


# Year of the Rabbit

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Resources to help your school  
celebrate Chinese New Year

Primary education pack

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# Introduction

According to the Chinese Lunar Calendar we enter the Year of the Rabbit on January 22nd, 2023. This education pack for primary schools contains information and activities to help teachers and pupils learn more about this important spring festival and explore Chinese language and culture.

Your pupils can read out about a traditional Chinese tale to explain why they might spot the outline of a rabbit on the moon, practice vocabulary and calligraphy linked to counting and pets and get creative painting rabbits using brushes and inks. They can also learn about some traditional rabbit proverbs and celebrate the New Year festival by making some delicious custard filled rabbit dumplings.

## Spring Festival Chūn Jié (春节)

Celebrated from the first day of the first month of the lunar year until the 15th day, the Spring Festival is regarded as the most important festival of the year in Chinese culture. During the festival, people hold family reunions and honour their ancestors. The lion dance is performed in public and red envelopes of money are placed in the lion's mouth for good luck. It is traditional for grandparents to give their grandchildren red envelopes with money inside; this is called *ya' suì qián*. These days the envelopes are just as likely to have cartoon characters on them as traditional symbols.





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Concept and development by the British Council.

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Education Consultant.

# A traditional Chinese story

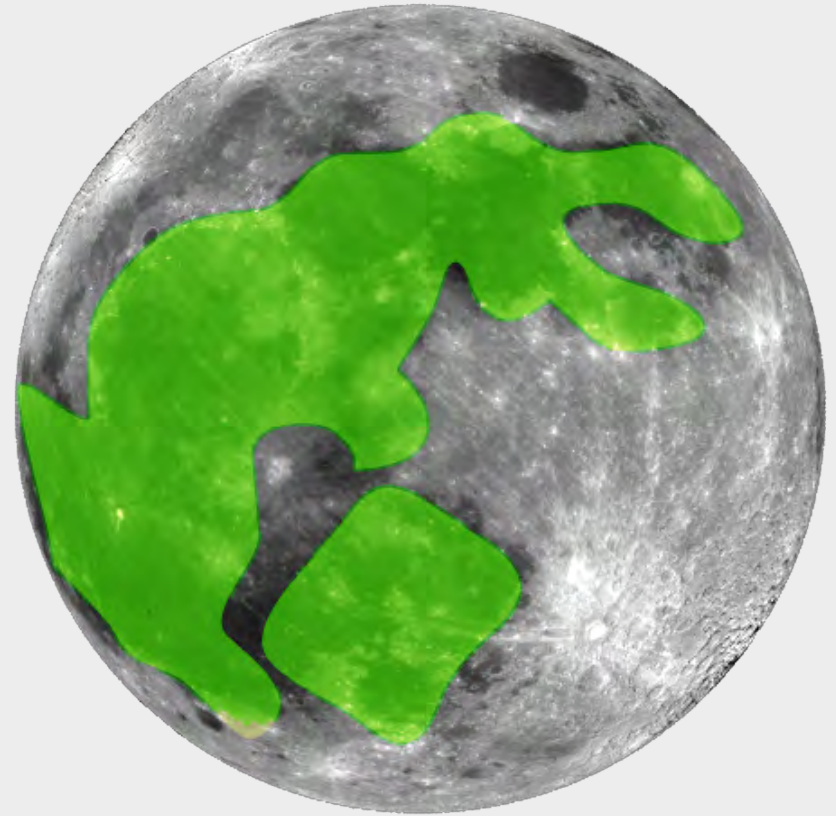
## How did a rabbit get to the Moon?

In the West, we talk about the Man in the Moon, but in China (and other countries in the Far East) they talk about the Rabbit in the Moon. Next time there is a full moon in a clear sky, have a look and see if you can make it out!

There are two traditional stories about how a rabbit came to be on the Moon. Share these with your pupils and see which one they like best.

The first story begins with a famous **archer** called Hou Yi who lived way back in the time of myths and legends. The Earth was a terrible place to live back then because instead of there being just one sun giving the right amount of heat and light, there were ten suns which rose one after the other and as they crossed the sky, they made all the rivers and lakes dry up and they shrivelled all the crops the humans needed for their food.

