

Were you born in the year of the Dog, the Monkey or maybe the Rooster? 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. a cycle
2. an emperor
3. to reward
4. respect
5. to kneel
6. to bow
7. to prosper
8. fortune

Definition

- a. to give something to someone for their good work or behaviour
- b. to be successful and become rich
- c. to rest your body on your knees
- d. what will happen to you
- e. a group of events that happen in an order and are often repeated
- f. to bend forward the top of your body to show respect
- g. a male ruler or king
- h. admiration for someone

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. However, it is usually in January or February. As well as being celebrated in China, Lunar New Year is also an important festival in many other places, including Vietnam, Singapore and Korea.

Each year is named after one of 12 animals. A traditional story explains how this came to be. One day, the Emperor decided to have a race for all the animals in the country. Unfortunately, only 12 animals actually managed to get to the race. 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 named after him. The other eleven, in order, were the ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat, monkey, rooster, dog and pig.

A family celebration

Different places celebrate in slightly different ways, but Lunar New Year is very much a family celebration wherever it takes place. 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 cash presents, 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 another meaning. For example, in China, many people eat fish dishes because the Chinese word for 'fish' sounds similar to 'surplus', meaning you will have plenty.

In Korea, people serve 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. It is said that eating this soup at New Year makes you one year older. People joke that if you have two bowls of soup, you'll be two years older!

A traditional Vietnamese food is 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 it in turn to throw 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 the very best for the year ahead. What do you wish for next year?

Tasks

Task 1

Are the sentences true or false?

	Answer	
1. The date of the lunar new year changes every year.	True	False
2. In the story, all the animals in the country joined the Emperor's race.	True	False
3. Young people in Korea give their parents money.	True	False
4. In China, it would be unlucky to give someone 88 dollars.	True	False
5. Eating rice cake soup is a way of showing you are now a year older.	True	False
6. In Korea, the round shape of the rice cakes does not have any special meaning.	True	False
7. Street performers in China may dress up as a dragon or tiger.	True	False
8. All the Lunar New Year celebrations are about hoping for a good year ahead.	True	False

Task 2

Where do people do these things to celebrate Lunar New Year? Circle the correct answer.

- People invite someone special to visit their house.
 - China
 - Korea
 - Vietnam
- People use firecrackers.
 - China
 - Korea
 - Vietnam
- People eat a square rice cake.
 - China
 - Korea
 - Vietnam
- People play a game called *yunnori*.
 - China
 - Korea
 - Vietnam
- People think it is lucky to eat fish.
 - China
 - Korea
 - Vietnam
- Young family members bow deeply to older ones.
 - China
 - Korea
 - Vietnam

Discussion

What do you wish for the new year?

Answers

Preparation task

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

Task 1

1. True
2. False
3. False
4. False
5. True
6. False
7. False
8. True

Task 2

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