

Were you born in the Year of the Tiger, the Rabbit, or maybe the Dragon? Read on to find out more about Lunar New Year and how it is celebrated in some places in Asia.

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

1. lunar
2. an emperor
3. to kneel
4. to bow
5. to prosper
6. a surplus
7. fortune
8. a bang

Definition

- a. a ruler of an empire
- b. to bend your body forward, out of respect
- c. an amount that is more than you need
- d. relating to the moon
- e. chance and the way it affects your life
- f. a sudden very loud noise
- g. to be successful, especially with money
- h. to touch your knees to the ground

Lunar New Year

The lunar calendar is based on the cycles of the moon, so the date of Lunar New Year is different each year. In China and in many other places, like Vietnam, Singapore and Korea, Lunar New Year is usually celebrated in January or February, and it's a very important festival.

Lunar New Year animals

Each year is named after one of 12 animals. There is a traditional story about how the animals were chosen. The Jade Emperor – an important god in traditional Chinese religions – wanted to find a way to measure time. He decided to have a race for all the animals in the country. Only 12 animals actually managed to get to the race, and the Emperor rewarded them by naming the 12 years of the lunar calendar after them. The first to finish was the rat, so the first year is the Year of the Rat. The other eleven, in order, were the ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat, monkey, rooster, dog and pig. In many countries, the animals are the same as these, but in some places they are a bit different.

A family celebration

Different places celebrate in slightly different ways, but Lunar New Year is very much a family celebration everywhere. The younger generation greet their parents and grandparents with

good wishes for the year ahead and show their respect for the older generation. In Korea this is called *Sebae*. The young people kneel on the ground and bow deeply.

Older members of the family give younger ones gifts of money, traditionally in small packets. Red packets are used in China and Vietnam, as red is a lucky colour. Nowadays, many people send money electronically too. It is lucky to send money in certain amounts, for example using the number eight, which in Chinese sounds like the word 'prosper'.

Traditional food

Traditional foods which are eaten at Lunar New Year often have a special meaning. For example, in China, many people eat fish dishes because the Chinese word for 'fish' sounds similar to 'surplus', meaning you will have more than enough of everything you need.

In Korea, people have a special soup. Thin pieces of rice cake are boiled in a clear soup with slices of beef and vegetables. The rice cake pieces are round and may represent coins and money.

A traditional Vietnamese food is a square rice cake wrapped in leaves. It's stuffed with pork and vegetables and takes many hours to prepare, so many people buy the cake instead of making it.

Other traditions

There are many other Lunar New Year traditions. For example, in Vietnam, people believe that the first person to enter their home in the New Year will decide their fortune for the year ahead. They are careful to invite someone who is kind, well behaved and successful.

In Korea, families often play traditional board games together, such as *Yunnori*. In this game, teams take turns throwing four specially shaped sticks into the air. They move around the board depending on how the sticks fall.

In China, many people have firecrackers, which burn and make a loud bang. They watch street performances, where acrobatic dancers dress up as a lion or a dragon. They dance, accompanied by music and drums.

People celebrate Lunar New Year in many different ways, but all the celebrations are about wishing everyone luck, happiness and prosperity for the year ahead. Happy Lunar New Year!

Tasks

Task 1

Circle the best answer.

1. The date of Lunar New Year is _____.
 - a. based on the sun
 - b. the same every year
 - c. different each year
2. A traditional story explains that the Jade Emperor had a race with animals because he wanted to _____.
 - a. choose his favourite animal
 - b. find a way to measure time
 - c. find out which animal was the fastest
3. At Lunar New Year, people bow to their _____.
 - a. parents and grandparents
 - b. children
 - c. friends
4. In China, a lucky number is _____.
 - a. six
 - b. eight
 - c. ten
5. In China, fish is a lucky food because the word 'fish' sounds like the word for _____.
 - a. happiness
 - b. money
 - c. surplus
6. A square rice cake with pork and vegetables is a traditional food for New Year in _____.
 - a. China
 - b. Korea
 - c. Vietnam
7. In Vietnam, a tradition says that the first person to enter your home in the New Year _____ for the year ahead.
 - a. gives you money
 - b. brings you food
 - c. decides your fortune
8. In Korea, families traditionally play _____ at New Year.
 - a. board games
 - b. card games
 - c. drums and music

Task 2

Complete the sentences with words from the box.

prosper

kneel

invite

take

show

represent

send

make

1. Younger generations their respect for their parents and grandparents.
2. They on the ground and bow to the older generation.
3. At New Year, people sometimes money electronically.
4. In Chinese, the word 'eight' sounds like the word '.....'.
5. The round rice cake pieces in soup may coins and money.
6. In the game *Yunnori*, teams turns throwing sticks.
7. In Vietnam, people someone kind and successful to their home for good luck.
8. Firecrackers burn and a loud bang.

Discussion

Do you celebrate Lunar New Year? When and how is New Year celebrated where you live?

Answers

Preparation task

1. d
2. a
3. h
4. b
5. g
6. c
7. e
8. f

Task 1

1. c
2. b
3. a
4. b
5. c
6. c
7. c
8. a

Task 2

1. show
2. kneel
3. send
4. prosper
5. represent
6. take
7. invite
8. make