

Teaching notes for THEN AND NOW by Datsun Tran

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**A 2025 CBCA Picture Book of the Year
Notable**

In his first-ever picture book, contemporary artist Datsun Tran tells his family's story of making a new home after journeying by boat from Vietnam as refugees. In vivid ink paintings and simple, resonant text, *Then and Now* explores the powerful associations a sound, smell or sensation can carry. Readers are warmly welcomed into two immersive, multi-sensory and strikingly different worlds: then and now.

Datsun Tran is a contemporary artist who combines traditional and modern materials and processes to make ink paintings inspired by classical Chinese brushwork.

What is this story about?

- Seeking refuge
- Sensory associations: negative and positive
- Food security
- Cultural tradition and identity
- Family bonds
- Brave journeys
- Danger and safety
- Honouring ancestors

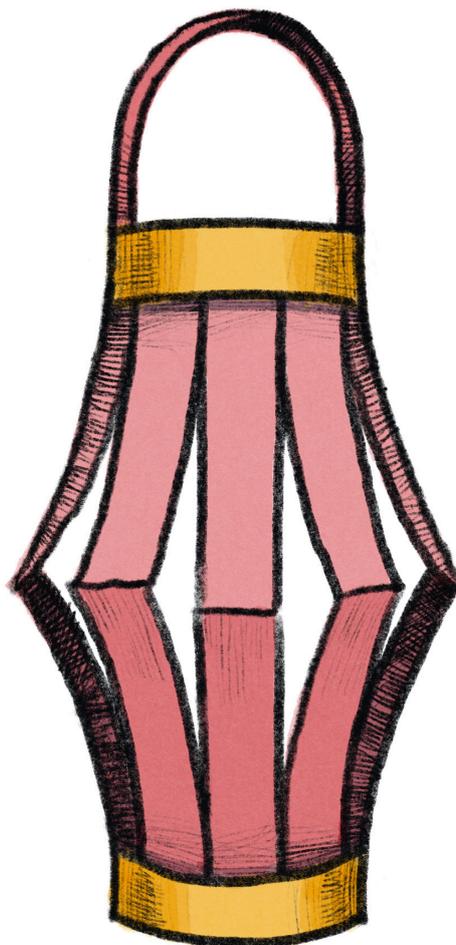


Activities

Lantern making

The cover of Datsun's book features a Chinese red lantern. During the Chinese Lantern Festival, people let go of red lanterns to symbolise a letting go of your past self. Using paper, scissors and glue, make a paper lantern.

1. Cut off one edge of the paper. You'll use this later for your handle.
2. Decorate your paper using crayons, textas, pencils, washi tape, glitter, or anything else that won't make the paper too hard to cut through. If you're celebrating Lunar New Year, the lucky colours to use are red and golden.
3. Fold your paper in half lengthwise along the middle
4. Cut 2cm strips from the folded edge towards the opposite edge, stopping 2cm before you reach the end with each cut
5. Unfold the paper
6. Match the long edges together on the lantern and use tape, staples or glue to hold it in place
7. Staple, tape or glue the handle to your lantern



Monochrome painting

Most of the artwork in Datsun's book is painted in monochrome. A monochromatic painting is one that uses only one colour or hue.

Use only one colour, and create the detail by using varying shades and intensities of that colour.

When you're painting, think about how you can create a *chiaroscuro* effect in your work – the use of strong contrasts between light and dark – to give it a luminous or glowing quality.



Discussion questions : early primary and up

- In Datsun's book, a child lights a candle for their ancestors. Do you know where your ancestors are from? Do you have any special rituals or traditions that connect you to them?
- Two illustrations show delicious home-made food that's culturally traditional for Datsun's family. What foods are culturally traditional or special in your family?
- The sound of fireworks can be scary for people who have lived through wars. Many children around the world are currently living through wars. What do you wish for those children?

