

Happy Chinese New Year from the Maxwell Museum!

Chinese New Year

People celebrate with sweet food and lively lion dances. People will often set off fireworks as well and light up the sky to ring in a new year full of new beginnings. In China it is referred to as Spring festival or *chūnjié* because it also marks the coming of the spring season. In the past, it meant that it was time to start planting food crops. Each year, the holiday culminates in the Lantern Festival. During this time, people decorate their homes with colorful lanterns and red banners.



The Story of Chinese New Year:

Chinese New Year is celebrated as the beginning of spring and the New Year but is also is celebrated according to an ancient legend. According to legend, a beast named Nian would attack the people of the village each year and cause chaos and fear. Nian is also the Chinese character for year and like his name would suggest, every year, on the lunisolar new year, he would come to earth and with his sharp teeth, frighten people and take their livestock.

Everyone was so afraid of the beast that they decided to leave and hide in the mountains. One day an old beggar came to the village seeking shelter. He found the village quiet and empty except for one house. It was the house of an old woman who was preparing food for her husband. Because her husband was sick, she explained she could not go to the mountains. She invited the beggar in to share their meal with them. He asked why everyone was gone and she told him of the terror Nian caused.

The beggar quickly responded that he knew exactly how to keep the beast away. He explained that the great Nian was frightened by loud noises and flashy lights. Nian, is also afraid of the color red. The beggar hung up some red banners and made firework in a cane of bamboo. When Nian arrived, he was so startled by the brilliant red cloth and paper, and he jumped at the light and sound of the firework. Before getting the chance to attack like he normally would, Nian turned tail and



did not come back.

The beggar also disappeared into the night. His knowledge and wisdom helped the people of the village from then on to no longer hide in fear. Instead people lit up the night sky with fireworks and adorned houses in bright red colors.

Still today, people practice the tradition of hanging red decorations on their homes and streets and wearing red and enjoying fire works displays.

You might recognize Nian from the traditional lion dances performed that depict the legend of driving Nian away.



Fun Fact: Many historians believe that fireworks originated in China! These early fireworks were packed into rolls of paper and bamboo and when lit, would make many small explosions. While they weren't fancy colors and shapes like we know now, they were still used as a way to celebrate joyous occasions and ward off evil spirits and Nian, the beast that would come each year.

