

## New Year's Eve Traditions



Going first-footing, eating twelve grapes, singing 'Auld Lang Syne': there are some interesting traditions at New Year. Read more ...

What do you do to celebrate when the clock strikes midnight on 31<sup>st</sup> December? Perhaps, like many people, you raise a glass of champagne or sekt and make a toast to the New Year. Or maybe you watch a firework extravaganza. Or perhaps you pull the duvet over your head and wish the festivities were over.

There are some other interesting ways to ring in the New Year. In Scotland and the north of England the tradition of *first-foot* is common. The first-foot is the first person to enter a household after the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve and this person brings good fortune with him or her into the house for the coming year. The first-foot should (ideally) be a tall, dark-haired man – but these days, women and short, fair-haired men will also be happily welcomed. The first-foot should bring gifts which will bestow good luck on the house for the new year: a coin (for money), bread (for food), salt (for flavour), a piece of coal (for warmth) and a drink, usually whisky, (for good cheer). Similar traditions are also to be found in Greece, where it is called *pothariko*, and in Georgia where it is known as *mekvle*.

In Spain, people eat twelve grapes, swallowing one at each stroke of the midnight bell. *Las doce uvas de la suerte* or the twelve grapes of good luck, symbolize the twelve months ahead and it is important that each grape eaten coincides with the striking of the bell. In order to swallow so many grapes so quickly, canny Spaniards peel the grapes beforehand to help them slip down more easily. This tradition dates back to the late 1800's, although it became particularly well promoted in 1895 when growers around Alicante had a bumper grape harvest. Some enterprising growers then encouraged their fellow Spaniards to take part in the tradition – or bad luck would befall them.

The most popular song at New Year must surely be *Auld Lang Syne*: a Scottish song that is well over 200 years old. The words were written in 1788 by arguably the greatest Scottish poet, Robert Burns; the melody is a traditional folk song. Together the words and the tune have become the English speaking world's 'must sing' at midnight on 31 December, when we say goodbye to the old year and welcome in the new one. The words *auld lang syne* mean 'for the sake of old times'.

Fighting off hangovers after a New Year's Eve party can be helped by a quick dip. Swimming in freezing oceans, rivers and lakes seems to be a very popular tradition across the northern hemisphere on New Year's Day. Brave souls take the plunge (literally) in the Atlantic at Coney Island in the United States of

America; the Ottawa River and in the Pacific in Vancouver, Canada; the North Sea at Queensferry near Edinburgh; Oranke Lake near Berlin; Lageveld Lake in The Netherlands; Geluzis Lake in Vilnius, Lithuania; the Baltic Sea Gdansk, Poland; Lake Geneva, Switzerland, and in Harbin, Heilongjiang province, China. Water: a cleansing beginning to the coming year.

So whether you are a party animal dancing in the New Year or you are a home bird, cuddled up keeping warm and cosy with a spicy hot tea, we wish you a healthy, happy and prosperous New Year!

If you would like to find out more about New Year's Eve, then click [here](#).

If you would like to use ***Auld Lang Syne*** as a topic in your lesson, then we have provided you with an activity at A2 level. You'll find it in the following **Teacher's notes** and on the **Worksheet**.

### Teacher's notes

#### **Auld Lang Syne** (Level A2 and above, 10 mins)

You can listen to a version of *Auld Lang Syne* [here](#) by Dougie Maclean, which also has the words. You only need the first minute.

- Make a copy of the **Worksheet**, one for each student.
- On the board write: *Auld lang syne* and ask students if they know anything about these words. You can give a hint by singing the words.
- Explain that *Auld lang syne* is a song that is often sung at New Year throughout the English speaking world. The words *Auld lang syne* are Gaelic (Scottish) and mean 'the old times'.
- If possible, play the first verse and chorus of *Auld lang syne*.
- Hand out the **Worksheet**, one to each student.
- Sing the words together (if possible with the music).
- Then tell students you are all now going to sing the song as it is sung on New Year's Eve: All stand together in a circle. Cross arms in front of you and hold your partner's hands. Now sing the song and everyone's hands should move up and down in rhythm to the music. And now everyone shakes hands and wishes everyone in the circle a *Happy New Year!*

**Auld Lang Syne** with translation:

Should auld acquaintance be forgot  
*Sollte denn alte Freundschaft vergessen sein*  
and never brought to mind?  
*und ihrer nicht mehr gedacht werden?*  
Should auld acquaintance be forgot  
*Sollte denn alte Freundschaft vergessen sein*  
and days of auld lang syne?  
*und auch die guten alten Zeiten?*

Chorus:

For auld lang syne, my dear,  
*Der alten Zeiten wegen, mein Lieber,*  
for auld lang syne,  
*der alten Zeiten wegen,*  
we'll tak a cup o' kindness yet,  
*Lass uns noch gemütlich ein Gläschen zusammen trinken,*  
for days of auld lang syne.  
*der alten Zeiten wegen.*

## Worksheet

### *Auld Lang Syne*

*Should auld acquaintance be forgot  
and never brought to mind?*

*Should auld acquaintance be forgot  
and days of auld lang syne?*

#### Chorus:

*For auld lang syne, my dear,  
for auld lang syne,  
we'll tak a cup o' kindness yet,  
for days of auld lang syne.*



### *Auld Lang Syne*

*Should auld acquaintance be forgot,  
and never brought to mind?*

*Should auld acquaintance be forgot,  
and days of auld lang syne?*

#### Chorus:

*For auld lang syne, my dear,  
for auld lang syne,  
we'll tak a cup o' kindness yet,  
for days of auld lang syne.*