Chinese Art

<u>Learning Objective:</u>
To explore the theme of dragons in Chinese art.

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When you think of dragons, what words or images come to your head?

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The dragon has always been an important symbol in Chinese culture dating back as far as prehistoric times. Traditionally, Chinese people believed that they were the descendants of dragons. Unlike the angry fire-breathing dragons of western culture, the Chinese dragon is a symbol of dignity and a force for good.

Chinese culture states that the dragon has the power to bless and influence people's lives.

The dragon was believed to have the power to bring rain, wind, rainbows and stars. Dragons are also a symbol of luck.

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The earliest examples of Chinese dragons come in the form of jade artefacts from neolithic China (around 4700 B.C. to 2900 B.C.).

A pig dragon

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:C-shaped_jade_dragon.jpg

Pig dragons had a pig-like head with a limbless body that was coiled around in a circle. Pig dragons started being thick and stubby but later became more graceful.

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A dragon statue outside the Summer Palace in Beijing, China

When the first emperors came to power in China, the dragon became a symbol of the emperor himself. Emperors were even called dragons and were believed to be descended from dragons, which gave them unrivalled power and wisdom. Up until the revolution of 1911, the emperor was associated with the dragon. Their throne was the dragon throne, their palaces were the dragon palaces and their sons were 'seeds of the dragon'.

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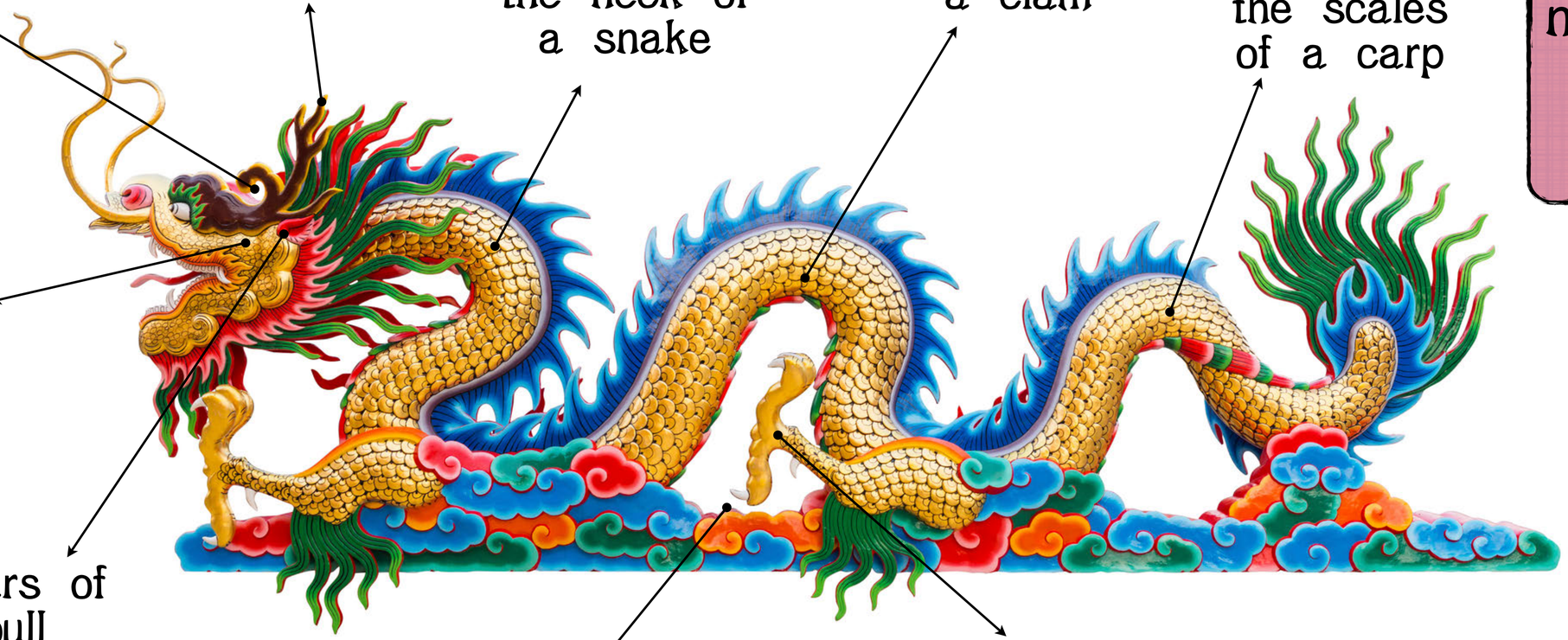
Throughout the dynasties, the image of the dragon changed and evolved. Eventually, the dragon was made up of parts of nine different animals...



