



New Year's Celebration

(intermediate level)



NEW YEAR'S AROUND THE WORLD

For many years in history, the New Year was celebrated in mid-March rather than on the first of January. The early Roman calendar only had ten months, with March as the first. If you look at the names of the months, you will see this to be true. The word September stems from the Latin word seven, as it was once the seventh month in the calendar. Similarly, "Octo" means eight, "Novem" means nine, and "Decem" means ten. January and February were added around 700 BC, bringing the total number of months in the calendar up to twelve. The decision to increase the number of months reversed the **logic** of naming some of the last few months by their numerical placement.

In 46 BC, Julius Caesar created a solar-based calendar. After **reforming** the Roman calendar, the political leader stated that the New Year would officially start on January 1st. January was named after Janus, the Roman God of gates and doors. The new calendar was not accepted by many, especially Christians who chose various times such as Dec 25th or March 1st to celebrate their new year. Many European countries **adopted** January 1st as the official New Year in the 1500s, but it wasn't until the mid 1700s when Britain and its colonies accepted the date. Since then, numerous countries outside of Europe have also adopted January 1st as the start of a new year, making it an international holiday celebrated by millions.

Despite sharing a common date, countries around the world celebrate the New Year in a **multitude** of ways. The foods and traditions that characterize New Year's celebrations have as much to do with the culture and beliefs of a nation as they do with the season that January 1st falls in. For example, Australia's New Year's Eve parties usually take place on the beach with picnics and BBQs, whereas on the other side of the world many New Year's Eve celebrations take place in **frigid** outdoor **ceremonies** where people *brave the cold* and **huddle** to keep warm. Sydney is the first major city to *ring in* the New Year each January. The city puts on an impressive theme-based fireworks display watched by millions of viewers on TV, namely those who are *gearing up* for their own countdowns. It isn't until 16 hours later when the world-famous crystal ball drops at Times Square in New York City.



NEW YEAR'S AROUND THE WORLD - continued

In Japan, the New Year is one of the most important holidays of the year. Japanese New Year is associated with a new beginning. Families hold Bonenkai (forget-the-year) parties to say farewell to previous troubles and worries. Cleaning the home *from top to bottom* is an important ritual that prepares Japanese families for the new year. Special festivals are held at shrines and temples, and people often burn the previous year's lucky charms. Japanese people also send out special New Year's postcards to their friends and loved ones, taking special care to make sure the cards are delivered by January 1st. On the seventh day of January, families enjoy a special soup called "Seven Day Rice Soup," which is meant to give the stomach a rest from all of the **festive** meals enjoyed over the holiday week.

Columbians also like to say farewell to bad luck from the previous year, known in Spanish as "Ano Nuevo". Family members write out short notes about their bad luck and place the papers inside a homemade straw man. Mr. Old Year is dressed in clothes from each family member, and **stuffed** with firecrackers. You can guess the poor man's **fate** at the *stroke of midnight!*

Firework displays are common to New Year's celebrations worldwide. Originally fire and noise were used to *cast away* evil spirits and ghosts who were believed to be **petrified** of brightness and loud sounds. Though the meaning has largely been lost, the tradition continues today as people **bond** with friends and family around a **spectacle** of lights and music after the countdown. But all of this **grandeur** comes at a *steep price*, not only to the tourism boards, but to the environment itself. In 2008, Taiwan's landmark Tower 101 made a commitment to use eco-friendly fireworks for its New Year's celebrations. With one of the highest skyscrapers in the world, Taiwan set an important **precedent** by committing to starting the new year off *on the right foot*.

**READING COMPREHENSION**

A. Practice asking and answering the following questions with your partner. Then write the answers in the spaces below.

1. Why was New Year's celebrated in March prior to 700BC? _____

2. How did the last four months of the year originally get their name? _____

3. Why is the god of gates and doors mentioned in the reading? _____

4. Which is the first major city to ring in the New Year on television each year? _____

5. What happens almost a full day after Australia celebrates New Year's? _____

6. What is a Bonenkai party? _____

7. What do Japanese people send out prior to New Year's? _____

8. Who is Mr. Old Year? _____

9. Why were fireworks first used at New Year's celebrations? _____

10. What major change did Taiwan make to its New Year's festivities in 2008? _____

**VOCABULARY REVIEW****A. Match the words on the left with the correct meaning on the right.**

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| ___ 1. logic | a) get physically close to others, often in a circular formation |
| ___ 2. reforming | b) to feel a sense of connection with other people |
| ___ 3. adopted | c) full of joy and excitement in relation to a festival or event |
| ___ 4. multitude | d) something that makes good sense |
| ___ 5. frigid | e) filled with something; changes the shape to a larger size |
| ___ 6. ceremonies | f) very afraid |
| ___ 7. huddle | g) a decision or action that can be used as a model or example |
| ___ 8. festive | h) changing |
| ___ 9. stuffed | i) to take up (start) a new practice |
| ___ 10. fate | j) greatness |
| ___ 11. spectacle | k) many |
| ___ 12. petrified | l) the final or future result |
| ___ 13. bond | m) very cold |
| ___ 14. grandeur | n) an impressive site to see |
| ___ 15. precedent | o) events that celebrate or honor something |

