

# Chinese New Year

## What is Chinese New Year?

Chinese New Year is celebrated every year by millions of Chinese people. In addition, it has now become a very popular event for people of all cultures and races. Many communities flock to their local Chinatown to witness the joyful festivities and it is the longest and most important holiday for a lot of Asian countries, such as China, Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia.

Chinese New Year doesn't happen on the same day as the Western New Year's Day. This is because it is worked out according to the first day of the Chinese Lunar calendar, which means the year is determined by the movements of the sun and moon. The celebration falls between 21<sup>st</sup> January and the 19<sup>th</sup> February. In 2021, Chinese New Year falls on Friday 12th February.

## Celebrations

There are certain traditions that are very likely to occur at a Chinese New Year celebration. Here are just a few:

**Red Envelopes:** The colour red is very lucky to the Chinese as it symbolises fortune, good luck and joy. People give each other money in small, decorated red envelopes. It is usually older people who give them to the young in amounts of even numbers.

**Firecrackers:** Firecrackers are traditionally made of lots of red paper rolls strung together. When lit, they explode very quickly, one after the other, and create loud popping noises as well as a cloud of red paper shards in the air. However, they are quite dangerous and have been banned in a lot of countries, except for some rural villages in China.

**Lion and Dragon Dances:** These dances are often performed by skilled acrobats under the lion and dragon costumes. The dance is accompanied by loud music consisting of drums and cymbals to chase away the evil spirits and bad luck. The dragon dance is often the highlight of a parade in a Chinatown and people flock to see the magnificent show!

**Spring Cleaning and Debt:** It is believed that spring cleaning your home will sweep away the bad fortune of the old year and any debts should be settled before the new one.

**Food and Families:** Food is quite symbolic at this time of year. Chicken and prawns represent happiness whilst noodles represent long life. Dumplings are also eaten. Like Christmas, friends and family all gather together to eat and enjoy each other's company.

## Legends

It is said that Chinese New Year started in ancient times, when the Chinese people were hounded by a mythical beast called the 'Nian'. The Nian would visit every New Year's day to gobble up all their livestock, crops and even people!

Scared and tormented, the villagers left food outside their houses for the Nian, in the hope that it would leave them be once it had been fed.

One day, the villagers noticed that the Nian was afraid of a small child wearing the colour red. From that day on, red lanterns, firecrackers and scrolls were used to frighten the Nian away and it never came back!

The Chinese Zodiac and its 12 animals all link to certain years of the Lunar calendar. Last year (2020) was the year of the rat, 2021 is the year of the ox and 2022 will be the year of the tiger.

These animals all came to be ranked by a legendary race they all took part in by crossing a river. The rat won the race through trickery and people who are born in the year of the rat are said to be very cunning.

From first to last, the animals finished in this order: rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat, monkey, rooster, dog and pig.

## Your Celebrations

It is very likely that your local community will be holding some sort of celebration for Chinese New Year. Have you ever watched a dragon dance? If not, do you think you will this year?



# Comprehension

1. Name two countries where Chinese New Year is celebrated?

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2. What day of the week is Chinese New Year in 2021? Tick one.

- ☐ Monday
- ☐ Friday
- ☐ Wednesday
- ☐ Thursday

3. Look at the **Celebrations** section.

**Find** and **copy one** word which means the same as **talented**.

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4. Why is it a popular tradition to tidy your home for Chinese New Year?

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5. In your own words, explain the legend of how Chinese New Year began.

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6. According to the Chinese Zodiac, 2021 is the year of the...? Tick one.

- ☐ dragon
- ☐ pig
- ☐ dog
- ☐ ox

7. Why is Chinese New Year not on the same day as the Western New Year? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

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8. Choose two Chinese New Year traditions and explain how they are symbolic.

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9. Would you like to experience Chinese New Year? Why?

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# Answers

1. Name two countries where Chinese New Year is celebrated?  
**Accept any two of China, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia.**
2. What day of the week is Chinese New Year in 2021? Tick one.
  - ☐ Monday
  - ☒ **Friday**
  - ☐ Wednesday
  - ☐ Thursday
3. Look at the **Celebrations** section.  
**Find and copy one word which means the same as talented. skilled**
4. Why is it a popular tradition to tidy your home for Chinese New Year?  
**In Chinese tradition, it is believed that cleaning your home for New Year will sweep away any bad fortune of the previous year.**
5. In your own words, explain the legend of how Chinese New Year began.  
**Pupils' own responses, such as 'According to Chinese legend, a village was attacked by a monster called the Nian, which ate their food, livestock and people. The villagers left food out for it but noticed that it was scared of a child wearing red. They then used red lanterns, scrolls and firecrackers to scare away the Nian and it never returned.'**
6. According to the Chinese Zodiac, 2021 is the year of the...? Tick one.
  - ☐ dragon
  - ☐ pig
  - ☐ dog
  - ☒ **ox**
7. Why is Chinese New Year not on the same day as the Western New Year? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.  
**Pupils' own responses, such as 'Chinese New Year is not on the same day as the Western New Year's Day because it is worked out according to the first day of the Chinese Lunar calendar. This means the year is determined by the movements of the sun and moon.'**
8. Choose two Chinese New Year traditions and explain how they are symbolic.  
**Any two from:**
  - **Giving red envelopes containing money – symbolises good luck, fortune and joy.**
  - **Lion and dragon dances – the music is to scare away any evil spirits and bad luck.**
  - **Spring cleaning your home – gets rid of any bad fortune from the previous year.**
  - **Food – chicken and prawns represent happiness and noodles represent long life.**
9. Would you like to experience Chinese New Year? Why?  
**Pupils' own responses, such as 'I would like to experience Chinese New Year because it sounds exciting and colourful. I would particularly like to see the lion and dragon dances in a parade as there is loud music and the text says it is 'magnificent' to see.'**