

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO

THE LUNAR NEW YEAR

This free document has been created to support educators in having necessary conversations about the Lunar New Year.

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ABOUT BESEA.N

Hello! We're besea.n - Britain's East and South East Asian Network. We are a community focused, volunteer-led organisation with a mission to empower, educate and embrace East and South East Asian people - and their allies! - in the UK.

Our advocacy spotlights ESEA experiences through our online platforms, research and community events - providing a safe space for sharing knowledge, creating joy and fostering connections.

Our vision is one where our communities are seen and supported in all spaces. That's why we've launched ESEA Heritage Month, celebrated every year in the month of September. It's a jam packed programme of events to celebrate, acknowledge and learn about the incredible ways in which our communities have helped to shape the UK.

We are a small but perfectly formed team of volunteers and we rely on your support. Please donate to our cause and sign up for our newsletter. Also, don't forget to follow us on social media and continue spreading #ESEAJoy!

This guide was written by Amy Phung, Stephanie Yau and Jess Hibbeler.



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WHAT IS LUNAR NEW YEAR?

Lunar New Year kicks off on the first new moon of the lunisolar calendar, which is based on the cycles of the moon and ends on the next full moon fifteen days later.

It is celebrated all around the world, and it has different names, particularly China (Chūnjié), Hong Kong, Mongolia (Tsagaan Sar), Indonesia (Imlek), Malaysia (Hokkien: Chap Goh Mei), Singapore, South Korea (Seollal), Taiwan, Vietnam (Tết) and the Philippines.

The history of LNY broadly centred around creating offerings and enacting traditions that would bless the food harvests for the new year. Today, festivities often involve coming together with loved ones, enjoying good food, viewing a lion dance, making loud noises (traditionally to scare away bad spirits) and spring cleaning.

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LUNAR NEW YEAR AROUND THE WORLD

Although LNY is a national holiday in many countries, it is celebrated worldwide because people from those countries have travelled all over the world. It is ok for anyone to celebrate LNY, even if you're not from that country or from a particular culture, as long as it is respectful.

IMPORTANT POINTS TO NOTE FOR CELEBRATIONS

- Avoid wearing “costumes”. More information about cultural appropriation in what children wear can be found in [this article](#). Instead, show pictures or display traditional cultural clothing on mannequins.
- Avoid generic activities that condense ESEA cultures into singular tokens without an understanding of their history (e.g. sensory play with rice and chopsticks)
- Avoid making LNY sino-centric (focussed on China). It is celebrated in a number of countries in different ways, not only in China.

IMPORTANT

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LUNAR NEW YEAR TRADITIONS

LUCKY ENVELOPES

People from countries such as Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar, South Korea, Philippines, China and Malaysia present red envelopes as gifts at social and family gatherings such as weddings or holidays such as Lunar New Year.

LANTERNS

Lanterns are often hung to celebrate LNY. The lantern festival takes place on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month, and it marks the end of the New Year celebration. Big displays of colourful lanterns are built showing different creatures, objects and scenes for people to view.

THE LION DANCE

This performance is a form of traditional dance in various ESEA countries in which performers mimic a lion's movements in a lion costume to bring good luck and fortune. The lion dance is usually performed during the LNY and other cultural and religious festivals.



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ZODIAC STORY

The ESEA zodiac is a classification scheme based on the lunar calendar that assigns an animal and its reputed attributes to each year in a repeating twelve-year cycle. Originating from China, the zodiac and its variations remain popular in many East Asian and South East Asian countries, such as South Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand.

Note: Zodiac animals can differ depending on the country, e.g. the Ox is replaced by a Water buffalo and Rooster is replaced by a Chicken in the Vietnamese zodiac.

Each year is represented by one of 12 zodiac animals, find out which animal you and your family are.

- Rat 1948, 1960, 1972, 1984, 1996, 2008, 2020
- Ox 1949, 1961, 1973, 1985, 1997, 2009, 2021
- Tiger 1950, 1962, 1974, 1986, 1998, 2010, 2022
- Rabbit 1951, 1963, 1975, 1987, 1999, 2011, 2023
- Dragon 1952, 1964, 1976, 1988, 2000, 2012, 2024
- Snake 1953, 1965, 1977, 1989, 2001, 2013, 2025
- Horse 1954, 1966, 1978, 1990, 2002, 2014
- Goat 1955, 1967, 1979, 1991, 2003, 2015
- Monkey 1956, 1968, 1980, 1992, 2004, 2016
- Rooster 1957, 1969, 1981, 1993, 2005, 2017
- Dog 1958, 1970, 1982, 1994, 2006, 2018
- Pig 1959, 1971, 1983, 1995, 2007, 2019

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ADDITIONAL SYMBOLISM

MUSIC

Setting off firecrackers and banging drums is aimed at warding off bad luck and welcoming the new year. The lion dance is usually performed to a steady drum beat.

NEW BEGINNINGS

New year symbolises new beginnings. People traditionally sweep and clean up their homes.

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FURTHER READING & RESOURCES

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

[The Great Race](#)

[Ruby's Chinese New Year](#)

VIDEO

[Tet \(Lunar New Year\) in Vietnam](#)

READ-ALoud

[CBeebies Zodiac story](#)

[Ruby's Chinese New Year](#)

[Tomorrow Is New Year's Day: Seollal by Aram Kim](#)

BEASE.N RESOURCES

<https://www.besean.co.uk/resources> (including School Resources Pack which contains Lesson Plans and Ideas)



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