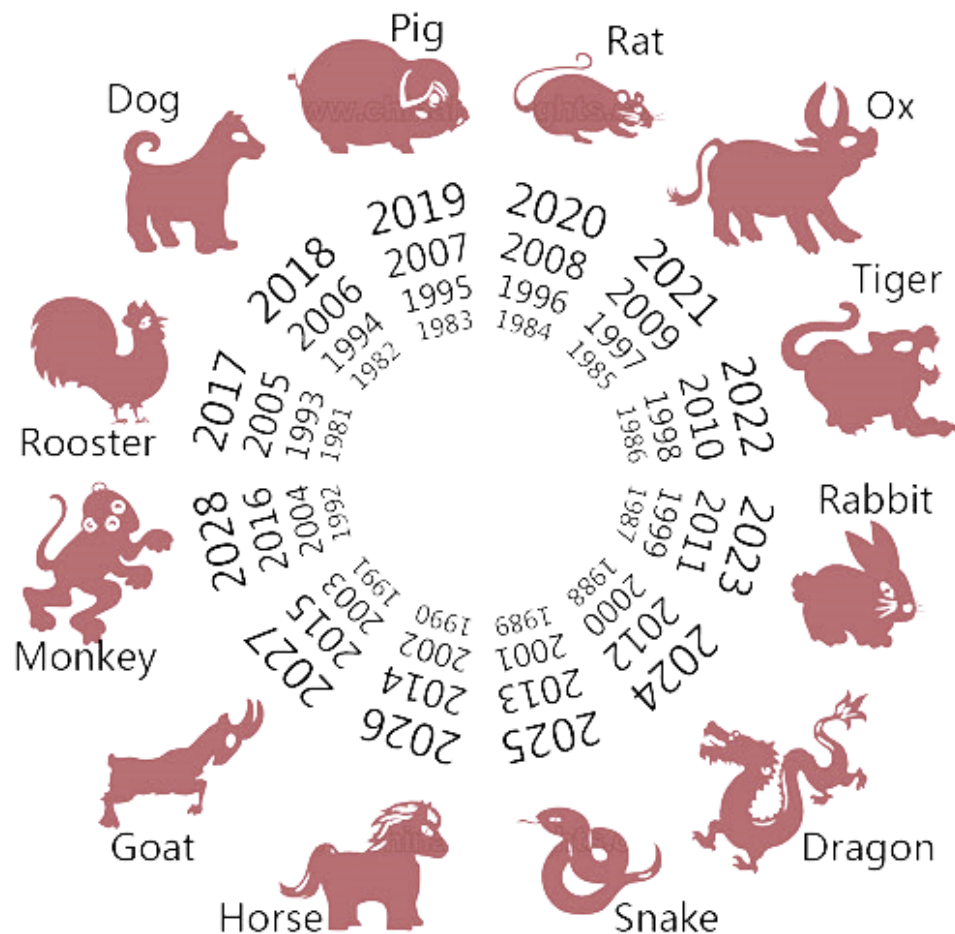


This Chinese New Year pulls us into the Year of the Tiger

The Chinese New Year also marks the beginning of a new year in The Chinese Zodiac. The Chinese Zodiac is made up of a 12 year cycle with each year being associated with an animal and different traits for those born at that time.



What year were you born in according to the Chinese zodiac?



Why is it not on January 1st?

The twelve month calendar we might be most familiar with, also known as the ***Gregorian calendar***, is not the only calendar people use to measure time. The lunisolar calendar is the calendar in which Chinese New Year is based. Therefore, the holiday may also be referred to as the Lunar New Year.

The Lunar New Year is also celebrated in many other countries though goes by different names.

In Vietnam, the Lunar New Year is called ***Tết*** and like Chinese New Year is celebrated with firecrackers, and noise making to ring in the New Year. Frequently, families will gather for the occasion and make lots of food to eat and celebrate together. Just like Chinese New Year, red envelopes containing money are also often given to children as good luck.



In Korean Culture, the Lunar New Year is celebrated with ***Seollal***. To celebrate Seollal, families traditionally gather together to feast, play games, and remember their ancestors to receive their blessings in the New Year.

These are just a few ways different cultures celebrate the Lunar New Year, and each have different traditions that make them unique!



During the Chinese New Year, people will often wish each other a prosperous new year by saying:

Gong Xi Fa Cai
(Gong-she-faa-tsai)
in Mandarin or

Gong Hey Fat Choy
(Gong Hee Faat Choy).
in Cantonese.

People decorate for Chinese New Year with red banners called Fai Chun. These are often placed in doorways and will have phrases written on them which mean good luck, prosperity, and all the good things people wish for the new year.

Squares called Doufang are hung in the center of doorways and usually only contain one character/word.

Banners called Chūnlián are hung and contain spring couplets, or two lines of calligraphy equal in length that express messages of love, and happiness.



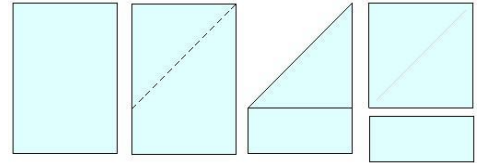
Activity: Make your own Banner

To make Doufang, the center door hanging with one character:

1. Cut one sheet of paper into a perfect square.
2. Next, turn it so it is positioned to look like a diamond
3. Now write!