B. Choose the word(s) with the closest meaning to the underlined word in the following sentences.

1. Fireworks these days come in a multitude of shapes and colors.
a. box b. beautiful c. variety
2. Though it is customary to make New Year's goals every year, you never know what fate has in store for you.
a. philosophy b. failure c. the future
3. In Japan, one way to bond with friends over New Year's is to send postcards.
a. remember b. connect c. celebrate

**B. continued**

4. The young child was petrified of the loud display of fireworks.
a. surprised b. fearful c. excited

5. After visiting Columbia, my Canadian family adopted the tradition of creating a Mr. Old Year each New Year's Eve.
a. took up b. took away c. took down

6. Eco-friendly communities are reforming traditional events and ceremonies.
a. managing b. changing c. translating

7. It is expected to be frigid this year, so dress warmly for the New Year's party.
a. freezing cold b. very frightening c. more popular

8. It was impossible not to be impressed by the grandeur of the fireworks display.
a. colors b. greatness c. cost

C. Choose the correct word from the list to complete the following sentences. A few of the words will not be used.

~ *precedent* *huddle* *logical* *festive* *spectacle* *stuffed* *adopted* *ceremonies* ~

1. It was so frigid outside we had to _____ to keep warm.
2. The Columbian students _____ their scarecrow with notes about their bad luck.
3. The club set a _____ by not allowing alcohol at the dance party.
4. It was quite a _____ to see the ball drop from the flagpole.
5. Without fireworks, the New Year's Eve ceremony didn't feel very _____.
6. It is _____ to start the new year in an eco-friendly manner.
7. Times Square has been holding New Year's Eve _____ for many years.

**PAIR WORK****Part 1: Sharing Information**

Directions: You and your partner each have a short reading passage about the dropping of the New Year's ball at Times Square in New York. Read your passage and then share your information with your partner. Work together to complete the questions that follow.

Student A

In the last few seconds of 1907, the first New Year's ball dropped from the flagpole in Times Square. It was made of iron and wood and was lit with one-hundred light bulbs. The ball weighed approximately 700 pounds and was built to commemorate the opening of The New York Times. Apart from two years during the war (1942-1943) when the city was restricting the use of lights, the ball has dropped every December 31st. The ball takes one minute to reach the ground. The first ball was replaced in 1920 by an iron ball that was just over half the weight of the original. In 1955 the ball was reinvented again, this time with aluminum.

Student B

Waterford Crystal redesigned the traditional New Year's ball for the millennium celebration. At over 1000 pounds and with more than 500 crystals, it was significantly heavier than previous time balls. This ball was retired in 2007. For the 100th anniversary of the ball drop, the New Year's ball went green. The incandescent light bulbs inside the ball were replaced with LED lights. In 2009, the ball received yet another overhaul. This 12000 pound ball with over 2000 crystals was given a permanent home on top of Times Square. Though the old balls were stored away in a vault until New Year's Eve, the new energy efficient ball is now lit daily from 7am to 2am throughout the year. It will always be associated with New Year's; however, it is also lit up for other special occasions such as Valentine's Day.

**Pair Work: Question Sheet – The Dropping of the New Year's Ball at Times Square**

Directions: Work with your partner to complete the following questions. (You each have half of the information in your previous readings.)

1. What was the very first Times Square ball made of?
2. What did the time balls in the 2000s have that the balls in the 1900s didn't?
3. Prior to 2000, what happened to the weight of the ball during each renovation?
4. What times does the Times Square ball start to fall from the flagpole each year?
5. Which reading discusses a period when the ball did not fall? A or B?
6. Why was the 2007-8 New Year's Eve celebration in Times Square so important?
7. What made the 2007-8 ball more environmentally friendly?
8. In what way was the 2009 overhaul so different than the 1920 renovation?
9. What used to happen to the New York time ball after New Year's Day?
10. Which reading mentions another holiday besides New Year's and why?

**PAIR WORK****Part 2: Idioms and Expressions in Context**

Directions: Complete the definitions by sharing information with your partner. Use the main reading to help you understand the meaning in context.