The Great Emperor Yao asked the hunter Hou Yi to do something about it. At first, Hou Yi tried to frighten the suns into **submission** by pointing his bow at them. He hoped this would be enough because everybody, even suns in the distant heavens, knew that he never missed. But the suns thought they were too big and too strong and too far away to need to worry about Hou Yi's arrows. They were wrong!



**Learning Objectives:** To engage pupils with a traditional Chinese folk tale and carry out activities to deepen their understanding and engagement with the text.

**Curriculum Links:** English

**Core and transferable skills:** Communication and collaboration, creativity and imagination.

**Preparation and resources:** You will need copies of the story, a large space, large paper and pens.



When Hou Yi saw that threats were not enough, he fired one arrow after another at the suns, making them tumble from the sky! He was just about to shoot down the tenth sun when Emperor Yao realised their mistake and snatched the last arrow from the string of Hou Yi's bow. "How terrible it would be if there was no sun at all and there was no longer night and day, just darkness all the time!". So Hou Yi did not fire that final arrow, and the remaining sun continued to cross the sky, all by itself giving the Earth just the right amount of light and heat for the rivers and lakes to be full of water and for the crops to grow to feed the people.

As a reward for his heroic **deed** in shooting down the nine suns, the Great Emperor Yao gave Hou Yi the Pill of **Immortality**, that would allow him to fly up to Heaven and live for ever. Hou Yi did not swallow the Pill immediately but kept it locked up in a safe place in his home. Not long after, he married an intelligent and beautiful woman called Chang E and they lived together happily for many years.

Then, a long time afterwards, one of Hou Yi's students, a lad called Peng Meng, who had heard about the Pill of Immortality, crept into Hou Yi's house and tried to steal it. But Chang E caught him red-handed just as he opened the box where the Pill was stored. She knew she wasn't strong enough to fight off Peng Meng, so, she swallowed the Pill herself to stop him taking it. The power of the Pill took her immediately and swept her up into the heavens.

As she was flying upwards, she cried out to the Jade Emperor up in Heaven to allow her at least to stay close to Earth and her beloved Hou Yi. The Jade Emperor heard her **pleas** and allowed her to fly only as far as the Moon.

The Jade Emperor took pity on Chang E and made her as comfortable as possible on the Moon with a palace to live in and he also sent her a rabbit to keep her company. However, he also knew that she had to be punished in some way for swallowing the Pill of Immortality, so he set her the task of making more Pills, with the rabbit to help her. That is why, when you look up at the Moon, if you look really carefully, you might see a rabbit standing next to a jar, in which it is mixing the ingredients for Chang E to make into Pills of Immortality.

The second story tells how three immortals decided to make a trip down to Earth to see how the animals were behaving themselves. They **disguised** themselves as beggars and went around asking the animals for food. First, they asked the fox, who went out hunting and brought them back some meat to eat. Then they asked the monkey, who went climbing up into the trees to bring the immortals fruit and berries. Finally, they asked the rabbit. The rabbit was very sad, because he knew that humans could not eat grass and straw which was all he had to offer them. It was so upset that all it could think of doing was throwing itself into a fire so that it would be cooked, and the beggars would have roast rabbit to eat. However, because they were, in fact, immortals, the beggars could see what the rabbit was intending to do, and they stopped it before it could carry out its plan. Instead, to reward the rabbit for its **selfless virtue**, they turned it into an immortal Jade Rabbit and sent it up to the Moon to live with Chang E.



Image: White-Rabbit-making-elixir-of-immortality - Moon rabbit - Wikipedia (common domain)

# Activities

## Questions for Discussion

**Ask your pupils to work with a partner and discuss the following questions:**

- Which of the two stories did you like best? Can you explain why?
- Was there anything you disliked about the stories?
- Was there anything you found puzzling?

## Vocabulary

There is quite a lot of tricky vocabulary in the tale of the moon rabbit. Some of it has been made bold.

