

# The Emperor's Egg

RAE TAN



TEACHERS RESOURCES



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**Teachers Resources by Robyn Sheahan-Bright**

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# INTRODUCTION

*'I wonder what kind of creature will hatch,' Ren says.  
'A tiger with wings!' Pei says.  
'A dragon with gold teeth!' Ping says.  
'Now, now,' Papa says. 'We'll just have to wait and see.'*

Looking for a worthy successor to his throne, an ageing emperor gives all the children in his kingdom an egg. After thirty days, he will judge what each child delivers to him and choose his heir.

Ren brings his egg home and takes the best care of it. He reads to it, sings to it, sleeps with it and keeps it warm. Ren waits and waits, but his egg never hatches, while all around him wondrous hatchlings are emerging from other children's eggs.

In a hall full of magical creatures, how can Ren present his unhatched egg to the emperor?

This is a wondrous and richly illustrated reimagining of an ancient Chinese folktale about integrity, courage and patience from Rae Tan, the creator of *Pancakes for Plum*.

## THEMES & CURRICULUM TOPICS

Several themes are covered in this book which might be related to the Australian Curriculum, including:

### HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES (HASS)

[<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/humanities-and-social-sciences/hass/>](https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/humanities-and-social-sciences/hass/)

### HONESTY AND INTEGRITY

**Discussion Point:** Ren displays a very mature sense of responsibility in caring for his egg. He never for a minute thinks of trying to win the Emperor's favour via trickery or dishonesty. He displays an intense devotion to the task of caring for his egg. Discuss the concepts of honesty and integrity with students.

### LOVE AND CARE

**Discussion Point:** 'It's all right, Ren,' Papa says. 'You've given Bao Bao all your love and care. That's what matters.' This advice might equally relate to other areas where students have felt a sense of failure. Discuss with students the importance of kindness and care for others, above personal aggrandisement.

### PATIENCE

**Discussion Point:** Ren evinces a patience the other children lack. Within days the other children have found fantastical animals with which to impress the Emperor. But Ren steadfastly cares for his egg, waiting for it to hatch. Ask the students whether they could have been so patient. (They may reflect on owning a pet, or waiting for chickens to lay eggs, as a related activity.)

### COURAGE

**Discussion Point:** Ren is courageous when he returns to the Emperor's Court with his egg still

unhatched. He might have feared the Emperor's wrath, but he bravely confesses that his egg hasn't hatched. Students might relate this to their own experiences when for example, being brave with their teachers or parents in confessing to them how they have dealt with a challenge.

## ANCIENT CHINA

**Discussion Point:** Students might study the history of China's Emperors and how life in an Emperor's court was observed. [See **Bibliography**.]

**Activity:** Read other books about China and its culture. [See **Bibliography**.]

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

<<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/english/>>

The text of this book might be studied in relation to the following aspects:

**Activity:** Folk tales follow a traditional structure. A character is set a task, or embarks on a journey, and the resolution of that pattern generally involves a moral lesson or message. Ren cares for the egg the Emperor has given him and despite it not 'hatching', his honesty and care for the egg ultimately makes him the Emperor's choice of a successor. As often occurs in folktales, the other children who had also been given eggs had engaged in 'trickery', bringing outlandish animals to the Emperor, pretending that they had hatched from the eggs they were given. Can you think of other 'trickster' folk tales like this one?

**Activity:** Read other Chinese folktales and discuss some of them with your students. [See **Bibliography**.]

**Activity:** Read other picture books about Chinese culture and compare to *The Emperor's Egg*.

**Activity:** Test your students' **comprehension** by asking them questions about the written and visual text.

## VISUAL LITERACY

<<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/the-arts/visual-arts/>>.

The visual text of a book combines with the written text to tell the story using the various parts of the book's design and illustrations, as explored below:

**Activity:** The back cover features an image from the book in which Ren is pushing his egg, which he has named Bao Bao, in a baby's pram. The front cover depicts two children with their creatures, and Ren closely observing Bao Bao. Design another cover for this book.

