

# Lunar New Year

## Topic

Lunar New Year

## Aims

- To introduce or revise the vocabulary for the Lunar New Year animals
- To practise listening skills
- To develop speaking and storytelling skills
- To practise saying years
- To practise the use of 'will' for future predictions

## Age/level

Primary  
CEFR level A1/A2

## Time

60 minutes

## Materials

1. world map
2. flashcards for each of the animals (rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, ram, monkey, rooster, dog and pig) and a flashcard of a king and a princess
3. props for retelling the story, e.g. blue paper for the river, card and string to make masks, etc.
4. materials to make the crafts here – optional:  
<https://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/en/crafts/chinese-new-year>
5. circles and slips of paper to make the fortune cookie (one per learner) – optional

## Introduction

The Lunar New Year is one of the many colourful events celebrated in our multicultural calendar. Each year in the Chinese calendar is named after an animal, and in this lesson, learners will listen to the story of how the order of the animals was decided. They will join in with the story and retell it, then do some follow-up work practising saying years, using 'will' for future predictions or making a craft.

## Procedure

### 1. Before storytelling

Write the date of this year's Lunar New Year (you can check the dates here: <https://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/china/spring-festival>) on the board.

- Ask learners if they know what is special about this day. Depending on your class, elicit anything they know about the Lunar New Year or you can explain that it is Lunar New Year, which is different every year, and is celebrated in many countries in Asia and around the world. Tell them some of the countries that celebrate it (China, Vietnam, Korea, Malaysia, Thailand) and then ask them to find the countries on a world map.
- Elicit or introduce the animals by showing the flashcards one by one and saying the animal's name, getting learners to repeat and then sticking them on the board. Introduce each animal in this way, revising the others as you do so.
- Now do a few activities with the flashcards to practise the vocabulary, for example secretly remove a flashcard and learners try to recall what's missing, make the noise of an animal and learners say the animal, give a type of animal (e.g. reptile, mammal, bird, etc.) and learners say which animals, etc.

## 2. Storytelling

Stick the animal flashcards on the board in the correct sequence. Tell the story:

- *Long ago in China, there lived twelve animals.*  
Count 1–12, encouraging learner participation.
- *There was a rat,*  
Invite learners to point to the flashcard of the rat and repeat 'rat'.
- *an ox, a tiger, a rabbit, a dragon, a snake, a horse, a ram, a monkey, a rooster, a dog and a pig.*  
Point to each flashcard as you say it and the learners repeat the animal.
- *When the old year was coming to an end, all the animals began to quarrel noisily. Each one wanted the new year to be named after it.*  
Mime quarrel or say the word in the L1 to convey meaning.
- *The animals made such a noise that even the king heard the quarrel from far away.*  
Mime noise and introduce the flashcard of the king – you could put your hands over your ears pretending to be the king hearing all the noise.
- *The king had a clever daughter. She asked the animals why they were quarrelling.*  
Introduce the flashcard of the princess, then, pretending to be her, speak directly to the animal flashcards and say 'Why are you quarrelling?'
- *'I want to have the new year named after me,' said the tiger.*  
Point to the tiger flashcard as you say the word.
- *'Me too,' said the rat.*  
Point to the rat flashcard as you say the word, and say 'Me too, said the ...' and encourage learners to supply 'rat'.