Did you know that the number nine is lucky in Chinese culture?

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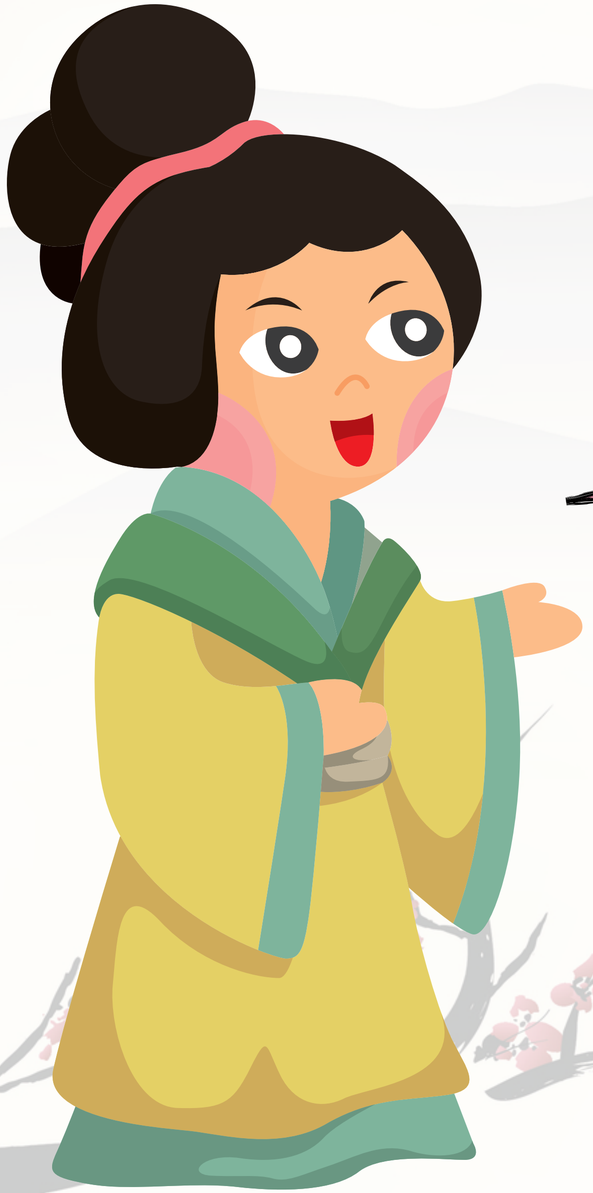

Let's have a look at some more examples of dragons in traditional Chinese art...

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A plate from the Ming Dynasty, created between 1567 and 1572

