

MID - AUTUMN FESTIVAL

The Mid-Autumn Festival, which is also called the Chinese Moon Festival, is a harvest festival in the Chinese calendar. It is a time for family reunion, giving thanks for the harvest and also a time for praying for things such as; a husband or wife, a baby, beauty, a long life or good fortune. As you can imagine it is one of the most important annual festivals for Chinese people.

This festival takes place on the 15th day of the 8th lunar month every year so, just like Dragon-Boat day, its exact date by the Western calendar differs from year to year.

In Britain people have been giving thanks for successful harvests since pagan times, that is before Christianity came to our part of the world. Harvest festival is traditionally held on the Sunday nearest to the Harvest Moon; and the Harvest Moon is the full Moon that occurs closest to the autumn equinox (about Sept. 23).

Harvest festivals typically feature feasting, both family and public, with foods that are taken from the crops that come to maturity around the time of the festival. Ample food and freedom from the necessity to work in the fields are two central features of harvest festivals: eating, merriment, contests, music and romance are common features of harvest festivals around the world.

There are quite a few legends about the mid-Autumn festival, but I'll just mention a couple of well-known ones.

Why Lady Chang'e Flew to the Moon

In the distant past there used to be ten suns in the sky. One year these suns became so scorching that the heat dried up the lakes and the people were at death's door. Just at that time a hero, named Hou Yi, heard about this problem. With his extraordinary power and a supernatural bow, he shot nine of the suns down on the peak of Mount Kunlun.

As you might expect, Hou Yi became loved and respected by the people. A large number of people flocked to Hou Yi to ask him to be their teacher and to seek instructions. Among those students there were some who were treacherous and cunning. Peng Meng was one such student.



Before long, Hou Yi fell in love and married a beautiful young girl named Chang'e. One day, when Hou Yi went to Mount Kunlun to meet some friends, he encountered the Queen of Heaven, who gave him an elixir of life. Anyone who drunk this all this elixir would instantly become an immortal.

When Hou Yi returned home he gave this elixir to his wife to keep safe. Chang'e put the elixir of life into a case on her dressing table. Unfortunately, the treacherous Peng Meng saw this. Three days later, when Hou Yi went out for hunting with his friends, Peng Meng pretended to be ill and so he didn't go with them. Shortly after they had left, Peng Meng took his double-edged sword and broke into Hou Yi's House. He threatened Chang'e and demanded that she handed over the elixir of life. Peng Meng was strong and dangerous and Chang'e knew that she wouldn't be able to stop him or manage to protect the elixir of life.

So Chang'e fetched the elixir of life from her case and held it out to Peng Meng, but just as he reached for it she swiftly raised the bottle to her lips and drank it all. Immediately, Chang'e became an immortal and started to rise away from the ground, she floated out of the window and flew towards the moon. Chang'e stayed on the moon, which was the nearest place to the earth, as she was anxious about her husband, Hou Yi.

When Hou Yi returned home that night and was told what had happened during his absence he became extremely enraged and immediately went looking for Peng Meng to kill him. However, Peng Meng had already escaped. The heart-stricken Hou Yi shouted to the sky and shouted for Chang'e, just at that time he surprisingly discovered the moon was extremely bright and clear that night and he caught sight of a swaying figure that was exactly like Chang'e.

Hou Yi hastily asked his maids to put an incense table in the back garden and put fresh fruits and moon cakes which were the favorite food of Chang'e on the table, holding a memorable ceremony for Chang'e who lived on the distant moon. When the local people heard that Chang'e had flown to the sky and became an immortal on the moon, they all arranged incense tables below the moon to worship the goodness Chang'e, praying for happiness and safety.

Since then, Chinese people have worshipped and gazed at the moon in appreciation during the Mid-autumn festival.