**These words are archer, submission, deed, immortality, plea, disguise, selfless, virtue**

Ask the pupils to work together to see if they can create a glossary of these words for other pupils. They can also add any other words that they are not familiar with. Their glossary could include a definition, synonym and a sentence containing the new vocabulary. Display these on a working wall and encourage your pupils to use their new words and phrases every day during the week, so that they become familiar with them.

## Drama and storytelling

Read the first story again in a large space, and pause at dramatic moments such as when the Emperor stops Hou Yi from shooting the final sun, when Chang E spots the intruder or meets her rabbit companion for the first time.

Ask the children to create freeze-frames or still images of the action in pairs at that point in the story, and then bring them to life at a given signal, so that the characters say what they are thinking at that dramatic moment.

Back in the classroom, invite your pupils to make a story map of the key events and their spoken phrases from the drama on a large sheet of paper. Using drama and drawings can help children to hold on to the narrative and vocabulary of the story and retell it more confidently.

Challenge them to then use their story maps to write a new version of the story of the rabbit in the moon but this time from the perspective of either Hou Yi or Chang E. Encourage them to explore the features of first-person narrative and note how their character would feel as the events of the story unfold. For younger children and those with additional needs, you could carry out this activity as a shared writing activity scribing the children's ideas or sequencing some key sentences.

## Partner School Activities

If you are working with a partner school why not share your story maps and new versions of the story with each other.

# Chinese language lesson

**Learning Objectives:** To learn Chinese vocabulary associated with counting and owning pets.

**Curriculum Links:** Modern languages.

**Core skills and attributes:** Communication and collaboration

**Preparation and resources:** You will need Internet access

**This vocabulary is linked to counting and pets.**

一 <i>yī</i>	one
二 <i>èr</i>	two
三 <i>sān</i>	three
四 <i>sì</i>	four
五 <i>wǔ</i>	five
六 <i>liù</i>	six
七 <i>qī</i>	seven
八 <i>bā</i>	eight
九 <i>jiǔ</i>	nine
十 <i>shí</i>	ten

Revise the numbers 1 to 10 that we first learnt in the Year of the Horse education pack.

Then, help your pupils to practise saying the vocabulary linked to pet ownership. Can they ask and reply to the question 'Do you have any pets?'

只 *zhī*  
measure word for animals in general

条 *tiáo*  
measure word for wriggly things like fish, snakes and roads

家 *jiā*  
family, home

有 *yǒu*  
have

没有 *méi yǒu*  
not have

宠物 *chǒng wù*  
pet

兔子 *tù zi*  
rabbit

兔宝宝 *tù baobao*  
bunny rabbit

白色兔子 *baísè tùzi*  
white rabbit

狗 *gǒu*  
dog

猫 *māo*  
cat

金鱼 *jīn yú*  
goldfish

仓鼠 *cāng shǔ*  
hamster

吗 *ma*  
interrogative particle

和 *hé*  
and

你家有宠物吗? *nǐ jiā yǒu chǒngwù ma?*

Do you have any pets?  
(lit: Does your family have any pets?)

没有 *méi yǒu*  
No! (lit: not have)

有; 我有一只狗, 三只猫 和 八条金  
鱼

*yǒu ;wǒ yǒu yīzhī gǒu, sānzhī māo, hé bātiáo jīnyú*

Yes, I have one dog, three cats and eight goldfish



# Traditional Chinese brush and ink painting

**Learning Objectives:** To learn about and experiment with traditional Chinese ink and brush techniques.

**Curriculum Links:** Art and design

**Core and transferable skills:** Communication and collaboration, creativity and imagination.

**Preparation and resources:** You will need copies of the painting of rabbits, paper, pencils, cartridge paper, pointed brushes, inks.

## Information to share with your pupils

Ink wash is a type of traditional Chinese painting which began hundreds of years ago during the Tang dynasty and is still popular today with contemporary artists, who use brushes and black ink to create the “spirit” of a subject rather than an exact copy. This type of brush painting was considered one of the ‘four arts’ that were expected to be learnt by China’s ‘scholar gentlemen’ in the past. The other three were becoming proficient at playing a stringed instrument called the guqin, the strategy game of Go and Chinese calligraphy.