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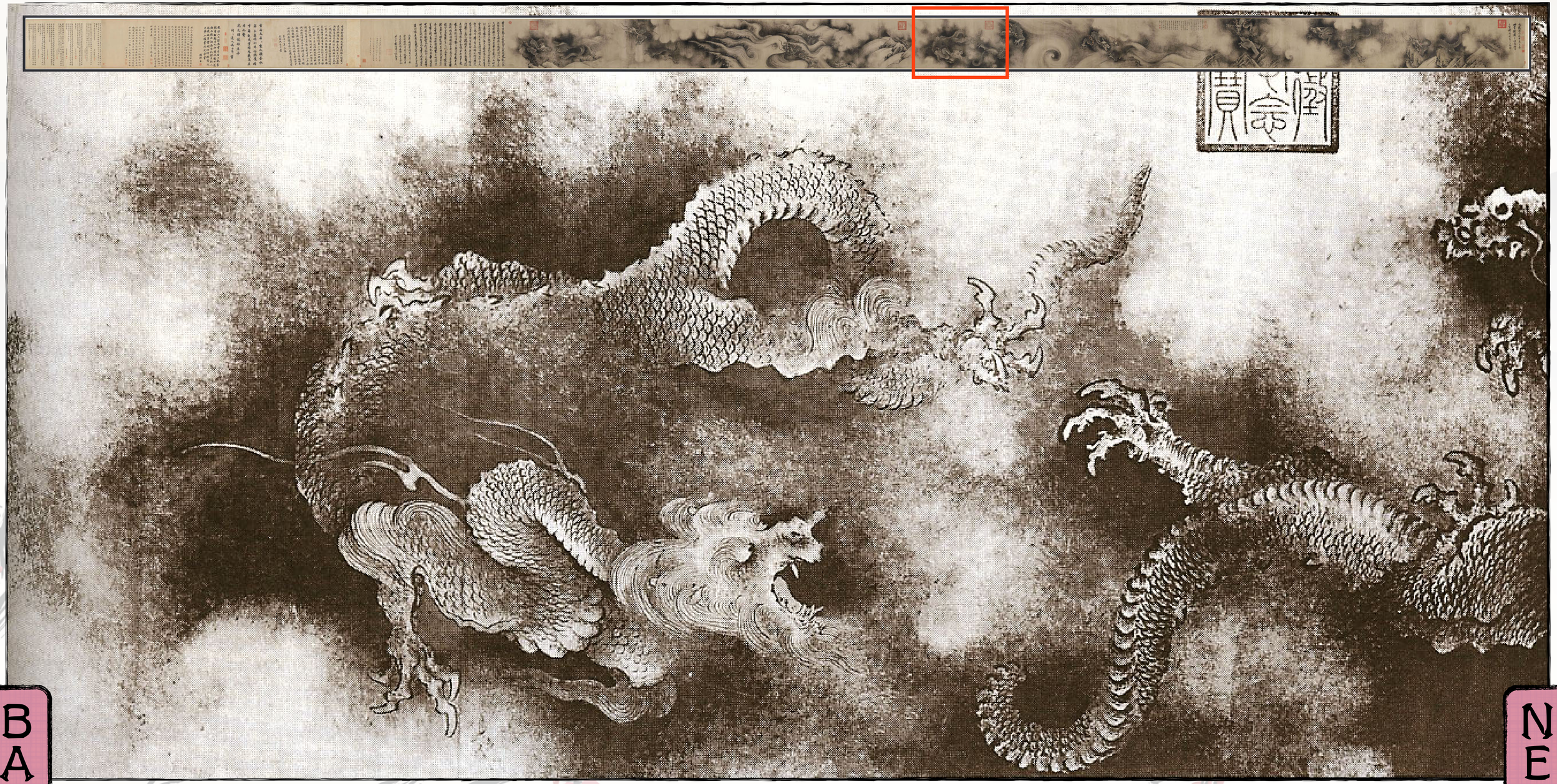

Detail from the Nine Dragons scroll of the Song Dynasty, created in 1244

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A bowl from the Qing Dynasty, created between 1662 and 1722

