

Children's Mid-Autumn Festival in Vietnam

Enjoy this additional information for students and teachers for the World Celebrations feature on Children's Mid-Autumn Festival in Vietnam from the August/September 2009 (Volume 10, No. 1) issue of Music Express.

For the Students:

Since ancient times, some cultures and traditions have calculated months based on the phases of the moon. The word “month” even comes from moon and, in the lunar calendar, is one full cycle of the moon—new, crescent, full, crescent. In Vietnam, Tet Trung Thu, or Children's Mid-Autumn Festival, is typically celebrated on the 15th day of the eighth lunar month, when the moon is full. This festival celebrates the harvest and children. The full moon represents a full life with prosperity. Prosperity is felt after a successful harvest season and a full life is experienced with children in the family. The calendar that we use in daily life is not a lunar calendar; hence the date of celebration is different each year. [In 2009, it is on October 3.]

The lyrics of the song “Tet Trung Thu” give an excellent description of the activities and happy feelings of this festival. Here is how a Vietnamese immigrant named Hang interpreted the three verses of the song. If you have someone in your school or class who came from Vietnam, or whose parents did, maybe you could invite him/her to give their interpretation, or to help you learn how to say some of the Vietnamese words. Of course, invite them to share their experiences of Children's Mid-Autumn Festival and their culture, too!

It's the mid-autumn festival.
We walk around with our lanterns.
We walk all across the town.
I am very happy singing with the moon.
The lanterns are all different shapes—
The star, the fish, the swan, the butterfly.
I'm taking my lantern up to the moon.
The sky is like a rainbow of colors in white, blue, deep blue, and violet purple.

How beautiful and full the moon is, shining on the earth.
The fifteenth day of the eighth month the moon appears.
The moon is so clear.
I'm sitting here waiting for the moon.
Tung din din kak tun din din
Tung din din kak tun din din
I'm going to take this sound up to the moon.
Tung din din kak tun din din
Tung din din kak tun din din
I'm taking this lantern to free the lady in the moon.

Mid-autumn festival;
Cakes, candies, gifts, goodies.
We all stand around the tray
And ask for lots and lots of lotus seeds and moon cakes.
I want to eat four or five portions!
Moon cakes taste good and sweet.
There are two kinds—one is sweet and one is spicy.
It's made of ginger, watermelon seed dyed red, and squash. [the spicy kind]
The seeds sound like firecrackers when you bite them.
Everyone is happy to greet the full moon.

Notice the mention of the Lady in the Moon at the end of verse two. (In western cultures, we sometimes sing about the Man in the Moon.) There are a couple of legends about how she got there. One of these is part of Hang's heritage and she shares it in her own words: "A fairy came and told a certain man that if he would eat the medicine that she gave him, he would be young forever. He took the medicine and hid it. One day, the girl he loved found the medicine and ate all of it. She became so young that she turned into a spirit and floated away to the moon. Now she is the spirit of the moon, and the Vietnamese refer to her as 'big sister' or 'Hang'." Hang said she took great interest in this story because her name is the same as the Lady in the Moon. If you have someone with Vietnamese heritage in your class, you might enjoy hearing what stories they know about the Lady in the Moon.

EXTRA:

Along with rice, another crop harvested in Vietnam is bamboo. This is becoming very popular as a renewable ("green") flooring material. It has numerous other uses. After it is split, bamboo can be used for fences, baskets, and mats. The stems can make simple furniture, musical instruments, hunting implements, traps and even homemade alarms. Young shoots are a vegetable delicacy called bamboo shoots. Segments of large branches can be used as disposable dishes and cooking pots or to carry water. Even the leaves can be woven. After harvest a new crop can be planted. Two popular instruments in Vietnam are made from bamboo—the bamboo flute and the bamboo xylophone. The flute is found in most regions, while the xylophone hails from the mountainous region. Both are portable. The xylophone can be rolled up and carried in a backpack. Pretty cool! In addition to bamboo instruments, there are many stringed instruments and several drums.