**Activity:** The front endpaper depicts the egg with stylised Chinese motifs on each corner of the two pages. The back endpaper depicts Ren in Emperor's robes, running from left to right into the arms of his two younger brothers and father. Discuss the story that this set of endpapers tells to the reader. Invite students to create another set of endpapers for this book.

**Discussion Point:** The title page depicts Ren carefully tucking his egg into his tiny wooden bed to keep it warm. The emotion invested in this action is palpable and very endearing. Invite students to discuss what this image means to them. Does it remind them of any feeling or event in their own lives?

**Activity:** Creating characters entails studying **facial expressions** and **'body language'**. Rae



Tan is a master of this, in evoking the feelings of her characters. Invite students to examine several frames in the book and to outline what emotions the characters depicted are feeling.

**Activity:** The **medium or style** employed is digital art working in Procreate. [See **Author/Illustrator's Notes** below.] The **colours** used in this book are rich and vibrant. Invite students to emulate this medium and colour palette in images they create in response to this book.

**Discussion Point:** The parade of animals that the children bring to the Emperor's court is colourful and intriguing. Some are dragon-like and others seem to be an amalgam of a number of creatures. Invite students to say which is their favourite, and why?

**Discussion Point:** Invite students to draw their own fantastical creature. [See **Worksheet 1.**]

**Activity:** Illustrators use **perspective** in different ways such as 'zooming' into faces, or taking a longer view of people within a landscape, in a sequence of images, to enhance the visual meaning. The reader's perspective in observing strong left to right movement across a double page spread is also important in a picture book, encouraging the reader to follow the action sequentially in a filmic way. See for example:

pp 12–13 'Day by day, more creatures hatch.' This panorama depicts the children flying across the townscape on their fantastical creatures.

pp 16–17 'Bao Bao does not hatch' depicts the three children with the two brothers behind Ren as he gazes dispiritedly at the egg on the right.

pp 20–21 'On the thirtieth day Bao Bao still does not hatch.' Ren and his two baby brothers are depicted looking intensely at the reader on the right hand page in an image where the 'camera' seems to zoom into the three enlarged faces.

Discuss the use of perspective in this book, with your students.

**Discussion Point: Critical Literacy** involves readers in closely looking at the images in a picture book. In this one there are unremarked details, for example,

The Emperor has an assistant who appears in several frames, and wordlessly does what he is asked to do by his master.

In the image (pp 30– 31) the audience of children and their fantastical creatures is viewed from behind, with the Emperor and Ren facing the reader. The tufts of hair on the children's heads are as curious as the headpieces of their fantastical animals!

p 32 The Emperor and Ren sit side by side on thrones wearing similar robes. But Ren's robes feature different imagery to those worn by the Emperor.

Invite students to closely examine each image to discover unremarked details.

**Activity:** Invite students to draw, paint, or collage another scene to accompany the story they wrote above. Create a classroom mural using all the images. [See also **Worksheet 1** below.]

**Activity:** Create a graphic novel/comic version of a scene in this book. [See **Bibliography.**] [See also **Worksheet 4.**]

## **CREATIVE ARTS**

There are many creative activities suggested by this text:

**1. Egg Craft:** Boil some eggs and then have students decorate the shells using watercolours, texta pens, or other materials [See **Bibliography**.]

**2. The Australian Children's Laureate for 2022 and 2023, Gabrielle Wang,** created some excellent materials for students, including dragon-themed, worksheets, to access here: 'Creative Activities: Gabrielle Wang' *ACLF* <https://www.childrenslaureate.org.au/gabrielle-downloads>

**3. Create a Chinese Dragon Mask.** [See **Worksheet 4**.]

**4. Create a poster** to advertise this book.

**5. Create a Book Trailer** to promote this book. [See **Bibliography**.]

## **LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES**

**Activity:** Research the author/illustrator online. [See **Bibliography**.]

## **MATHEMATICS**

**Activity:** Have fun counting things in this text. [See **Worksheet 3** below for mathematics activities.]

## **FURTHER TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH**

- Research Rae Tan's work and compare this to her other books.
- Investigate any other topic not covered in these notes which you consider is suggested by this text.