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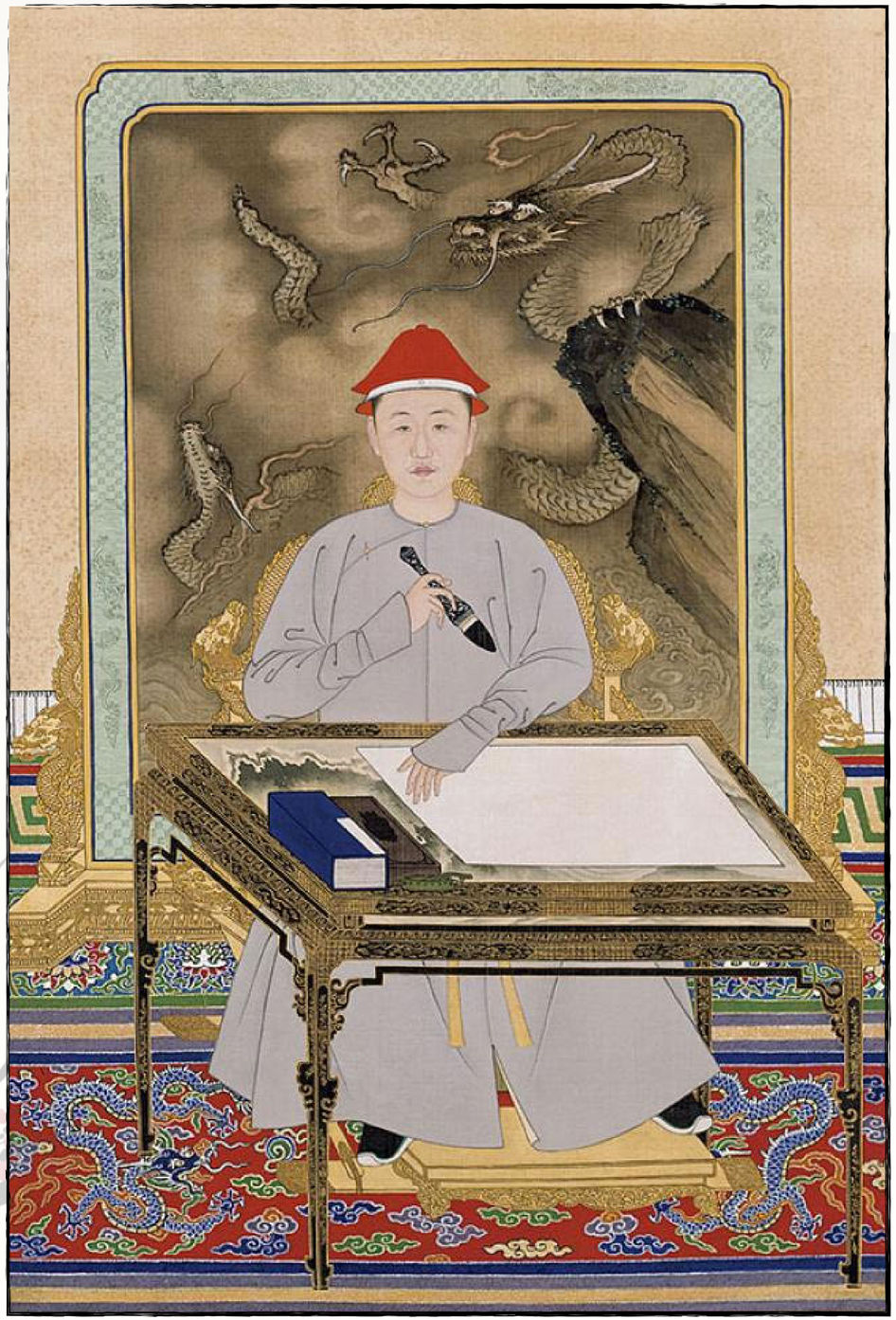
A portrait of the Kangxi Emperor of the Qing Dynasty



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Dragon throne at Mukden Palace, built in 1625
慎德式勿替
念茲戎功用肇造
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Nine-Dragon Wall at the Forbidden City, built in 1771

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Dragons still feature heavily in Chinese culture today, particularly during celebrations such as Chinese New Year.

Have a look at these modern examples of Chinese dragons. How do they compare with some of the other dragons we have looked at today?

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Today you are going to be doing some Chinese dragon artwork of your own!

Click here if you want to see how to create a salt dough dragon!

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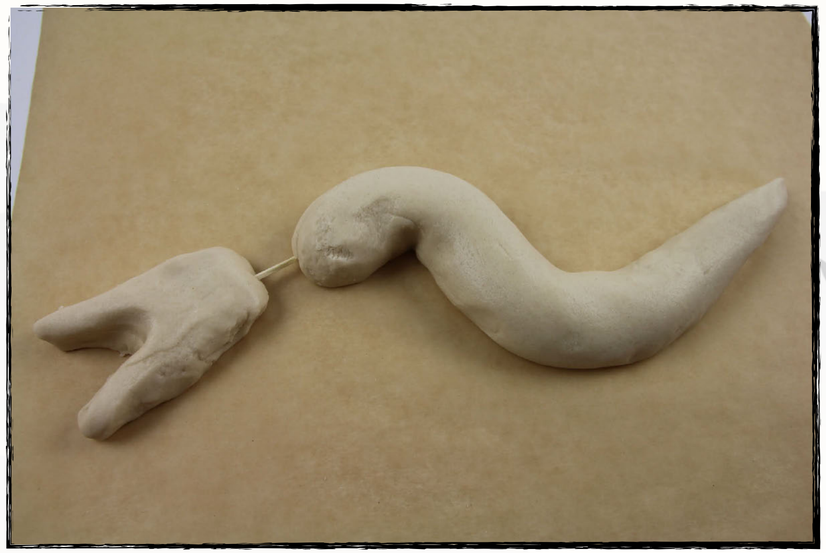
How to make a Chinese dragon using salt dough

