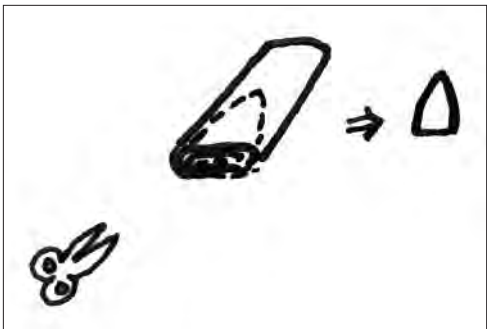
Lotus lanterns. Photo by Kaz Tsuruta.



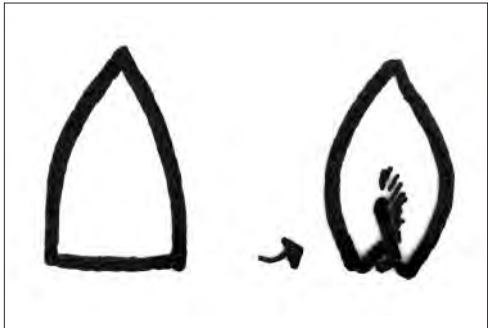
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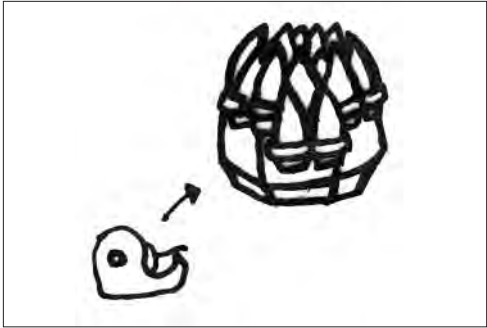
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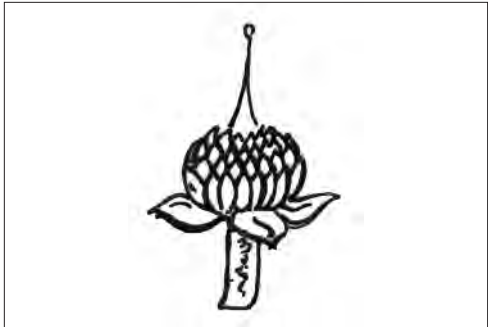
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Mini-Lotus Lanterns

Elementary through High School

Lesson written and illustrated by Stephanie Kao

Please refer to the lesson plan Lotus Lantern Festival in this packet for a description of the festival, lesson objectives, procedure, and further student resources.

MATERIALS:

Two empty half-pint containers, pink and green crepe paper, white paper, small petal stencil, pencil, markers, wire, scissors, pushpins, flathead pins, and tape (preferably Scotch transparent tape).

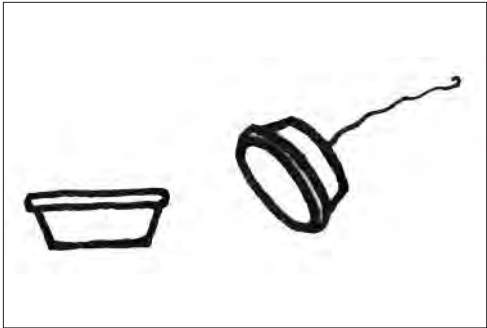
ACTIVITY:

1. Using a pushpin, punch a large hole in the bottom of an empty half-pint container. Tie a knot at the end of a wire. String it through the hole so that the container can be hung upside down.
2. Tape the top of one container to the top of another empty half-pint container so that it is secure.
3. Fold the pink crepe paper along the grain of the paper. Using the small lotus petal stencil, draw and cut out petals for the lantern. Gently fold over and pinch the bottom of each petal to give it a concave shape. (Please note the stencil provided in this packet needs to be enlarged 200 percent).
4. Starting from the top, tape rows of pinched paper petals onto the frame until it is covered. In order to secure the petals to the bottom of the containers, you may need to reinforce them with small flathead pins. Teachers and parents may need to help younger students do this.
5. Next, cut the green crepe paper along the grain to form five large petals (slightly larger than the lotus petals) and tape them to the bottom of the frame. Using markers on a small rectangular white piece of paper, have students write their wishes and the names of their immediate family members and/or deceased relatives. Finally, tape this paper to the bottom of the lantern so it dangles when the lantern hangs.