A particular characteristic of Chinese ink painting is the use of lines. The thickness of the brush strokes creates a sense of movement, and this can depend on the type of brush that is used. Traditionally, the brushes were made from bamboo combined with goat, horse, rabbit, deer, boar and wolf hair.





# Activity

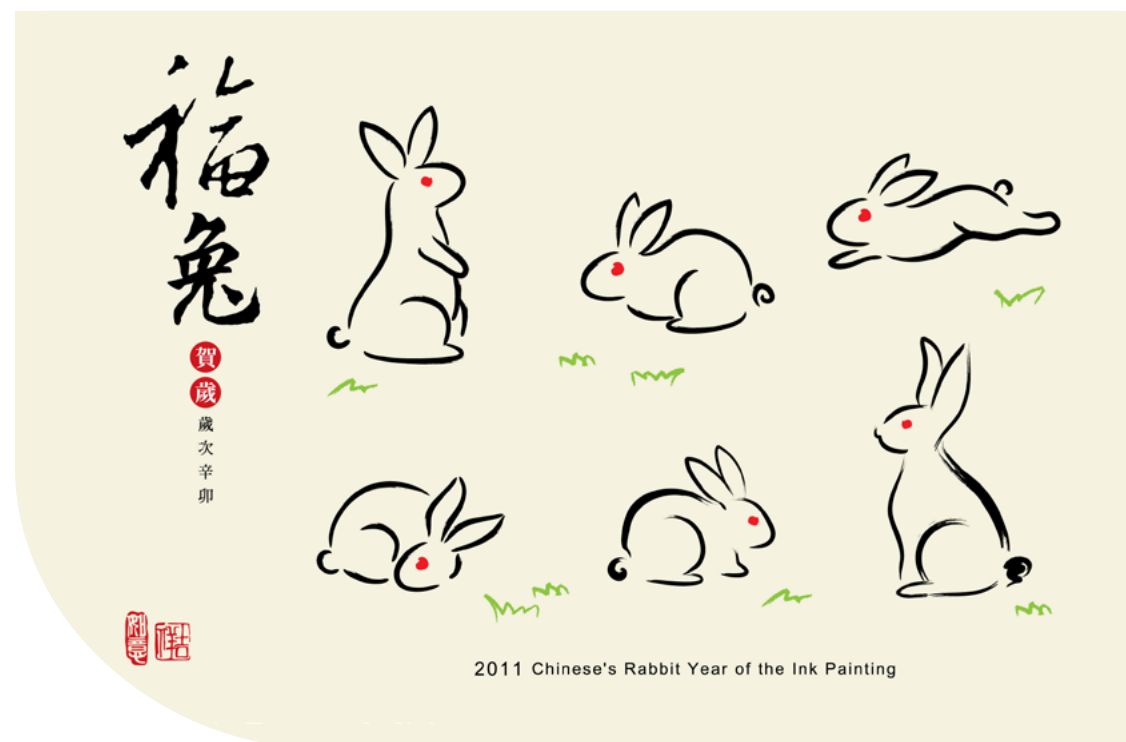
## Show your class the painting of the ink rabbits in different positions by a Chinese artist

In order to encourage your pupils to look really carefully and practice making continuous line journeys, try carrying out the following warm up drawing activities.

1. Ask your pupils to choose one of the rabbits and then give them only 30 seconds to draw it. The difficult part of the task is that they must keep their pencil moving without stopping and not look at their drawing, only the painting!
2. Challenge 2 Repeat the activity, but this time ask your pupils to use their non preferred hand. So right handers use their left hand and left handers their right. They can choose the same or a different rabbit and again have 30 seconds to complete the task.
3. Provide paper, brushes and inks and encourage the children to experiment making continuous brush strokes on cartridge paper using a pointed brush and ink. Ask them to try using different degrees of pressure and speed to make their lines.
4. When they feel ready, ask them to go on to create their own ink rabbit or rabbits in different positions like the ones in the painting.

