

Running sheet

Dragon Boat Blessing.

Before you start, you should have a card table or similar, covered with a at least a white sheet – more colourful is better, but predominantly red, on which you have a number of small dishes of red paint and a small paint brush with each dish – the number of dishes to ensure each dignitary dotting the dragon head has a dish of paint and brush. On the same table should be a bunch of leafy green (eg a sheaf of palm leaves) in silver bucket (eg an ice bucket) of water and a “chung” (rice dumplings wrapped in bamboo leaves) for each of the boats (alternatively, if you can’t get “chungs”, have a large bowl of rice, enough for a handful each for the number of dignitaries).

Have sufficient dignitaries to correspond with the number of boats and one extra to perform the water sprinkling with the sheaf of palm leaves.

Start the proceedings by having all the boats lined up perpendicular to the beach. Boats should be on the water. It is not right to have the boats on land. Make sure the dragon heads are no higher than the dignitary’s chest. All boats should be dressed, meaning adorned with the heads and tails, drummer’s seats, drums and drum sticks – maybe even wide red ribbons around each dragon’s neck.

Each of the dignitaries, who will be dotting the eyes, should solemnly walk past the table and pick up a dish and a brush, then line up facing a dragon head.

The “extra” dignitary picks up the bucket with the sheaf of leaves in water. This person walks up to the first of the dragon boats and stands by the head.

You commence reading the Origins of Dragon Boating. Commence by

saying:

“This has been provided by AusDBF to remind all paddlers to remember and observe Dragon Boating as a Chinese cultural event dating back many thousands of years.”

As you read it, each of the dignitaries should slowly and solemnly dip their brushes and dot one eye. Then dip their brush again to dot the second eye. To prolong the dotting process while you are reading the “Origins”, they might like to dot the third eye - the forehead - of the dragon head as well. In the event that a dragon boat has never been launched or blessed (eg a new boat), dotting the forehead is mandatory. So slowly dip the brush into the paint again for the third time to dot the third eye. Others also paint a short straight line on the tongue.

While the eye-dotting is being carried out, the dignitary with the bucket of water and palm leaves, walks down the length of each boat, sprinkling water with the palm leaves over the head, body and tail of the dragon.

With the right timing with your story-telling, all will be completed by the time you reach the end of “Origins”. With the dotting of the eyes and sprinkling of the water, the blessing ceremony will be completed.

You then read **The Dragon Spirit**. You could introduce it by saying:

“As ?????? Club, in the spirit of all dragon boating, we believe in the Dragon Spirit

“ Play the game Etc.

At the end of the Dragon Spirit, you invite everyone to stand and join you in the Paddler’s Oath:

“Everyone, please say **The Paddler’s Oath** with (if they know the words) or after me:

“On behalf of all paddlers,

“I promise to take part in this regatta,
“showing mutual respect
“and abiding by the rules that govern,
“with the Dragon Spirit in heart and mind,
“for the glory of Dragon Boat
“and the honour of all teams.”

At this point, each of the dignitaries pick up a “chung” or a handful of rice and fling them into the water, signifying throwing in food to attract the water creatures away from defiling the body of Qu Yuan and a peace offering to the water spirits.

Thank you. Let the regatta begin.

Origins of Dragon Boating

Dragon Boat Festival celebrates the life and especially the death of Qu Yuan (*pronounced Chu Wan*) (c. 340 -278 BC), the great Chinese poet who lived during the period of the Warring States (481 – 221 BC) – a time when China was divided into several kingdoms, kingdoms which were constantly at war with each other, each seeking supremacy over the other.

Qu Yuan was a high-ranking Mandarin (official), a Minister of Law and Ordinance of the Kingdom of Chu, in southern China. The Kingdom of Chu was under siege by the warriors of Qin (*pronounced Chin*), a kingdom in the north which was determined to control it.

The King of Qin offered a peace treaty to the King of Chu, a treaty that was never intended to be honoured. Qu Yuan, suspicious of the Qin motives, advised the King of Chu not to accept the treaty. Unfortunately for him and behind his back, treacherous officials, fearing his growing importance to the King, slandered him. This led the King of Chu to believe that Qu Yuan was being treacherous to the Chu's kingdom. The King of Chu signed the treaty. The King of Chu then dismissed Qu Yuan and sent him on exile to a remote region of the Hunan Province.

On the fifth day of the fifth lunar month of the Chinese calendar in the year 278 BC, while in exile, Qu Yuan heard of the fall of the Kingdom of Chu, that the capital had fallen into the hands of the Qins. In despair, and in the ultimate expression of love of his country, Qu Yuan, weighted down with a rock, threw himself into the Miluo River and drowned.

According to legend, when news of his drowning became known, boats were launched by the local fishermen in a race to be first to recover Qu Yuan's body. Thus dragon boat racing was born. The furious splashing of paddles and banging of drums used these days to get the crews in time has its origin in the fishermen's bid to scare off fish and other river creatures from defiling his body.

In one version of the legend, the fishermen began throwing rice into the river as an offering to Qu Yuan, so that his spirit could be nourished in the next world. But one night, Qu Yuan appeared in a dream to one of the fishermen, telling him that the fish were eating the rice offerings, that to prevent it, the rice ought to be wrapped in silk – later replaced by bamboo leaves – to protect the offerings.

A second version, was that rice was thrown into the river to entice the river creatures away from Qu Yuan's body, to prevent the creatures from defiling their hero.

Creatures in the river, perhaps crocodiles, may have appeared, looking like the mythological dragons of Chinese folklore. Was the head of the dragon boat modelled after a glimpse of a crocodile head. Perhaps the idea of a boat in the form of a dragon represented the Dragon Spirit, the Guardian of the Water, who joined in the search, was indicative of the greatness of Qu Yuan.

Whichever the version and the association with the dragon, Qu Yuan's ultimate sacrifice gave birth to dragon boat races.

The Dragon Spirit

Play the Game for the Game's sake;

Be modest in victory and gracious in defeat.

The most important thing in dragon boating is not to win but to take part;

Just as in life; it is not the triumph, but the struggle.

Be true to your fellow paddler.

Paddle not for yourself but for your team.

Work hard. Be strong. Expect no reward and reward will come.

The Paddler's Oath

On behalf of all paddlers,

I promise to take part in this regatta,

showing mutual respect

and abiding by the rules that govern,

with the Dragon Spirit in heart and mind,

for the glory of Dragon Boat

and

the honour of all teams.