

## Chinese New Year – Reading Comprehension

Chinese New Year, also known as the Spring Festival, is the most important and oldest celebration in the Chinese calendar. The spring festival celebrates the start of the new agricultural season, and each New Year is named after an animal.

1. Which animal is this year named after?
2. Which animal was the year you were born in named after?
3. Why do you think the following things are important during Chinese New Year celebrations?

### Chinese Zodiac – The Year of the.....

Rat – 1948, 1960, 1972, 1984, 1996, 2008

Ox – 1949, 1961, 1973, 1985, 1997, 2009

Tiger – 1950, 1962, 1974, 1986, 1998, 2010

Rabbit – 1951, 1963, 1975, 1987, 1999, 2011

Dragon – 1952, 1964, 1976, 1988, 2000, 2012

Snake – 1953, 1965, 1977, 1989, 2001, 2013

Horse – 1954, 1966, 1978, 1990, 2002, 2014

Goat – 1955, 1967, 1979, 1991, 2003, 2015

Monkey – 1956, 1968, 1980, 1992, 2004, 2016

Rooster – 1957, 1969, 1981, 1993, 2005, 2017

Dog – 1958, 1970, 1982, 1994, 2006, 2018

Pig – 1959, 1971, 1983, 1995, 2007, 2019

the moon

brooms 

rice pudding

the colour red

envelopes

dragons



### Text A

New Year festivities start on the first day of the lunar month and continue until the fifteenth day of that month, when the moon is at its brightest. The first week is celebrated with visits to friends and family, as well as enjoying many special traditions to bring people good luck.

Before the start of the festivities, Chinese people clean their houses to sweep away any bad luck; then, on New Year's Eve, all brooms, dustpans and brushes are put away so that good luck cannot be swept away. Houses are decorated with rolls of paper containing good luck phrases such as 'happiness' and 'good fortune'.

On New Year's Eve, families gather together to eat a large traditional meal. This includes different types of food depending on which region of China people come from. For example, in the north, people eat a dish called *jiaozi*, which is a steamed dumpling, and in the far south they eat *nian gao*, which is a sticky, sweet rice pudding.

### Text B

People usually stay up until midnight on New Year's Eve setting off fireworks which are believed to frighten away evil spirits. Similarly, as red symbolises fire and is also thought to scare away evil spirits, people dress head to foot in new red clothing. On New Year's Day, children wake up to find a red envelope filled with money and sweets under their pillow.

Chinese New Year comes to an end with the Lantern Festival. The lanterns, which symbolise light, are often hand painted with scenes from history or legend, or have puzzles on them, which families try to solve together. People hang glowing lanterns in the windows of their houses and carry lanterns in the street festivities, under the light of the full moon.

Dragon dances often take place in the street with a dragon made of paper, silk and bamboo held up by young men dancing and guiding it around. Dragons used in dragon dances vary in length from a few metres to up to 100m long; longer dragons are thought to bring people more luck than shorter ones.

## Reading Comprehension

Answer these questions with a partner:

1. What does the Spring Festival celebrate?
2. When do the festivities take place?
3. How is the first week celebrated?
4. What activity do Chinese people do before the festival begins?
5. Why is it a tradition to put all brooms, dustpans and brushes away?
6. Who traditionally eats *nian gao* on New Year's Eve?
7. Why is it customary to set off fireworks?
8. What two traditions involve the colour red?
9. Which festival is at the end of the Chinese New Year festivities?
10. What is the dragon in the dragon dance often made of?

## Vocabulary

Complete the words from the text.

1. Families g\_\_\_\_\_ t\_\_\_\_\_ to eat a traditional meal. (meet)
2. People hang l\_\_\_\_\_ in windows. (lamps)
3. Dragon dances t\_\_\_\_ p\_\_\_\_\_ in the street. (happen)
4. People s\_\_ o\_\_ fireworks. (launch)
5. The colour red s\_\_\_\_\_ a\_\_\_\_ evil spirits. (frighten)
6. Dragons b\_\_\_\_\_ l\_\_\_\_\_. (are lucky)
7. New Year f\_\_\_\_\_ start on the first day of the lunar month. (celebrations)
8. Red s\_\_\_\_\_ fire. (is a symbol of)

## Discussion

**Would you like to experience Chinese New Year? Which Chinese New Year traditions do you like? Why do you like them?**

**What are the differences and similarities between how you celebrate New Year, and how the Chinese celebrate New Year?**

This lesson is intended for an Intermediate level class but can be used with lower levels. Based on the theme of Chinese New Year, this lesson aims to practise reading skills in a communicative way, while also focusing on some key vocabulary of festivities. Students are then encouraged to react to the content of the text, and compare Chinese New Year traditions to their own traditions.

### Teacher notes

1. Introduce the topic by writing the topic Chinese New Year on the board. Set a 2 minute time limit and ask students to brainstorm vocabulary connected to the theme; write a selection of words/phrases on the board to facilitate comprehension.
2. Ask if students know under which Chinese zodiac sign they were born. In pairs, students should list as many of the animals in the Chinese zodiac as possible and compare with another pair. Nominate a student to compile the list on the board on behalf of the class; help students if required at this stage.
3. Students read the short introduction to the text, look at the box of zodiac signs / years and answer questions 1 and 2 in pairs. Elicit some answers as whole class feedback.
4. Pre-reading task (question 3). Check students know the vocabulary in the box (with the word 'broom' you could elicit the word 'sweep' too), and in small groups, students talk about why they think these things are important in Chinese New Year celebrations.
5. Put students in pairs. Student 'A' reads Text A, and Student 'B' reads Text B. The first time they read their text, they can find which objects from question 3 appear in their text, and check if their predictions about why those objects were important were right.
6. For higher level students, the second time they read their text they should underline the information about Chinese New Year traditions, in order to tell their partner about them afterwards. After they have swapped information with their partner about the traditions in their text, higher level students can then answer the comprehension questions - from memory if possible.

For students who need more support, they can answer the relevant comprehension questions for the text they have read\* first and then compare answers with another 'A' or 'B' partner. After answering the questions about their own text, they can pair up with a partner who read the other text, and swap information about the traditions they have read about. They can then answer the remaining comprehension questions with their partner's help. (\*Text A – comprehension questions 2-6, Text B – questions 7-10. The answer to question 1 is in the introductory paragraph at the top of the page). Conduct whole class feedback to elicit answers.

7. Vocabulary task – higher level students can try to complete the words without looking at the text, or by only consulting it when necessary. Students who need more support can consult the text for each item. Get students to do this in pairs, or if they prefer to do it individually, they can compare their answers with a partner after. Fast-finishers can pair up and test each other's memory of the vocabulary.
8. Put students in new groups, and give them ten minutes to talk about the discussion questions. Encourage them to use the new vocabulary. When students are talking, circulate and note down some sentences with errors that you hear the students saying. After the discussion task, write the sentences on the board and get students in pairs to correct the errors. Then elicit corrections as a whole class.