EXERCISES

1. Match the words to their expressions.

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| 1. reunion | a) Either of the two times each year (around March 21 and September 23) when day and night, everywhere on earth |
| 2. pagan | b) Of something that is very good or interesting and worth remembering |
| 3. equinox | c) Of someone who is not able to be trusted, or showing that someone cannot be trusted |
| 4. feast | d) A controlling influence |
| 5. legend | e) Of being full of sorrow, disappointment, or regret |
| 6. scorch | f) Something, usually a drink, that is able to cure illnesses and let you live for ever. |
| 7. flock | g) To meet someone or something without expecting or intending to |
| 8. treacherous | h) Of someone who is tricky and clever at getting what they want, often in a dishonest way |
| 9. cunning | i) To make someone very angry, or to fill someone with rage |
| 10. encounter | j) To come together, as in a group of animals such as birds or sheep |
| 11. elixir | k) To burn a surface so as to change its color and texture. |
| 12. immortal | l) An organized gathering of people who have not been together for a long time. |
| 13. enrage | m) A story from the past that many people believe, but which cannot be proved to be true. |
| 14. heart-stricken | n) A special meal with large amounts of food and drink. |
| 15. sway | o) A person who worships many gods and/or goddesses or the earth or nature |
| 16. memorable | |

2. True or False. Choose whether the statement is true or false. If you think it is false say why it is false.

1. The Mid-Autumn Festival is also called the Chinese Moon Festival. T/F
2. This festival takes place on the 8th day of the 15th lunar month. T/F
3. There are very few legends about the mid-Autumn festival. T/F
4. Hou Yi, with his supernatural bow, shot down seven of the suns. T/F

- Peng Meng was a good student and a strong friend of Hou Yi. T/F
- 6.The Queen of Heaven gave him the elixir of life to Chang'e. T/F
- 7.Chang'e threw the elixir away to stop Peng Meng drinking it. T/F
- 8.Chang'e became an immortal and started to rise from the ground. T/F
- 9.HouYi visited his wife, Chang'e, on the moon and took cakes for her. T/F
- 10.The people prayed to Chang'e for victory over their enemies. T/F

3. Reading Comprehension. Choose the best answer.

- 1.What is the relationship between the date of Dragon-boat day and the date of the Mid-Autumn Festival?
- a.They are both festivals in the Chinese lunar calendar.
 - b.The dates of both holidays vary from year to year in the western calendar.
 - c.The dates of both holidays do not vary from year to year in the western calendar.
 - d.Both festivals originally come from outside China.
- 2.What was the reason for Hou Yi shooting at the suns?
- a.If he could shoot down the suns the Queen of Heaven would reward him.
 - b.Shooting down nine of the suns was a magic action which allowed him to marry Chang'e.
 - c.He shot down nine suns to protect the people from their heat.
 - d.He didn't shoot down the suns. He asked the Queen of Heaven to give him some elixir so he could destroy nine of the suns.
- 3.Why did Chang'e drink the elixir?
- a.Because she wanted to become an immortal and live on the moon.
 - b.Because she loved her husband.
 - c. Because it was the only way she could stop the elixir being stolen.
 - d.Because she was jealous of the Queen of Heaven who gave the elixir to her husband.



4. Vocab Questions. Choose best word or phrase to complete the following sentences taken from the text.

1. The Mid-Autumn festival is a _____ festival in the Chinese calendar.
(A. family B. harvest C. dragon D. reunion)
2. The exact time of Mid Autumn festival _____ from year to year.
(A. is not B. varies C. contrasts D. is at midday)
3. Harvest festivals typically feature _____ both family and public.
(A. happiness B. singing C. dancing D. feasting)
- 4 There are quite a _____ legends about the Mid-Autumn Festival.
(A. few B. many C. some D. much)
- 5 In the distant past there _____ ten suns in the sky.
(A. is B. would have been C. used to be D. will be)
6. Hou Yi went to Mount Kunlun where he _____ the Queen of heaven
(A. faced B. confronted C. encountered D. gathered)
7. Peng Meng _____ Chang'e because he wanted the elixir.
(A. threatened B. fought C. begged D. demanded)
8. Chang'e became an immortal and _____ out of the window.
(A. jumped B. floated C. walked D. fell)
9. Hou Yi discovered that the moon was _____ bright and clear.
(A. at night B. bigger C. a lot D. extremely)
10. Since then, Chinese people have _____ at the moon during the Mid Autumn Festival.
(A. gazed in appreciation B. tried to watch C. taken many photographs)