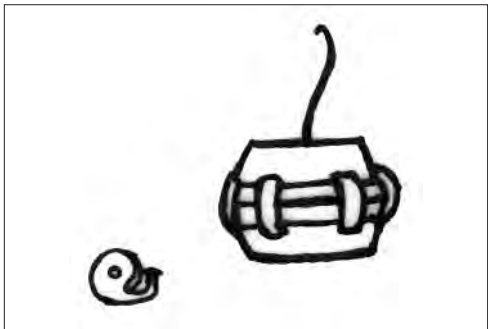
MINI-LOTUS LANTERN ACTIVITY



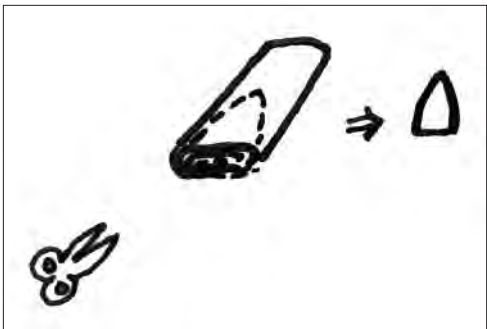
Lotus lanterns. Photo by Kaz Tsuruta.



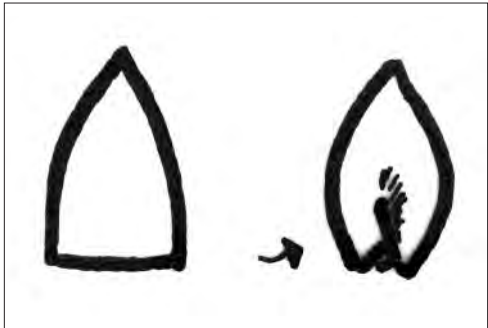
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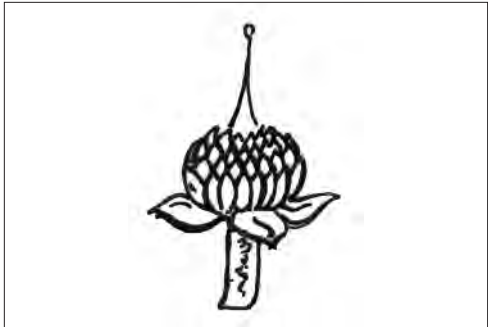
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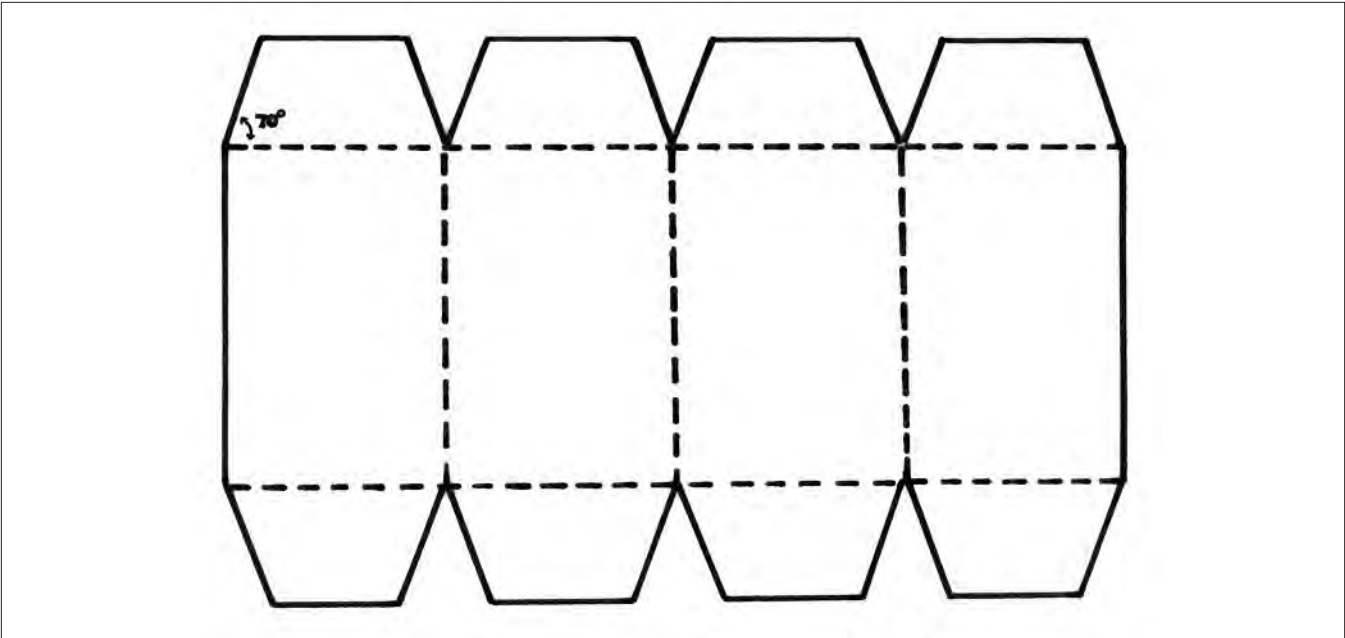
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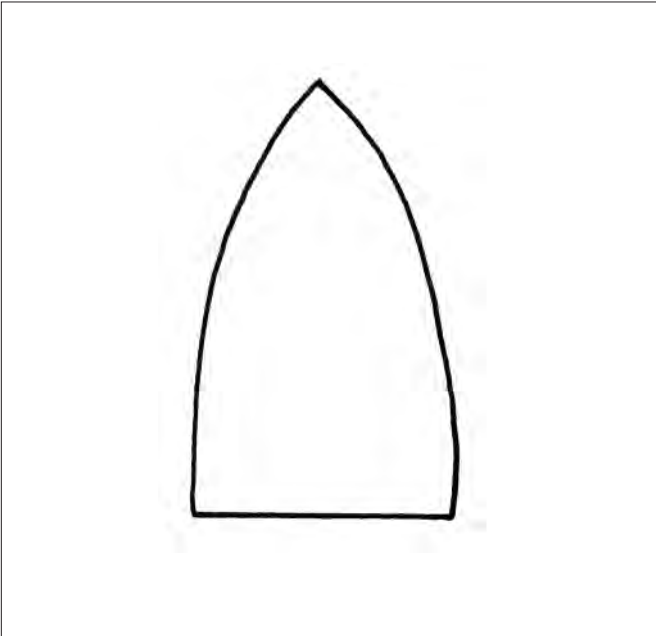
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LOTUS LANTERN STENCILS

