

## THE WEEK AHEAD



# THE YEAR OF THE RAT

## CHINESE NEW YEAR BEGINS 25 JANUARY

**IT'S hard to believe that we've already nearly finished the first month of 2020! While our New Year celebrations may have been and gone, the Chinese are just starting to celebrate.**

Chinese New Year is also known as the Lunar New Year or Spring Festival, and each year it begins on the first day of the new moon.

The most important date in the Chinese calendar, it's believed that a good start to the year will lead to good luck. Traditionally, the day will begin with firecrackers and fireworks being set off, and the colour red is used everywhere.

The story goes that in ancient times, a monster named Nián would come up from the bottom of the sea once a year, to feast on animals and humans. On this day, the villagers would all escape into the mountains.

One year, an old man decided to face down the monster. He covered homes in red paper, dressed in red, and prepared

firecrackers. When the Nián arrived, the red paper angered it, the firecrackers scared it, and when it saw the old man dressed in red, laughing at it – the Nián ran away!

The following morning, when villagers returned to their town, they found it had been saved from destruction. So, from then on, these colour and firecracker traditions continued.

While there are lots of ways to ensure good luck in the year ahead on Chinese New Year, there are also lots of things that you're supposed to avoid. One of these is taking a shower on the day of the New Year, as it could wash away any good luck you have with you. For the same reason, it's supposed to be important that you clean your home before the big day, to save you sweeping away good luck.

The ancient Chinese monster, Nián

You probably know that the 12 animals in the Chinese zodiac are used to represent

## THE CHINESE ZODIAC

years. In order, these are: Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Goat, Monkey, Rooster, Dog and Pig. Last year was the Year of the Pig, and this year, it's the rat's turn again.

The zodiac repeats every 12 years, making it easy to figure out whether it's your year. What's your zodiac animal?

If you were born in 2008, it's likely that your zodiac animal is a rat. While you might be thinking that your year will be lucky, it's actually said to be the opposite!

In Chinese culture, your zodiac year is seen as an obstacle to overcome. Some Chinese people believe that the best way to protect yourself from evil spirits and bad fortune in your zodiac year is to wear red underwear every day!



## HOW TO SAY HAPPY NEW YEAR IN CHINESE

Should you want to wish someone a happy Chinese New Year, there are various ways to do it in both Mandarin Chinese and in Cantonese – the main languages spoken in mainland China. For example, to wish someone success and riches in the new year, you can say 'gung hay fat choy' in Cantonese, or 'gong xi fa cai' (pronounced gong she fa tsai) in Mandarin.

GLOSSARY

**firecrackers** – Loud, explosive fireworks, sometimes called bangers



## Questions on: The Week Ahead: ‘The Year of the Rat’

### Part A: Find and explain the facts

- A1. What is Chinese New Year also known as?
- A2. Traditionally, how is Chinese New Year celebrated?
- A3. The 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac are used to represent the years. Put them in order.
- A4. Complete the following table by deciding if the statements are true or false. If false, please provide the correction.

Statement	True or false?	Correction if applicable
Chinese New Year is considered to be the most important date in the Chinese calendar.		
It is believed that you should avoid taking a bath on Chinese New Year’s Day.		
If you were born in 2008, it’s likely that your zodiac animal is a rat.		
Last year was the Year of the Ox.		
Some Chinese people believe that the best way to protect yourself from bad fortune in your zodiac year is to wear yellow underwear every day.		

- A5. How do you wish someone prosperity in the New Year in both Mandarin Chinese and in Cantonese?

Mandarin .....

Cantonese .....

### Part B: Deduce and infer information

- B1. Why is Chinese New Year the most important date in the Chinese calendar?
- B2. Our New Year celebrations have been and gone, so why are people just starting to celebrate Chinese New Year?
- B3. Explain the significance of Nián.
- B4. Why is the colour red used everywhere to celebrate Chinese New Year?
- B5. Why isn’t it good news for you this year if you were born in the Year of the Rat?

### Part C: Analyse the writing and presentation

- C1. Comment on the use of the image of red pants.
- C2. Look at the structure of the article. Do you think that the story behind Chinese New Year is appropriately placed within the text? Give reasons for your answer.

