

Prepare for the year of the goat

You may have just finished celebrating Christmas and New Year, but now comes another global festival – the Chinese New Year. And in 2015 we welcome the year of the goat.

The Chinese zodiac is based on a twelve-year cycle, each year represented by one of the animal signs: rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat (or sheep), monkey, rooster, dog and pig. We are just coming to the end of the year of the horse and in February we will be welcoming the year of the goat. Because it is a lunar festival (rather like Easter which falls on the first Sunday after the spring full moon), the date of the Chinese New Year falls each year between late January and mid-February – and this year, celebrations will begin on New Year's Eve 18 February.

The Chinese New Year is a two-week celebration with plenty of feasting, and families often travel long distances to spend time together and share the annual Reunion dinner, usually featuring fish and dumplings. It is also a time of cleaning – to sweep away ill-fortune and make way for good luck. The predominant colour for the whole period of the festivities is red. People usually wear red clothes, and doors and windows are hung in red paper decorations and mottos are written on them to call for good health, longevity and happiness. Presents are given, often using flowers for a message of good fortune: chrysanthemum for a long life, the peach blossom for luck, and the kumquat tree for prosperity. As well as celebrating, people also find time to honour gods and ancestors. Fortune-telling is also a popular activity at this time of year.

Fireworks and firecrackers play an important role in the festivities (the Chinese invented fireworks over one thousand years ago) and many Chinese cities have fabulous firework displays. However, many people buy their own firecrackers to scare away evil spirits with the loud bangs. There are similar noisy celebrations for the Chinese New Year in other countries in south-east Asia, notably Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore.

But you don't have to go as far as China to enjoy the fun of the Chinese New Year. You can visit the festivities in San Francisco in the United States or Vancouver in Canada. Or you could pop over to London. Starting in Chinatown just off Shaftesbury Avenue, right in the centre of London,

the dancing, singing, drum-banging procession makes its way to Trafalgar Square and attracts over half a million spectators. Enjoy tasty food, traditional crafts, dancing dragons and spectacular displays of acrobatics – a wonderful way to welcome in the Chinese New Year.

If you would like to find out more about Chinese New Year celebrations in London, then click [here](#).

If you would like to use the Chinese New Year as a topic in your lesson, we have provided you with two activities. You'll find them in the following **Teacher's notes** and on the **Worksheet**.

Teacher's notes

Activity 1: Chinese signs of the zodiac

(level A2 upwards, 25+ minutes)

- Make a copy of the Worksheet, **Chinese signs of the zodiac**, one for each student.
- On the board write *Chinese New Year*. Ask students if they know when this is. (In 2015 the Chinese New Year starts 19 February.) Explain that the Chinese zodiac is based on a twelve-year cycle, each year represented by one of the animal signs.
- Give each student a copy of **Chinese signs of the zodiac** and ask them to look at the first column of the table, to read the clues underneath the table and to circle the correct animal for each sign of the zodiac.
- Help with any unknown vocabulary.
- Ask students to check their answers with a partner.
- When everyone has finished, check answers together in class.

Key: 1 rat, 2 ox, 3 tiger, 4 rabbit, 5 dragon, 6 snake, 7 horse, 8 goat, 9 monkey, 10 rooster, 11 dog, 12 pig.

- Tell students the sign of the zodiac for 2015 is the goat.
- Ask students to read the characteristics for each zodiac sign. Go round and help with vocabulary.
- Now ask students to find their own year of birth, discover which animal they are and check if they match the mentioned characteristics. If you think your students would be too embarrassed to disclose their ages, then ask them to choose a friend or relative. (*I was born in 1960 and I am a rat. I am quite intelligent and sociable. My wife was born in 1962 and she is a tiger. She is very confident but she isn't very ambitious.*)

- Tell students to work in pairs. Ask each of them to write down the name of five friends or relations and his/her date of birth. Student A reads out the name and year of birth of the first person on his/her list. Student B looks up the zodiac sign for that year and the characteristics and tells Student A. Then Student B reads out the name and date of birth of the first person on his/her list and Student A looks up the zodiac sign and the characteristics and so on.

Activity 2: Famous people and their signs

(level A2 upwards, 15+ minutes)

- Read out the names and years of birth of the famous people below.
- Ask individual students to read out the correct zodiac sign and the corresponding characteristics.
- Encourage class comments and discussion on the characteristics, i.e. if students think they are appropriate.

Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg 1971	Key: (pig; optimistic, honorable)
Lady Gaga 1986	(tiger; ambitious, confident)
Til Schweiger 1963	(rabbit; sincere, trustworthy)
Angela Merkel 1954	(horse; adaptable, adventurous)
Prince William 1982	(dog; sociable, determined)
Kylie Minogue 1968	(monkey; lively, clever)
Barack Obama 1961	(ox; strong, loyal)
Diego Maradona 1960	(rat; intelligent, sociable)
Steffi Graf 1969	(rooster; honest, flexible)
Bill Gates 1955	(goat; warm, calm)
JK Rowling 1965	(snake; elegant, philosophical)
Ringo Star 1940	(dragon; lucky, artistic)

Worksheet

Chinese signs of the zodiac

Look at the **Zodiac sign** column. Read the clues below and circle the correct animal. Check answers with a partner.

	Zodiac sign	Characteristics	Year of birth				
1	rat bat	intelligent, sociable	1936	1948	1960	1972	1984
2	fox ox	strong, loyal	1937	1949	1961	1973	1985
3	lion tiger	ambitious, confident	1938	1950	1962	1974	1986
4	rabbit hedgehog	sincere, trustworthy	1939	1951	1963	1975	1987
5	unicorn dragon	lucky, artistic	1940	1952	1964	1976	1988
6	snail snake	elegant, philosophical	1941	1953	1965	1977	1989
7	horse bear	adaptable, adventurous	1942	1954	1966	1978	1990
8	goat goose	warm, calm	1943	1955	1967	1979	1991
9	donkey monkey	lively, clever	1944	1956	1968	1980	1992
10	duck rooster	honest, flexible	1945	1957	1969	1981	1993
11	cat dog	sociable, determined	1946	1958	1970	1982	1994
12	pig panda	optimistic, honorable	1947	1959	1971	1983	1995

- Clues:**
- 1 This animal looks like a mouse, but is bigger.
 - 2 This animal is similar to a cow.
 - 3 This dangerous animal has stripes.
 - 4 This animal hops, but can also run fast.
 - 5 This is a mythical animal that breathes fire.
 - 6 This animal is a reptile. Many people are afraid of it.
 - 7 This animal runs very fast and you can ride it.
 - 8 This is a smelly animal, but you can make cheese from its milk.
 - 9 This is a lively animal that swings through the trees.
 - 10 This animal crows in the morning – *cock a doodle doo!*
 - 11 This animal is man's best friend – as long as it doesn't bark!
 - 12 This animal lives on a farm. It is usually pinky brown.