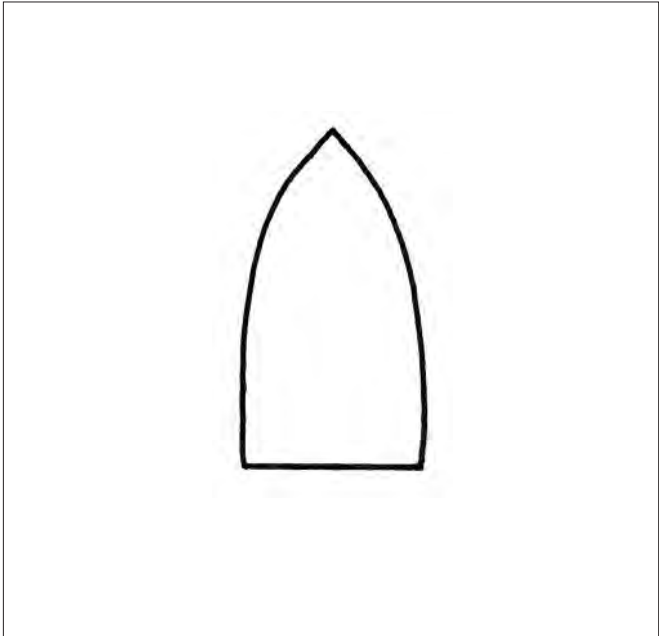
Please note that all stencils need to be enlarged by 200 percent.



lotus lantern frame



lotus petal



mini-lotus petal