5. Remind them to keep looking carefully at the painting and to keep their brush flowing.

6. They could go on to give their rabbit a name and a back story and practice writing the Chinese character of tù – rabbit in different sizes and colours using the following animation.




# Character animation tù – rabbit



Click image to play

Year of the Rabbit 2023  
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## Partner School Activities

If you are working with a partner school you could create an online gallery of photographs of your paintings and calligraphy. Encourage your pupils to give their picture a name and create a little gallery card explaining how their picture was made.

# Rabbit proverbs

Many traditional Chinese proverbs feature animals. Explain to your class that a proverb is a short sentence that people often use, which gives advice or tells you something about life. For example, a common English proverb is: “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.” What does this mean?

Share the following rabbit-based Chinese proverbs with your pupils. Ask them to discuss in pairs what they think might be the meaning behind each one?

Ask them to choose one of the Chinese rabbit proverbs. Challenge them to say it aloud in English and Chinese. Then practice writing the Chinese characters before creating two illustrations to show the literal and implied meanings. Can they think of any animal-based proverbs from their own culture?

Share your illustrations and home spun proverbs with a partner school if you have one.

**兔子不吃窝边草 tùzi bù chī wō biān cǎo**

Rabbits do not eat the grass around their burrows.

**兔子急了也咬人 tùzi jí le yě yǎo rén**

Even a rabbit may bite when cornered.

**守株待兔 Shǒu zhū dài tù**

Guard a tree stump to catch a rabbit

**兔子不吃窝边草 tùzi bù chī wō biān cǎo**

Rabbits do not eat the grass around their burrows. This can be taken generally to mean “it is a good idea not to draw attention to yourself”, but mostly it is used to mean “if you are going to do something naughty don’t do it close to home where people know you and where you live!”

**兔子急了也咬人 tùzi jí le yě yǎo rén**

Even a rabbit may bite when cornered. This means that even the gentlest people can get angry and turn on you if you push them too far.

**守株待兔 Shǒu zhū dài tù**

Guard a tree stump to catch a rabbit. This is used to describe someone who is both stupid and lazy. The story is that a farmer was out in his fields one day when he saw a rabbit running away from a fox. The rabbit didn’t look where it was going, ran into a tree stump, knocked itself out and was caught by the fox. The farmer thought to himself that this would be a much easier way of making some money than working away in his fields. So, from then on, he just sat beside the tree stump waiting for more rabbits to knock themselves out. Of course, it never happened again, and the farmer’s crops were all eaten by birds and swallowed up by weeds and he ended up with no money and nothing to eat.



# Letters from Chinese children about their pets

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## Information to share with pupils

In old China, the only “pets” that people kept were songbirds, crickets, goldfish and terrapins or turtles. Nowadays, as China has become a wealthy, modern economy, pet ownership has grown enormously.

Copy and share these letters with your pupils written by children in China in which they describe their favourite pet friends.



# Letters from Chinese children

Letters from children living in China



Dear friend,

Last year, I bought a Netherland Dwarf Rabbit from the pet market. How cute she is! One of her eyes is black, the other eye is blue. Her fur is white like the snow. On her way home, I had a cup of milk tea, and she tried to drink it! I couldn't stop her and gave her a little sip. Now her name is "Milk Tea"!

She likes eating snacks, but she doesn't like eating grass. When I fed the grass to her, she pretended to like it and bite it Yummy, Yummy! But if I left her alone, she would stop eating the grass. She just wants more love from me. How clever she is! But being too clever is not always a good thing.

One day, she opened the door, and escaped from the cage without me noticing. She was lost for three days! I missed her very much during these days. I searched for her everywhere, but no luck. I was very upset. Finally she found her way home to the 18th floor. When she was back, she was very tired and hungry.

What a poor rabbit! She was lucky to survive.

As you can see, "Milk Tea" is really clever and cute! I like her very much! She is my best friend now.

