

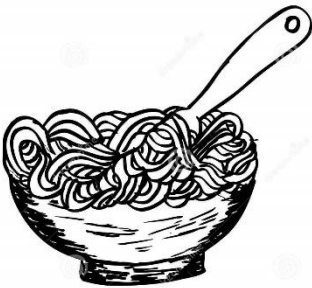
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Special Foods for the Chinese New Year

Food is a very important part of Chinese New Year celebrations. On New Year's Eve, family members and friends get together for a late night feast. Before eating, many families honor their ancestors by placing food on small shrines in their homes. They also make offerings of incense and food to the gods.

At the New Year's Eve meal, people often serve eight or nine different dishes. This is because eight and nine are lucky numbers. The Chinese word for *eight* rhymes with the word for *good fortune*, and the word for *nine* means *long-lasting*.



Many foods at the feast have a special reason for being included. A whole chicken symbolizes family togetherness. Dumplings and spring rolls (vegetables wrapped in rice paper and fried) represent wealth—dumplings because they look like golden nuggets and spring rolls because they are shaped like gold bars. Long noodles represent long life.

Fish is an especially important part of the meal. The word for fish, "Yu," sounds like both the word for *wish* and the word for *abundance*. Eating fish on New Year's Eve symbolizes a *wish* for *abundance* in the coming year. Serving the fish whole, with head and tail attached, represents a wish for a good beginning and a good ending for the coming year.

Sticky rice cakes and sweets are always served at the end of the meal. According to legend, each New Year's Eve, the Kitchen God, Zao Jun, reports to the Jade Emperor in heaven on whether families have been good or bad during the year. When families give the Kitchen God foods that are sticky and sweet, his mouth gets stuck together and he can't tell any bad things about the family to the Jade Emperor.

Tangerines and oranges are eaten during the entire two weeks of the festival. The Chinese word for tangerine sounds a lot like the word for luck, and the word for orange sounds like the word for wealth. Oranges, because they are perfectly round are symbols of good luck as well. It is a New Year's custom to bring oranges as a gift when visiting people's homes. Round almond cookies (which look like gold coins and symbolize good fortune) are another popular gift.



Name: _____

1. In China, what do many families do before eating their New Year's Eve dinner?
2. How many different dishes are served at the dinner?
Why?
3. What are some of the foods that are included in the New Year's Eve meal and what is the reason for each?
4. Why are sticky rice and sweets served at the end of the meal?
5. What fruit do people bring with them when they go visiting during the New Year's festival?
Why?