

Surf Soup® Tangyuan: A Winter Solstice Soup Story

By Donna Kay Lau

Hardback 978-1-967065-35-6

Paperback : 978-1-967065-34-9

Reader Guide & STEAM Activities

Ages: 5-12

Themes: Family, Food Traditions, Culture, Seasons, Belonging

Subjects: STEAM, Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), Cultural Studies

Reader & Educator Note

Surf Soup® Tangyuan: A Winter Solstice Soup Story invites young readers into a cozy family kitchen where food, culture, and song come together. Inspired by Toisanese traditions, the story introduces Tangyuan—called Tong Yoon in the Toisan dialect—as a symbol of togetherness, seasonal change, and family connection. Through sing-along moments and gentle storytelling, the book encourages cultural awareness, social-emotional learning, and conversations about belonging, tradition, and being “perfectly imperfect.”

Before Reading: Warm-Up Questions

(Encourage curiosity and connection)

What foods remind you of your family?

Have you ever helped cook with someone you love?

What shapes do you see most often in food?

What do you think the Winter Solstice means?

During Reading: Sing & Notice

Invite children to:

Sing along when the songs appear

Look for round shapes (bowls, moons, rice balls)

Notice how the family works together

Watch how the Tangyuan sink, then float

After Reading: Discussion Questions

(Perfect for circle time or small groups)

Why do you think the Tangyuan need to be round?

How does Little Donna feel when her Tong Yoon isn't perfect?

What does Grandma teach about belonging?

Why do families share special foods during holidays?

What is something "imperfect" that makes you special?

STEAM ACTIVITIES

S – Science: Sink or Float

Concept: Density & buoyancy

Materials:

Bowl of water

Small clay balls or play dough

Activity:

Drop a solid ball into water – does it sink?

Gently reshape it and try again

Talk about why Tangyuan sink first, then float when cooked

Question to Ask:

What changes when something floats?

T – Technology: Cooking Tools Exploration

Concept: Tools help us create

Activity:

Look at kitchen tools used in the story (bowl, spoon, pot)

Compare them to modern tools at home

Ask: How do tools help families work together?

E – Engineering: Build a "Perfectly Imperfect" Circle

Concept: Design & problem-solving

Materials:

Paper

Yarn

Tape or glue

Activity:

Try to make a perfect circle using different materials

Compare shapes

Celebrate the “imperfect” ones

Connection:

Just like Tong Yoon, every circle belongs.

A - Art: Tangyuan Print Art

Concept: Pattern & expression

Materials:

Sponges or cotton balls

Paint

Paper

Activity:

Dip round objects into paint

Create floating Tangyuan patterns

Add steam lines and bowls

Extension:

Add wishes inside each circle.

M - Math: Counting & Circles

Concept: Counting, shapes, sequencing

Activity Ideas:

Count how many Tong Yoon float

Sort circles by size

Sequence: sink → cook → float → eat

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Extension

Circle of Belonging Activity

Have children sit in a circle and share:

One wish

One family tradition

One thing that makes them feel included

Discuss how circles help everyone belong.

Cultural Connection

Tangyuan is eaten during the Winter Solstice

Different families use different names and recipes

Food helps families remember who they are, even far from home

Encourage children to ask their families about:

Special foods

Holiday traditions

Names used at home

Family Take-Home Activity

Make Your Own Tong Yoon (No Cooking Needed!)

Roll play dough into circles

Share a wish for each one

Place them in a pretend bowl and sing the song

Closing Reflection

Just like Tong Yoon, families come in many shapes – some perfectly round, some wonderfully imperfect. What matters most is sharing warmth, stories, and time together.

Tangyuan Free Reader & STEM Guide

By Donna Kay Lau – Surf Soup®

Page 1 – About the Story & Teacher Note

Story Overview:

Tangyuan is a heartwarming children's story about family, culture, and the joy of togetherness. Inspired by the traditional Chinese dessert eaten during Lunar New Year, it shows how sharing, caring, and family traditions make every day feel special.

Teacher / Librarian Note:

This guide is designed for classrooms, libraries, or home use. It includes discussion questions and simple STEM activities suitable for children ages 5-10. Activities can be done individually, in small groups, or as part of story time. Use the prompts and activities to encourage observation, creativity, and conversation about culture, tradition, and family.

Discussion Questions:

How do the characters feel when they share tangyuan?

Can you think of a special food or activity your family shares?

Why are traditions important?

What's your favorite part of the story?

Tip: Encourage children to draw, write, or act out their answers.

Page 2 – STEM & Activities

Tangyuan Science & Math Fun!



1 Counting & Measuring

Count tangyuan in the story or make your own.

Measure ingredients if cooking or crafting.

Compare sizes – which is bigger or smaller?

2 Floating & Sinking

Test tangyuan in a bowl of water – do they float or sink?

Try changing water temperature and observe differences.

3 Patterns & Shapes

Shape tangyuan (circle, triangle, square) and create patterns.

Draw your pattern on paper first.

4 Optional Timeline Activity

Write or draw the steps to make tangyuan in order.

Discuss why sequence is important in cooking and in life.

Tips for Teachers / Parents:

Leave space for notes, drawings, or observations.

Adapt activities for small groups, story time, or individual work.

Use as a starting point for conversations about family, culture, and creativity.

About the Author & Surf Soup®:

Donna Kay Lau is an Emmy-honored, Oscar-qualified animator, author, and illustrator with over 32 years of storytelling experience. She created Surf Soup®, a series of children's books and animated stories celebrating kindness, imagination, and cultural heritage.

Website: <https://surfsoup.tv>

Optional Call-to-Action:

“For more free guides, activities, and stories, visit our Offers page!”