### Part D: Writing task

There has been some debate over whether the official name of the event known as ‘Chinese New Year’ should be changed because it is not just the Chinese community that celebrates it.

“The name of Chinese New Year should be changed to Lunar New Year.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Give reasons for your view.

GLOSSARY

**firecrackers** – Loud, explosive fireworks, sometimes called bangers



**Questions on: The Week Ahead: ‘The Year of the Rat’**

**Part A: Find and explain the facts**

**A1.** What is Chinese New Year also known as?

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**A2.** Traditionally, how is Chinese New Year celebrated?

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**A3.** The 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac are used to represent the years. Put them in order.

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**A4.** Complete the following table by deciding if the statements are true or false. If false, please provide the correction.

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Chinese New Year is considered to be the most important date in the Chinese calendar.		
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If you were born in 2008, it’s likely that your zodiac animal is a rat.		
Last year was the Year of the Ox.		
Some Chinese people believe that the best way to protect yourself from bad fortune in your zodiac year is to wear yellow underwear every day.		

**A5.** How do you wish someone prosperity in the New Year in both Mandarin Chinese and in Cantonese?

Mandarin .....

Cantonese .....

**Part B: Deduce and infer information**

**B1.** Why is Chinese New Year the most important date in the Chinese calendar?

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## Questions on: The Week Ahead: ‘The Year of the Rat’

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**B2.** Our New Year celebrations have been and gone, so why are people just starting to celebrate Chinese New Year?

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**B3.** Explain the significance of Nián.

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**B4.** Why is the colour red used everywhere to celebrate Chinese New Year?

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**B5.** Why isn't it good news for you this year if you were born in the Year of the Rat?

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## Teacher Answers

**AIM OF THE NEWS COMPREHENSIONS:** News reports are unique non-fiction texts. Being real, they naturally engage students, and with the range of topics that are covered, help to develop pupils’ knowledge and understanding of the wider world outside the classroom. The reports are ideal for short, focused comprehension or discussion activities. Along with the opportunity to find fascinating facts and appreciate the opinions of those involved, there is plenty to be inferred and deduced to understand in more depth what is being reported. Like authors, journalists play with language, so news ‘stories’ are rich nuggets of text to investigate and provide the opportunity for literacy programmes.

**TEACHER ANSWER GUIDE:** The teacher answers are intended to provide a guide to the reading skill each question is practising. Suggestions are given for a starting point for responses that students would be expected to give at the start of KS3. Further suggestions then give fuller, more developed responses that students will work towards by the end of KS3, in preparation for the non-fiction elements of GCSE English language.

### Part A

**A1. What is Chinese New Year also known as?**

READING SKILL — Find and explain information

*Possible answer*

*Starting point*

- Chinese New Year is also known as the Lunar New Year or Spring Festival.

*Development*

- This year it begins on 25 January.

**A2. Traditionally, how is Chinese New Year celebrated?**

READING SKILL — Find and explain information

*Possible answer*

*Starting point*

- Traditionally, the day will begin with fireworks and firecrackers being set off.

*Development*

- Furthermore, the colour red is used everywhere.

**A3. The 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac are used to represent the years. Put them in order.**

READING SKILL — Find and explain information

*Possible answer*

*Expected response*

- In order, the twelve animals used to represent the years are: Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Goat, Monkey, Rooster, Dog and Pig.

**A4. Complete the following table by deciding if the statements are true or false. If false, please provide the correction.**

READING SKILL — Find and explain information

*Possible answer*

*Starting point — some information correctly identified*

*Development — information clearly identified and corrections given where applicable*

Statement	True or false?	Correction if applicable
Chinese New Year is considered to be the most important date in the Chinese calendar.	True	
It is believed that you should avoid taking a bath on Chinese New Year’s Day.	False	It is stated that you shouldn’t take a shower.
If you were born in 2008, it’s likely that your zodiac animal is a rat.	True	
Last year was the year of the Ox.	False	It was the Year of the Pig.
Some Chinese people believe that the best way to protect yourself from bad fortune in your zodiac year is to wear yellow underwear every day.	False	They believe you should wear red underwear every day.