For the Teachers: ABOUT THE SONG

Kathy Sorensen collected this song when she interviewed immigrants from Vietnam. She asked them what song from their culture they thought should be shared with children in this country to represent Vietnam. *Tet Trung Thu* was a favorite of many. Each person was invited to sing his or her version, while Dr. Sorensen wrote down the rhythm just like you did in this lesson. In addition, she wrote down the pitches they sang and the phonetics (sounds of the Vietnamese words.) As you can guess, this was hard to do! Luckily, the Vietnamese people wrote down their lyrics, which you can see printed in the student magazine. They also told what those words meant according to their knowledge of English. There were several different dialects and a few minor differences, as in most folk music. But every immigrant agreed that this was a beloved childhood song and brought back many happy memories of moonlit lantern parades, treats, singing, and time with family. We can be grateful to these immigrants for sharing and for a researcher who cared enough to write the song down so that children in the future could enjoy it.

Since Vietnamese is very difficult for English and Spanish speakers because of its use of tones, the version of the song in *Music Express* has kept the number of Vietnamese words to a minimum. However, since many communities have people who speak Vietnamese, we are providing three verses of Vietnamese lyrics for their enjoyment, as well as to allow you to see the visual complexity and beauty of the language.

Tet Trung Thu (Vietnamese lyrics)

Verse 1:

Tết trung thu rước đèn đi chơi.
Em rước đèn đi khắp phố phường.
Long vui sướng với đèn trong tay.
Em múa ca trong ánh trăng rằm.

Đèn ông sao với đèn cá chám.
Đèn thiên nga với đèn bướm bướm,
em rước đèn này đèn cung trăng.
Đèn xanh lơ với đèn tím tím.
Đèn xanh lam với đèn trắng trắng,
trong ánh đèn rục rĩ muôn màu.

Verse 2:

Tít trên cao dáng tròn xinh xinh,
xoi xuống trần ánh sáng din dàng.
Rằm tháng tám bóng Hằng trong sáng,
em múa ca vui đón Chị Hằng.

tùng dinh dinh cắc tùng dinh dinh*
tùng dinh dinh cắc tùng dinh dinh
Em rước đèn này đến cung trăng.
tùng dinh dinh cắc tùng dinh dinh
tùng dinh dinh cắc tùng dinh dinh
Em rước đèn mừng đón Chị Hằng.

**these words imitate the sound of a drum*

Verse 3:

Tết trung thu bánh quà đầy mâm.
Êm bé nhà ứa đưng quây quần,
đòi hạt sen bánh dẻo đầy nhân,
em muốn an bốn năm ba phần.

Ngọt thom như bánh dẻo bánh nướng.
ngọt cay như mít gừng mít bí.
Ăn mát lòng lại thấy vui thơm.
Hat dưa nghe cần nỏ lớp đóp.
Người hân hoan nói cười hấp tấp.
Bao tấm lòng mừng đón trắng rằm.

Speech tones in the Vietnamese language.

There are six tones in the Vietnamese language:

No tone mark = mid-level

Accent mark toward 2 o'clock above vowel = high rising

Accent mark toward 11 o'clock above vowel = low-falling

Dot under vowel = low broken

Tiny hook above vowel = low-rising tilde (waves line) above vowels high broken

Of course, a native speaker will be best able to help you make these sounds correctly.

Xylophones in Vietnam

The xylophone has been found in many cultures throughout the world. In Vietnam there is a really versatile bamboo xylophone, called a t'rung. It can be rolled up and carried in a backpack. It is portable because the courses of bamboo are tied together in a special way that remains flexible, rather than attached to a rigid structure. It is native to people living in the Central Highlands.

The Highlands have many waterfalls and streams. People say that the sound of this bamboo xylophone reminds them of the rushing water. You can see videos of the t'rung being played at www.footprintsvietnam.com. Once you are there, click on About Vietnam, and then click on Music and Cultural Performances in Vietnam. While you are there, you might enjoy seeing the three thousand year old xylophone that is made of stones, and thus called a lithophone or a Dan Da—not nearly as light and portable as the bamboo one! If you are really up for a challenge, try to figure out how to play Vietnamese bamboo pipes called Dan K'longput by clapping air into them!