## **CONCLUSION**

*The Emperor's Egg* is an utterly charming work that tells a captivating story and also delivers an important lesson about the importance of integrity and the value of love and patience when offered a challenge. This book will engage and delight readers, but also honours several values which students might observe in their own lives. Ren is a captivating hero and the final frame depicting him sitting beside the aged Emperor, dressed in identical robes is a beautiful resolution of the problem posed at the beginning. Who would be a worthy successor to the Emperor? Why, Ren, of course!

## **AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR'S NOTES**

*The Emperor's Egg* was inspired by a Chinese folktale that I read when I was a little girl. In the original tale, an emperor gives seven of the brightest men in his Kingdom a seed each. Six of them return with beautiful pots of plants, while one brings the (boiled) seed back to the emperor. As a child, I was very taken with the unexpected twist in this trickster tale and it stayed with me for many years. For *The Emperor's Egg*, I had so much fun reimagining this traditional story. In

my very own version, the emperor gives all the children in the land an enormous egg each. A gamut of wondrous creatures begin to 'hatch' from the eggs, from a turtle with a colourful shell to a pink frog with butterfly wings. It is my hope that little readers will be delighted by the whimsical creatures and at the same time, learn that a true hero is someone who is honest and brave enough to stand by their values even in the face of challenges and temptations.

For the illustrations, this was my very first time trying my hand at digital art. The whole picture book (from the initial rough sketches to the final linework and painting) was fully done on Procreate. Working digitally gave me the courage and freedom to test out all kinds of colour combinations, as I did not have to start from scratch on a fresh piece of watercolour paper if something went wrong. I absolutely loved dreaming up all the creatures and designing the patterns on their bodies and wings. It pushed my creativity to its limits as I wanted each and every creature to be uniquely different. I enjoyed every moment of the illustration process and felt a little sad when all the spreads were completed.

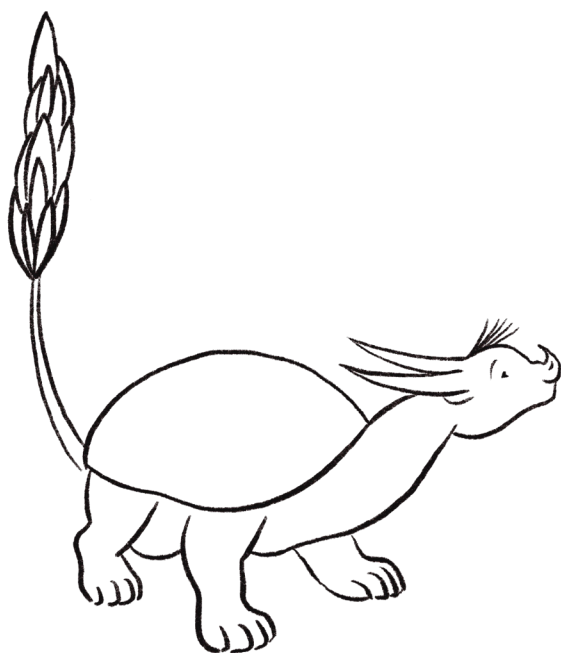
## ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR

**Rae Tan** was born in Singapore and now lives in Perth with her husband. She holds a BA in international politics from King's College London, and performance diplomas for both the piano and violin from Trinity College London. Currently, she is a music teacher working with young children. She is passionate about creating beloved characters and imaginative stories. Working mainly in pastels and watercolour, Rae's illustrative style is bold and loose, yet meticulous when it comes to expressing moods and emotions.