You will need:

- **Bright colored paper**
- **Markers or coloring supplies**
- **Scissors**



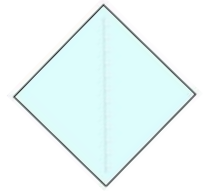
Here are two options for messages you might choose

福

(fú / happiness)

春

(chūn / spring)



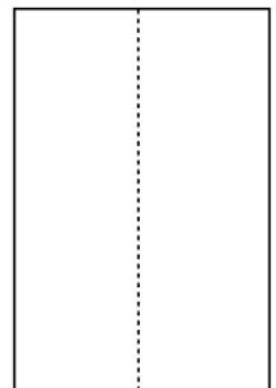
For the Fai Chun, the long banners:

1. Cut your paper in half long-ways.
2. Then write one of the phrases horizontally from top to bottom.

Here are a few options for you to write:

<https://www.travelsintranslation.com/2014/01/cantonese-chinese-new-year-phrases/>

1. 大吉大利 (Dàjí dàlì / Good Luck!)
2. 恭喜发财 / 恭喜發財 (Gōngxǐ fācái / May you have a prosperous New Year)
3. 身体健康 / 身體健康 (Shēntǐ jiànkāng / Wishing you great health)
4. 心想事成 (Xīn xiǎng shì chéng / Best wishes)
5. 吉祥如意 (Jíxiáng rúyì / Good fortune)
6. 出入平安 (Chūrù píng'ān / Peace and safety wherever you go)



For more New Year phrases to write and learn to pronounce, check out this webpage
<https://thewoksoflife.com/chinese-new-year-greetings/>

It is important that during the Lunar New year, people make sure they are doing all they can to bring in a good spring and new year. To do this, there are several things which are thought to bring in good luck and several things to avoid.

Things Which Are Lucky:

- The Color Red
- Mandarin Oranges
- Long Noodles
- Dressing in colorful clothes, especially warm colors like red, orange, and yellow.
- Buying a new outfit/clothes to wear

Things Which Are Unlucky:

- Wearing white, black or dark blue around the New Year.
- Gifts which are black or white in color.
- Uneven numbers. When people are giving gifts, they stick to giving amounts of money in even numbers or by giving gifts in pairs (i.e. two oranges)
- Giving clocks or watches. These are considered to symbolize time running out, which is not something people want in the New Year.
- Giving shoes. This sometimes symbolizes someone walking away from a friendship or relationship.
- Doing laundry on Chinese New Year. This might mean that you're washing away good luck and prosperity.
- Cutting your hair on the first days of the Lunar New Year. Sometimes means cutting away good luck.
- Cleaning with a broom on the first day of Lunar New Year. This often means sweeping away good luck.

This year, 2022, The Lantern Festival will take place on February 15th. Get ready by making your very own paper lantern!

You will need:

- ***Bright colored paper***
- ***Markers/ coloring supplies***
- ***Scissors***
- ***Tape***

Instructions:



1. Choose the color of paper you want your lantern to be.
On that paper, use your marker to draw a simple pattern.

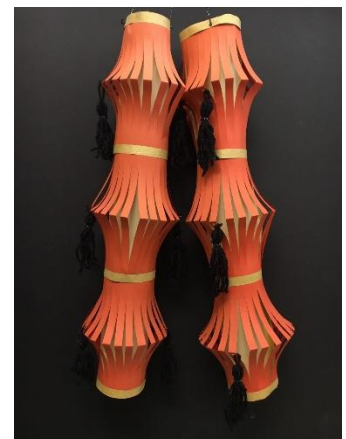
2. Once you've settled on your pattern, fold the paper in half longways. Make cuts equal width apart along the side with the fold. Don't cut all the way across!



3. When you are done with your cuts, unfold your paper and curl your paper into a cylinder with the strips you cut. Tape to secure it in place. Roll a second brighter color of paper into a cylinder and slide it into the center for full lantern effect.



4. To hang, use string or a strip of paper attached on the top, to either side of the lantern
5. If you like, you can add tassels, ribbons, or even stack them for bigger lanterns!



Some more resources to help celebrate:

<https://nm.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/68938b4e-1e68-4727-8f2d-cc341ed93b11/chinese-new-year-all-about-the-holidays/>