Pair A

Idiom	Definition
1. <i>ring in</i> :	_____
2. _____ :	with a good or positive start
3. _____ :	entirely
4. <i>gearing up</i> :	_____
5. _____ :	at exactly 12: 00 am
6. <i>cast away</i> :	_____
7. _____ :	a high cost
8. _____ :	go outside on a frigid day

Pair B

Idiom	Definition
1. <i>from top to bottom</i> :	_____
2. <i>brave the cold</i> :	_____
3. _____ :	celebrate
4. _____ :	getting ready
5. <i>on the right foot</i> :	_____
6. _____ :	send to a far away place
7. <i>steep price</i> :	_____
8. <i>stroke of midnight</i> :	_____

**PAIR WORK****Part 3: Have a laugh together! A New Year's Joke:**

Directions: Ask your partner if they "get" this joke. If not, find someone in your class who can explain why it is funny.

A New Year's resolution is something that goes in one year and out the other.

~Author Unknown

FIND SOMEONE WHO...

Directions: Walk around the classroom and ask your classmates questions. (Write the answers to the questions in the space provided below.) Find someone ...

1. who experienced good luck this year. _____

2. who started last year off on the right foot. _____

3. who watches New Year's countdowns on TV. _____

4. who has been to a New Year's celebration in another country. _____

5. who makes New Year's resolutions every year. _____

6. who celebrated the millennium by going to a big party. _____

7. who believes in ghosts and evil spirits. _____

**FIND SOMEONE WHO... (continued)**

8. who usually cooks on New Year's Eve. _____

9. who sends New Year's cards to friends. _____

10. who celebrates New Year's on a day other than January 1st. _____

CLASS DISCUSSION:**What are we singing?**

Auld Lang Syne is a popular song that people sing after the New Year's Countdown. The words are from a Scottish poem written in the 18th century. Robert Burns said he wrote the poem after a popular ballad. The song is so old that many people do not know or understand the words. Many people make up words as they sing the tune.

Look at the words to a few of the verses from the poem. What do you think *auld lang syne* means?

Auld Lang Syne

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

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

CHORUS:

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

And surely you'll *buy* your pint *cup* !
and surely I'll *buy* mine !

And we'll take a cup o' kindness yet,
for *auld lang syne*.

**ANSWER KEY****READING COMPREHENSION**

1. Prior to 700BC there were only ten months in the calendar and March was the first.
2. The last four months in the original calendar were named after the Latin numbers 7, 8, 9, and 10.
3. January was named after Janus, the god of gates and doors.
4. Sydney is the first major city whose celebration is televised each New Year.
5. 16 hours after Sydney rings in the new year, the famous ball drops in New York City's Times Square.
6. A Bonenkai party is a farewell to the year party held in Japan during the New Year's season.
7. Japanese people send out postcards to their closest friends and family members during the New Year's season.
8. Mr. Old Year is a stuffed doll that Columbians make. They place their bad luck inside him and burn him at midnight.
9. Fire and noise were used traditionally because they were believed to scare off evil spirits and ghosts.
10. Taiwan made a commitment to use eco-friendly fireworks at its world famous New Year's celebration on Tower 101.

VOCABULARY REVIEW

A. Match the words

1. d 2. h 3. i 4. k 5. m 6. o 7. a 8. c 9. e 10. l 11. n 12. f 13. b 14. j
15. g

B. Choose the words with closest meaning

1. c 2. c 3. b 4. b 5. a 6. b 7. a 8. b

C. Choose the correct word

1. huddle 2. stuffed 3. precedent 4. spectacle 5. festive 6. logical 7. ceremonies

PAIR WORK - Sharing Information

1. The very first Times Square ball was made of wood and iron.
2. From 2000 and on, the time balls were equipped with crystals.
3. Prior to 2000, the weight of the time ball increased with every renovation.
4. The Times Square ball starts to fall from the flagpole at 11:59 am each December 31st.
5. Reading A discusses a period when the ball did not fall. It was during World War II.
6. The 2007-8 New Year's Eve celebration in Times Square was so important because it was the 100 year anniversary.

**PAIR WORK - Sharing Information (continued)**

7. The 2007-8 ball was more environmentally friendly because LED lights were used.
8. The 2009 overhaul was different than the 1920 renovation because the ball got heavier, not lighter.
9. Prior to 2009, the New York time ball used to be placed in a vault for safekeeping each year after New Year's Day.
10. Reading B mentions Valentine's Day, because the new ball is lit up for other occasions besides New Year's.

PAIR WORK - Idioms and Expressions in Context

1. brave the cold: go outside on a frigid day
2. ring in: celebrate
3. gearing up: getting ready
4. from top to bottom: entirely
5. on the right foot : with a good or positive start
6. stroke of midnight: at exactly 12: 00 am
7. cast away: send to a far away place
8. steep price: a high cost

PAIR WORK - A Joke

There is a common English phrase "in one ear and out the other". It means you heard something but you didn't really listen. For example, you heard the instructions, but you didn't follow them. This joke is a play on words relating to this common phrase.

CLASS DISCUSSION: Song

Auld Lang Syne is usually translated to mean "times long past" or "old times gone".