Roll out a lump of salt dough and shape it into a wave. Place it on greaseproof paper.



Create the head shape with an open mouth. Attach this to the body using a matchstick.

Smooth the two sections together by dipping your finger in water and rubbing it along the joins.

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Add two legs by rolling two sausages and flatten one end for the foot. Join the leg to the body in the same way you joined the head.

Use a knife-like clay tool to cut slits in the feet. Separate these out to make toes. You can even curl the toes slightly if you want!

Join a tail to the body by rolling a sphere and flattening it, then shape it with the clay tool.

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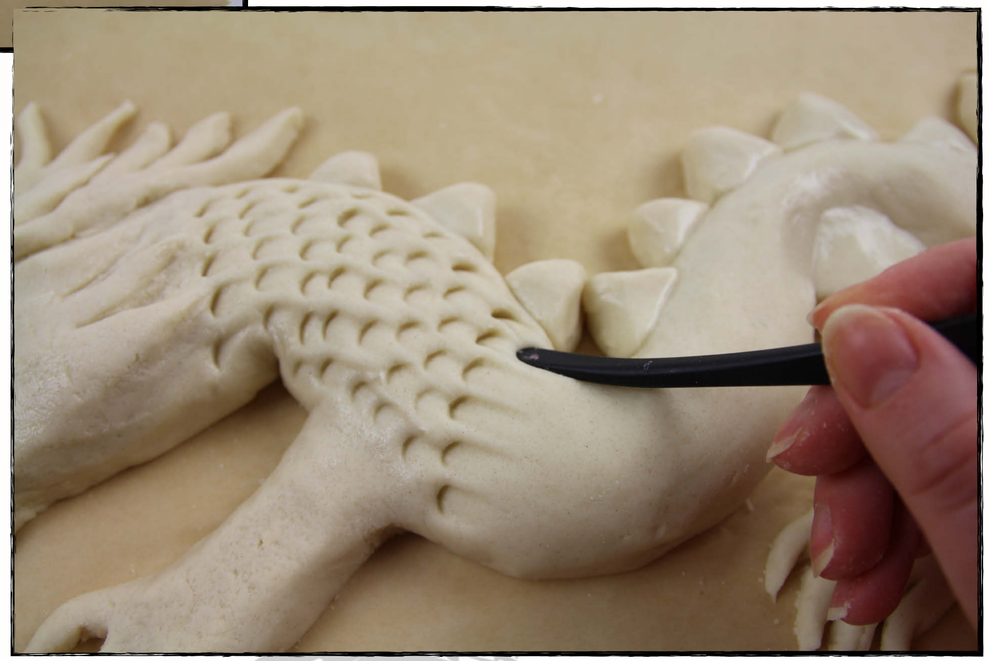
Keep adding features until you are happy with it. Smaller features can be added without matchsticks but just making sure the joins are wet.

Use the end of a paintbrush to create scales by pressing into the body of the dragon.



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Your salt dough dragon is nearly ready to bake! The last thing to do is to insert two paperclips into the top. These will allow your dragon to be hung on the wall once it's finished.

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Of course, there are lots of different ways you could create your dragon. This one has used sequins for scales! It's tricky and time-consuming but the end effect is interesting.

What do you think of this effect? Do you have any other ideas for your salt dough dragon?

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Once your salt dough dragon has cooked and cooled you can paint it!

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This one has been completely spray-painted gold. What do you think?

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Finally, you can thread your dragon and hang it on the wall!

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