

Really Good Activity Guide™

Happy New Year Poster

Congratulations on your purchase of the Really Good Stuff® Happy New Year Poster. This poster is a beautiful way to help children understand, appreciate, and celebrate a special Asian holiday. On the front of the poster Chinese messages spell out Happy New Year, Good Luck, and Good Health, with the 12 animals of the zodiac parading around the border. Read on to discover an informative overview of this multicultural celebration, plus related activities for children to enjoy.

Background Information

Did you know the Chinese use real bells to ring out the old year and ring in the new? They also celebrate the New Year with exploding firecrackers, dancing dragons and feasts of treats and sweets. The Lunar New Year falls on the first day of the first moon (lunar month). The Chinese Lunar Calendar is the longest known record in history. It dates from 2600 BC and is based on the cycles of the moon. Because China was largely agricultural, the movement of the solar system dictated the country's cycles and celebrations.

Each year in the Chinese Lunar Calendar is named after one of 12 different animals of the Chinese zodiac. Each animal is thought to possess a different set of characteristics. These animals appear in the sky as star constellations. Some Chinese believe that the animal who rules the year you were born has great power in your life and you embody some of your animal's characteristics.

Rat	1936	1948	1960	1972	1984	1996	2008
Ox	1937	1949	1961	1973	1985	1997	2009
Tiger	1938	1950	1962	1974	1986	1998	2010
Rabbit	1939	1951	1963	1975	1987	1999	2011
Dragon	1940	1952	1964	1976	1988	2000	2012
Snake	1941	1953	1965	1977	1989	2001	2013
Horse	1942	1954	1966	1978	1990	2002	2014
Sheep	1943	1955	1967	1979	1991	2003	2015
Monkey	1944	1956	1968	1980	1992	2004	2016
Rooster	1945	1957	1969	1981	1993	2005	2017
Dog	1946	1958	1970	1982	1994	2006	2018
Boar	1947	1959	1971	1983	1995	2007	2019

Despite the fact that in 1912 the Republic of China adopted the Gregorian calendar, the country and surrounding Asian countries continue to celebrate the traditional observances according to the lunar calendar. The festivities commence on the first full moon of the New Year and continue for 15 days.

Chinese New Year is the single most important holiday in that country. It's a time for family gatherings, feasting, and respecting ancestors and elders. Also, it is believed that what people do and how they act during the period will determine their fate for the rest of the year. So it is important that people eat the right foods, such as black moss seaweed for wealth, and dried bean curd for wealth and happiness. New Year goodies are prepared in advance. It is traditional for



the mother of the household to steam huge puddings such as White Radish Pudding, Purple Taro Pudding (made from turnips), Translucent Water Chestnut Pudding, and New Year's Pudding (made from rice flour and sugar). Other favorite treats are deep-fried food such as sesame-coated round dumplings and dough balls with sweet stuffings. The family feast is also commonly celebrated with air-dried pork and duck, and Chinese duck-liver sausage steamed with starchy arrowhead roots and cut into slices.

On New Year's Day, the sound of firecrackers is heard everywhere. Red papers printed with messages are pasted around the home to welcome abundance and good luck. A sign reading "bliss" is pasted upside down above the center of the door. Children clamor for red envelopes filled with money.

The second day of the first lunar month is the "opening" day of the New Year. Martial artists perform lion dances in the street. Shops hang prizes in red envelopes tied together with green lettuce leaves and a huge string of large, red firecrackers. Throughout the celebration, everyone says "gung hee fat choy" (congratulations for striking it rich) or "gung hee" (congratulations) to each other.

Most Westerners are aware of these Chinese New Year customs. But what Westerners may not realize is that many of China's neighboring countries have similar celebrations related to the Lunar New Year. Because many countries interpret the lunar calendar differently or use the solar system to guide celebrations, the dates of festivities may vary as well. No matter what the country, religion, or race, New Year's Day is a time for family reunions, gatherings, and reflection on the importance of the bonding of generations. Here is how similar celebrations take shape in other places on the map:

Korea: Koreans celebrate the lunar New Year, or Sol, with quiet family time, ancestor worship, and lots of rich food. In addition to the food, Sol is observed by some Koreans by dressing in traditional dress, passing out envelopes of money to children, and even taking the day off from work.

