

CHINESE NEW YEAR

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🔴 Advanced B1–C1

Ready to Explore the Bigger Picture?

Examine the cultural and social importance of Chinese New Year, consider how traditions adapt to modern life, and develop critical thinking, debate and writing skills.

PDF 9 – Reading & Analysis

PDF 10 – Debate & Discussion

PDF 11 – Writing & Reflection

Reading: More Than a Celebration

Chinese New Year is often presented through colourful images of lanterns, dragon dances, fireworks and enormous family meals. These images capture some of the excitement of the festival, but they only tell part of the story.

For many people, the Spring Festival is above all a time of return. People who have moved to cities for work or study may travel long distances to spend time with relatives. The annual movement of travellers around the holiday period is one of the largest seasonal travel events in the world. Behind the crowds and busy transport networks are millions of personal stories: parents waiting for adult children, grandparents preparing familiar dishes and relatives catching up after months apart.

Food is central to these reunions. A family meal is not simply a collection of dishes. It can represent care, identity and continuity. Recipes may be passed from grandparents to grandchildren, while the preparation of food creates opportunities for people to work and talk together. Particular dishes may carry symbolic meanings, although customs differ considerably across China and among Chinese communities worldwide.

Tradition, however, is not frozen in time. Modern celebrations may include video calls with relatives overseas, online gift purchases and travel arrangements made through mobile apps. Some families combine familiar customs with new ways of celebrating. Others may have different experiences because of work commitments, financial pressures or changing family structures.

There is also a difference between the public image of a festival and private experience. Not everyone can travel home, and not every family gathering is perfect. For some, the holiday can bring pressure, expense or difficult family expectations. Yet the festival continues to hold deep meaning for many people because it provides an opportunity to reconnect and look ahead.

Perhaps the lasting importance of Chinese New Year lies not in any single custom, dish or performance, but in the human desire to belong. The decorations may come down and the celebrations may end, but the relationships they strengthen can continue throughout the year.

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Activity 1 – Reading Comprehension

Answer in detail.

1. Why does the reading describe Chinese New Year as “a time of return”?
2. What does the annual movement of travellers reveal about the importance of the festival?
3. How can food represent care, identity and continuity?
4. Give two examples of how modern technology has changed celebrations.
5. Why might the holiday period be difficult for some people?
6. What does the writer suggest is the deeper importance of the festival?

Activity 2 – Vocabulary & Meaning

Explain the meaning of these expressions as they are used in the reading:

1. Seasonal travel event. _____
2. Continuity. _____
3. Frozen in time. _____
4. Family structures. _____
5. Reconnect. _____
6. Human desire to belong. _____

Activity 3 – Analyse the Writer's Viewpoint

Discuss:

1. Does the writer present Chinese New Year as entirely positive? Give evidence.
2. Why does the writer mention people who cannot travel home?
3. What is the purpose of the final paragraph?
4. Is the reading mainly about cultural traditions, family relationships or modern society? Explain your answer.

Activity 4 – Extend the Ideas

Choose one statement and write a short response of 100–120 words.

A. Food is one of the strongest ways to preserve cultural identity.

B. Modern technology makes family celebrations more meaningful.

C. The real value of a festival lies in the people, not the traditions.

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Teacher's Key / Suggested Answers

Activity 1:

1. Many people travel back to their hometowns to spend time with relatives.
2. It shows how important family reunions are to many people.
3. Recipes and meals connect generations, express care and preserve cultural identity.
4. Video calls, online gift purchases and mobile travel arrangements.
5. Travel may be impossible; there may be financial pressures, work commitments or difficult family expectations.
6. The desire to belong, reconnect and strengthen relationships.

Activity 2: Accept explanations showing understanding of the context.

Suggested meanings:

1. A large movement of people travelling at a particular time of year.
2. The continuation of something over time.
3. Unchanged despite the passage of time.
4. The way family members are organised and connected.
5. To renew a relationship or connection.
6. The need to feel accepted and connected to others.

Activities 3–4:

Open-ended. Look for relevant evidence, clear reasoning and balanced arguments.

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