# WORKSHEETS

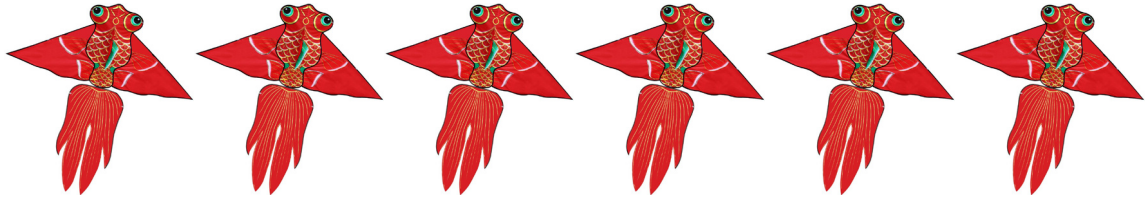
## WORKSHEET 1. EMPEROR'S EGG DRAWING

These images are of two fantastical creatures from the book. Add images of children and other creatures to tell a story in this image.





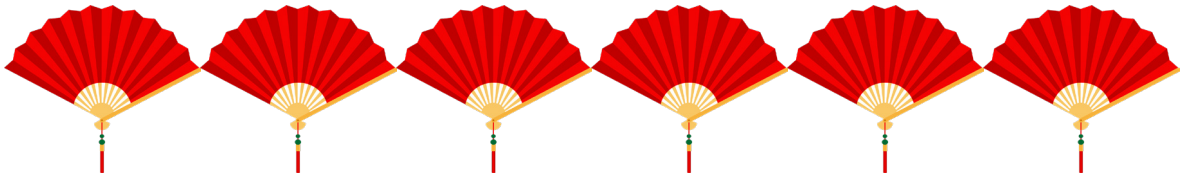
## WORKSHEET 2. MATHS



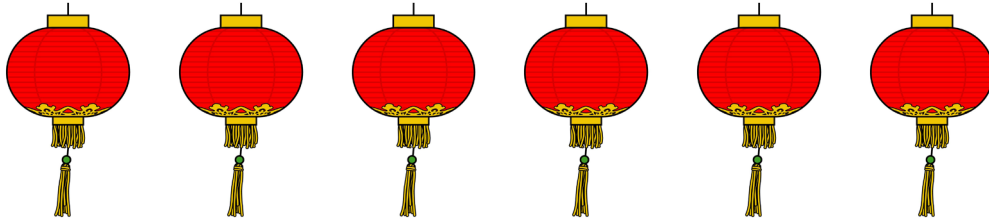
1. How many Chinese kites would you have if you divided the line above by three?