**A5. How do you wish someone prosperity in the New Year in both Mandarin Chinese and in Cantonese?**

READING SKILL — Find and explain information

**Possible answer****Expected response****Mandarin:** 'gong xi fa cai'**Cantonese:** 'gung hay fat choy'**Part B****B1. Why is Chinese New Year the most important date in the Chinese calendar?**

READING SKILL — Find and explain information

**Possible answer****Starting point**

- Chinese New Year is the most important date in the Chinese calendar because it's believed that a good start to the year will lead to good luck.

**Development**

- Traditionally, it is also a time to honour deities and ancestors. Furthermore, it is a time to bring family together for feasting and celebration.

**B2. Our New Year celebrations have been and gone, so why are people just starting to celebrate Chinese New Year?**

READING SKILL — Find and explain information

**Possible answer****Starting point**

- Chinese New Year begins on the first day of the new moon.

**Development**

- Therefore, unlike our New Year celebration, which is in accordance with the Gregorian calendar, the date changes every year. The date for Chinese New Year will always fall sometime between 21 January and 20 February, so it is later than our New Year, which is on 1 January.

**B3. Explain the significance of Nián.**

READING SKILL — Find and explain information

**Possible answer****Starting point**

- Nián is an ancient Chinese monster.

**Development**

- The monster is significant because it features in the Chinese New Year story. The story told that in ancient times, a monster named Nián would come up from the sea once a year to feast on animals and humans. On this day, the villagers would escape into the mountains. Chinese New Year celebrations mark the defeat of Nián by an old man from the village.

**B4. Why is the colour red used everywhere to celebrate Chinese New Year?**

READING SKILL — Find and explain information

**Possible answer****Starting point**

- When the old man decided to face down the monster, he covered homes in red paper and dressed in red. He also prepared firecrackers.

**Development**

- When the Nián arrived, the red paper angered it, the firecrackers scared it, and when it saw the old man dressed in red, laughing at it – the monster ran away! The colour tradition stems from this story.

**B5. Why isn't it good news for you this year if you were born in the Year of the Rat?**

READING SKILL — Find and explain information

**Possible answer****Starting point**

- It isn't good news this year if you were born in the year of the rat because the year of your zodiac animal is considered to be unlucky for you.

**Development**

- In Chinese culture, your zodiac year is seen as an obstacle to overcome.

**Part C**

**C1. Comment on the use of the image of red pants.**

READING SKILL — Identify benefits of text organisation and presentation

**Possible answer**

**Starting point**

- The graphic of red underpants adds a humorous touch to the article. They look funny placed in the bottom corner of the page because you don't really associate pants with Chinese New Year, so they seem out of place. However, the image is appropriate because the underpants link to a Chinese superstition. Some Chinese people believe that the best way to protect yourself from evil spirits and bad fortune in your zodiac year is to wear red underwear every day.

**Development**

- Perhaps the image would have been even more effective if it had been against a different coloured background to make it stand out more.

**C2. Look at the structure of the article. Do you think that the story behind Chinese New Year is appropriately placed within the text? Give reasons for your answer.**

READING SKILL — Identify benefits of text organisation and presentation

**Possible answer**

**Starting point**

- In the main body text, there are two introductory paragraphs, then three paragraphs dedicated to the story and a final paragraph to end the article.

**Development**

- The story is appropriately placed because the introductory paragraphs are needed to give the background details about when Chinese New Year takes place and how it is celebrated. Then the story is told in order to explain why those colour and firecracker traditions came about. Finally, there is a paragraph developing the information on traditions to focus on how to avoid bad luck. The story is important because it provides the necessary context and ties the text together.

**Part D – discussion task**

**There has been some debate over whether the official name of the event known as 'Chinese New Year' should be changed because it is not just the Chinese community that celebrates it. "The name of Chinese New Year should be changed to Lunar New Year." Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Give reasons for your view.**

READING SKILL — Develop opinions and provide justifications for view points

**Possible answer**

Agree	Disagree
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It makes sense for it to be called the Lunar New Year because it begins on the first day of the new moon.</li> <li>• It is more inclusive for the name to change because it is celebrated by more than 20% of the world. The festival doesn't belong to one group of people, so the name of it should reflect that.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changing the name would be taking political correctness too far. The English language is spoken by people from all different countries, but we haven't changed the name of the language.</li> <li>• The festival originated from China. It doesn't mean anything more than that. It doesn't mean that it can't be celebrated outside of China.</li> </ul>