- *'Me too,' said the ox.*  
Point to the ox flashcard, and encourage the learners to join in with the whole sentence.
- *'Me too,' said the rabbit.*  
*'Me too,' said the dragon.*  
*'Me too,' said the snake.*  
*'Me too,' said the horse.*  
*'Me too,' said the ram.*  
*'Me too,' said the monkey.*  
*'Me too,' said the rooster.*  
*'Me too,' said the dog.*  
*'Me too,' said the pig.*  
With the remaining animals, point to each flashcard in turn and see if learners can supply the whole sentence for each one.
- *The princess said, 'We shall have a swimming race across this river. The new year will be named after the winner.'*  
*The animals agreed. They lined up on the bank of the river. 'One, two, three, go!' shouted the princess.*  
Mime swimming if necessary and draw a river and the two banks on your board, moving all the animal flashcards to one side to line up.
- *All the animals jumped into the river and began to swim to the opposite bank. Very soon the ox was in the lead. But he didn't see the crafty rat, who climbed up his tail and onto his back.*  
Move the animals into the river and put the ox in the lead and then the rat on his tail then his back.
- *When the ox was near the bank, the rat ran along the ox's head and jumped onto the grass. 'I am the winner!' said the rat. 'Well done,' said the king. 'The new year will be named the Year of the Rat.'*  
Using the flashcards, show the rat running along the ox's head and jumping onto the grass.
- *The princess felt sorry for the other animals as, one by one, they finished the race. 'The next eleven years can be named after the other animals,' she said. 'So the order is: Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Ram, Monkey, Rooster, Dog and Pig.'*  
Using the flashcards show the other animals finishing the race in order.

### 3. Retelling the story

Tell the story again. Give the animal, king and princess flashcards to learners and get them to participate in the story as above in response to the story. Learners without cards continue participating in the storytelling orally.

Give all learners the opportunity to have a flashcard role in subsequent retellings. As they become more familiar with it, introduce further ways of acting out the story as it's told, for example with simple props (e.g. some learners could hold and move blue paper as the river) or creating masks so learners can act the parts of the animals, king

and princess instead of holding flashcards. Other learners could take the part of the narrator, dividing up the narration between as many remaining learners as you have.

**4. Follow-up:  
What animal are  
you?**

Revise the names and order of the animals and stick them on the board.

- Practise saying years by writing a few examples on the board and drilling them, e.g. 1972 (nineteen seventy-two), 2001 (two thousand and one), etc.
- Write the following years underneath the corresponding flashcards:

Rat: 1984, 1996, 2008, 2020	Dragon: 1988, 2000, 2012, 2024	Monkey: 1992, 2004, 2016, 2028
Ox: 1985, 1997, 2009, 2021	Snake: 1989, 2001, 2013, 2025	Rooster: 1993, 2005, 2017, 2029
Tiger: 1986, 1998, 2010, 2022	Horse: 1990, 2002, 2014, 2026	Dog: 1994, 2006, 2018, 2030
Rabbit: 1987, 1999, 2011, 2023	Ram: 1991, 2003, 2015, 2027	Pig: 1995, 2007, 2019, 2031

- Ask a learner, 'When were you born?' They reply, for example, 'Two thousand and eight.' Ask, 'What animal are you?' Help the learner find the animal and introduce the reply, 'I'm a dog.' Repeat with the other learners.
- Learners can then either draw a picture of their animal and write sentences, e.g. 'I was born in ... I'm a ...', or do a survey of their classmates, asking 'What year were you born? What animal are you?' and recording the results.
- If your learners are very close together in age and all have the same one or two animals, for some variety you could extend this to their family members, e.g. 'What year was your brother/sister born? What animal is he/she?'
- Depending on your learners, you could also do some maths work, asking them to try to find the pattern (every 12 years) and working out the next or preceding years for each animal.
- Note that if a learner was born in either January or February, they may in fact be the previous animal, depending on when the New Year fell in that year. You may wish to check the exact dates in advance for the range of years your learners were born in, for example at the link given above.

**5. Follow-up:  
craft activities**

- Children could make a Chinese dragon or lantern using the crafts here: <https://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/en/crafts/chinese-new-year>
- Children could make an origami fortune cookie. Writing the fortune for the cookie allows 'will' for future predictions to be introduced and practised. Brainstorm some ideas for fortunes as a class, for example 'You'll be happy', 'You'll have good luck', 'You'll be rich', etc. Children then write a fortune on a slip of paper to go in their cookie, and exchange cookies with other learners in

the class. There are various ways to make the cookie, such as this one:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wc-kYYD1oWE>

**Contributed by**

Gail Ellis