

Webquest: Chinese New Year

by Adrian Tennant

Level: Intermediate / Upper intermediate
Target age: Teenagers / Young adults
Time needed: Up to 60 minutes
Key skills: Reading, speaking
Materials: One copy of the worksheet per student

Chinese New Year is celebrated around the world. In many countries, people get to see some of the celebrations and symbols, e.g. parades with a giant dragon and lanterns hanging in the windows of restaurants and houses. But what else do your students know about this festival?

Here are four activities designed to give your students more information about Chinese New Year. There are four sections: a general introduction, traditional food, customs and traditions (including a section on superstitions), and the calendar and Chinese zodiac.

How to do the activities

You could get students to work in pairs or small groups and go through each activity and the questions. However, if you want to make it more fun, you could turn it into a competition, e.g. which pair or group can find the answers the fastest?

You could also do it as a jigsaw activity, either setting each group two or three questions from each activity or dividing the class into four groups and getting each group to do one activity before sharing what they found out with the rest of the class.

Activity 1: Introduction

Key:

1. *the spring festival*
2. *from late January to mid February*
3. *at the end of two weeks of celebrations; on the fifteenth day of the month*
4. *to get rid of bad luck from the previous year*
5. *Red is considered lucky. Gold represents wealth.*
6. *because they usually have money or sweets in them*
7. *so evil spirits are frightened away by their own reflections*
8. *scenes from history or legend*

www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/schools/4_11/cultureclub/learning/chinainfo.shtml

Activity 2: Traditional food

Key:

1. *Rice cake / new Year cake; it is sweet in the north and savoury in the south.*
2. *1. b; 2. a; 3. c*
3. *because it is the best time to finish all the vegetables stored and preserved from the winter / many vegetables have symbolic (lucky) meanings*
4. *their ancestors, for blessings and protection*

chinesenewyear.net/food

Activity 3: Customs and traditions

Key:

1. *F; on New Year's Eve*
2. *T*
3. *F; Unmarried people get money in red packets*
4. *T*
5. *T*
6. *F; just two people perform the lion dance*
7. *F; mandarin oranges*
8. *F; People visit the temple on the third day of New Year.*

theculturetrip.com/asia/china/articles/10-chinese-new-year-traditions

There are several other customs, traditions and superstitions listed in the website above. This is a good opportunity for students to discuss which they found most surprising and to compare these customs to customs, traditions and superstitions in their own countries.

Activity 4: The calendar and zodiac signs

Key:

1. *It is a combination of both.*
2. *Twelve in normal years and thirteen in leap years*
3. *by a system of names that is repeated every sixty years*
4. *There was a mistake in the calculations so the leap month will happen at a different point in the year.*
5. *boar; rat*

www.webexhibits.org/calendars/calendar-chinese.html

Students visit www.topmarks.co.uk/ChineseNewYear/Zodiac and submit their birthdays to find out what their zodiac animal is. Students should find out about their animal's characteristics and discuss with a partner to decide whether or not the descriptions fit their own character.