Thailand: In Thailand, water and string are important elements for welcoming the Thai New Year, Songkran. During

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the four days of festivities (in mid-April), people sprinkle each other with water scented with jasmine petals to symbolize cleansing and renewal. People also recite blessings of kindness while tying strings around each other's wrists. These strings are left in place until they fall off.

India: The holiday of Diwali falls in late October or early November. Today, the festival is celebrated according to regional customs. Highlights include visiting loved ones and exchanging gifts of homemade sweets. Children light the *diyas* (oil lamps) that have been placed on each windowsill in the home and on flat rooftops. Others set off fireworks and pass out small amounts of money to everyone present at the celebration. Diwali is observed nationally. It is the most widely celebrated festival on the Hindu calendar, celebrating the bonds of family and close friends.

Cambodia: The New Year in Cambodia is a spiritual celebration. During the three days of *chaul chnam thmey*, or the New Year celebration, people go to the temple where they pray, play and feast. Games include old favorites like a *jhun* (scarf tossing) and *teanh proat* (tug-of-war). In the evening, the community works together to build a sand mountain in the temple. Cambodians believe that they will have as much happiness and health as there are grains of sand on the mountain.

Japan: The Japanese celebrate New Year on January 1st. Because Japan adopted the solar calendar system in the late 19th century, it abandoned the lunar system that had been used for centuries. So, for Japan, New Year's Day, or *Gantan*, comes on January 1st, the same day it comes for most countries outside of Asia. But still, Japan celebrates with much color and tradition. Buddhist temples ring their bells 108 times shortly before midnight on New Year's Eve. The rings represent the hardships and sorrows of the past year. After that, the New Year begins. The entire celebration actually starts during the last few days of December and through the first few days of January and lasts for five to six days. Most stores and offices close during this period. Japanese take time off from work to clean their homes to make way for the New Year. A sign of modern times is that the meals that took days to prepare in the home can now be purchased prepared in the stores. But the celebration time still revolves around family.

Singapore: In Singapore, where about 50 percent of the population is Chinese, the New Year holiday lasts for three days, but Singaporeans often take the entire week off from work to celebrate, visiting relatives and friends. People thoroughly clean their homes and buy new clothes to wear. The Chinese New Year's Eve feast doubles as a family reunion. As in China, meals are filled with dishes that are symbols of good luck. Children receive envelopes of money which they must tuck under their pillows until the 15th day of the New Year. If they do not peek, they believe they will have good luck.

Vietnam: The Vietnamese ring in the New Year celebration, known as *Tet Nguyen Dan*, with plenty of food, fun and smiling faces. They believe that how you behave on the first three days of the Lunar New Year will set the tone for the rest of the year. So, everyone begins the New Year with good moods, good foods such as ripe fruits and delicate rice cakes, and of course, red envelopes stuffed with cash.

Classroom Activities

• Alphabet Awareness

Point out to children that the Chinese symbols on the front of the poster spell out the messages Happy New Year, Good Luck, and Good Health. Guide them to understand that each character stands for an entire word. Look together at other Chinese characters. (*Tip:* Take-out menus from a Chinese restaurant can provide some symbols for children to explore.) Have children compare and contrast these symbols with the letters in our alphabet. This website (http://www.logoi.com/notes/chinese_alphabet.html) explains in depth how Chinese characters each stand for a concept and, although they serve as a method of communication, they are not synonymous with our alphabet, which is a phonetic system of sounds and symbols. Many other links to understanding Chinese writing are also featured on this site.

• Globe Trotting

Help children learn more about how each country's customs and celebrations are the same and how they are different. Begin by locating each country on a map or globe. Then use books or an Internet search to have students research each location. Have children also compare and contrast multicultural holiday celebrations in this country to see how they are similar and how they are different according to different criteria, such as length of time celebrated, gifts exchanged, foods consumed, etc.

• Lunar Calendar Explorations

Offer children a copy of the New Year Calendar that features the 12 animals of the zodiac. Challenge them to each research the calendar to find out the following information:
The year they were born
The animal that ruled the year they were born
The beliefs or traits linked with each animal
(*Tip:* Invite students to use this website [<http://www.c-c-c.org/chineseculture/zodiac/zodiac.html>] to learn more about each animal's traits and characteristics.)

• Friendship Bracelets

Divide children into partners. Have each partner secretly wish a kind wish for each other as they tie a thread around each other's wrist to symbolize the wrist strings of Thailand. When the strings fall off, have each partner reveal his or her wish to see if it came true.