2. How many sampans would you have if you multiplied those in the line above by five?



3. How many fans would you have if you added sixteen to the fans above?



4. How many Chinese Lanterns would you have if you multiplied the lanterns above by three?



5. How many Chinese dragons would you have if you added another twelve to the dragons above?

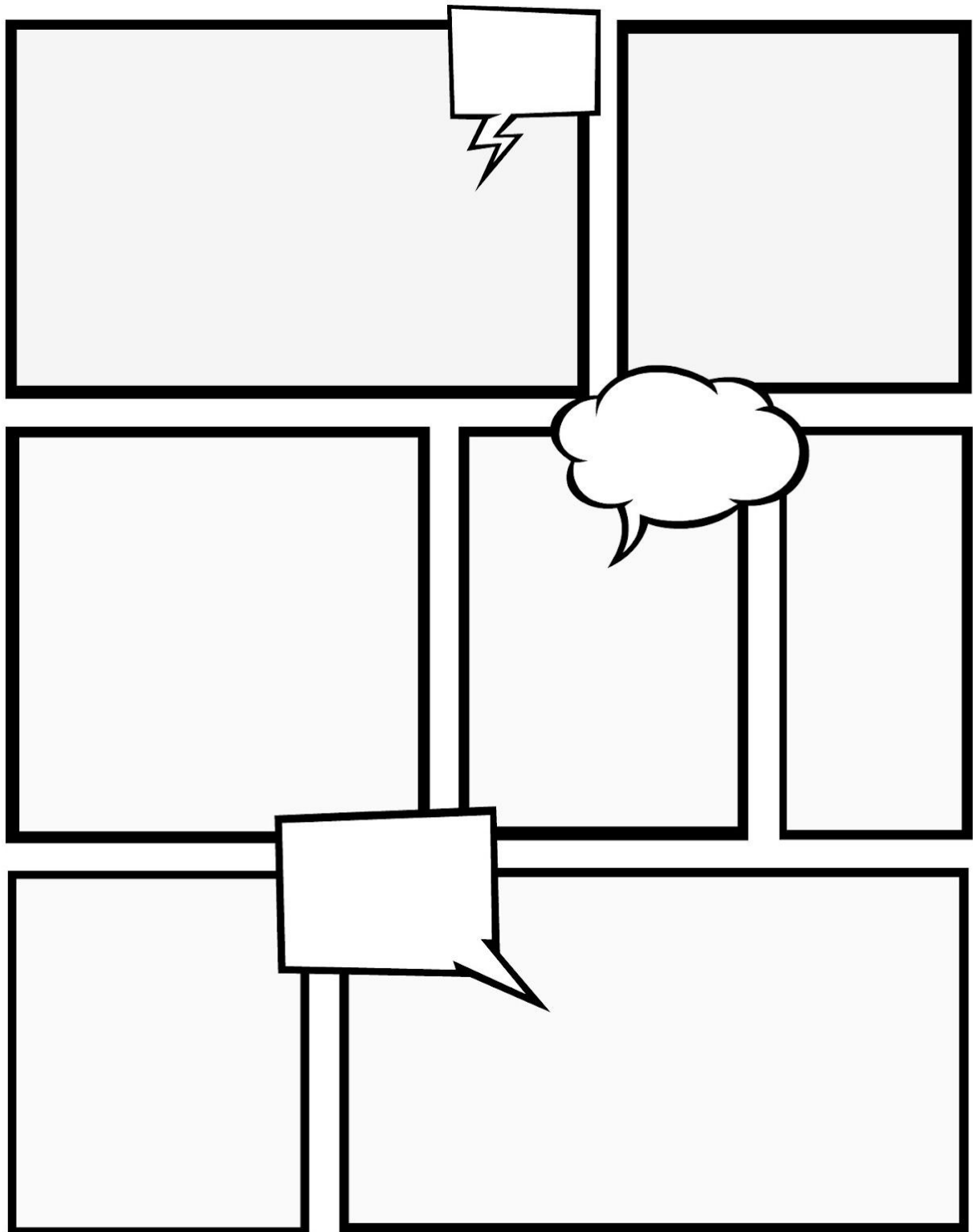


6. How many rice bowls would be left if you subtracted two from the line above?

**ANSWERS: 1. Two. 2. Fifteen. 3. Twenty-two. 4. Eighteen. 5. Sixteen. 6. Four.**

## WORKSHEET 3. GRAPHIC STORYTELLING

Create a graphic novel/comic interpretation of one of the scenes in this book. Use the layout below as the storyboard for your comic. Enlarge on a photocopier to give you more space.



Comic Book Template viewed at: <<http://www.pinterest.com/pin/365706432212821426/>>



## WORKSHEET 4. CHINESE DRAGON MASK

Decorate this image to give it even more impact. Then cut it out, and glue paper streamers to it as well, before you wear your Chinese dragon mask.



See: 'Chinese Dragon Mask' *First Palette* <https://www.firstpalette.com/craft/chinese-dragon-mask.html>>



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE NOTES

**Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright** operates justified text writing and publishing consultancy services, and is widely published on children's literature, publishing history and Australian fiction. In 2011 she was the recipient of the CBCA (Qld Branch) Dame Annabelle Rankin Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Queensland, in 2012 the CBCA Nan Chauncy Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Australia, and in 2014, the QWC's Johnno Award. In 2021 she was appointed a member of the Order of Australia.