Yours  
Keyi, Fan  
Class 2, Grade 4,



My little puppy Tiger

Tiger is a one-year old small brown dog. He was just exactly like my dream pet.

I took care of Tiger for just a few months, because my auntie had to work in another city. Mom and I bought a new dog kennel, a water bowl, lots of dog foods and snacks, as well as a lot of toys for Tiger. When we picked up Tiger at my auntie's home, Tiger was a little nervous, so was I, as if I had butterflies in my stomach. I loved him at first sight, because he was quite lovely. Tiger seemed to know that he was going to leave my auntie, so he whined and was reluctant to go. I hugged him, kept stroking his back, and comforted him. Then I said "It's ok, you will not be lonely. I will take good care of you."

Finally, I had a dog for the first time!

Every day I took him everywhere with me. Up in the morning, we had breakfast together, I took him into the yard for happy running. Sometimes, he could accompany me to school with my father. Tiger was so cute and friendly that all my classmates loved him very much. I was so proud of Tiger. When I went back home, every time Tiger was very happy. He wagged his tail, jumped around me, and was looking forward to my hug.

When Tiger went back to my auntie, I was very sad to see him off. He will be my favourite pet forever.

Yilian Lin  
Class 1 Grade 3  
North Campus of Daxing Middle School  
Attached to Capital Normal University, Beijing

# Letters from Chinese children

Letters from children living in China



Dear friends from England,

As we all know, animals are friends of the people. I love all kinds of animals, but my favourite animals are goldfish, there are five goldfish in my family.

I like goldfish because they look very beautiful. They are colourful, such as orange, red, golden, red and white, red and black.

I like goldfish because they are very cute and interesting. Sometimes they blow bubbles in the bowl; sometimes they are swimming at the bottom; sometimes they jump out of the water suddenly when I feed them. We have been good friends, for a long time. When I am close to the bowl every time, they will come out immediately. They seem to say, "Let's play together, my dear friend."

Do you like my little goldfish?

Best wishes

Sandy  
Zhige Wu  
Class 4 Grade 3  
North Campus of Daxing Middle School  
Attached to Capital Normal University, Beijing



Dear Friends,

In China, many families would like to have a dog as pet. Chinese people think the dog is a very honest and loyal animal who will defend his home. I also have a dog. She is called "Money". Her fur is yellow and soft. She is very fluffy. She is very mild, swift and nimble. She likes chasing cats, but I usually don't let her do that. Because I like these cats so much, too. Don't you think that? They are like "flying fluffy balls".

In the morning, I always get up very early and go to walk with "Money". After that, I have my breakfast and go to school. When I go back in the afternoon, she is always very happy to see me. I always do my homework quickly so that I can have enough time to train her. While I am training her, she is never absent-hearted. I sometimes play football with her. At first, she is not interested in football. But when I draw a cat face on the ball, everything is changed. She likes to kick and hit the ball. I know why. I think it is just likes chasing cats. After my dinner, I often lay some bones in her bowl, she likes eating them. After that, I walk with her again for half an hour. She is always very excited about this activity.

At weekends, I often take her to the park in the neighbourhood. We go there for jogging, playing football or having a picnic. I think that it can build a better relationship between Money and me. I am sure that you will like her too. Money is not only a pet, but also a good friend for me. Do you have such a friend? Please tell me as soon as possible, I can't wait!

Your friend, Kenneth Cheng  
Class 3, Grade 5, Zimo, Cheng  
Minhang Experimental Primary School, Shanghai, China.



# Activities

## Questions to discuss with a partner

- Why did Fan name her rabbit “Milk Tea”?
- Can you find one phrase from each letter to show how the children feel about their pets?
- Which of the four pets would you prefer to own if you could? Can you explain why?
- What other questions would you like to ask the children about their pets?
- Ask your pupils to draft a reply to one of the letters describing their own pets and how they look after them. If they don't have a pet themselves, they could describe the ideal pet that they would like to own.

## Hold a Year of the Rabbit Celebration Event

To celebrate the start of the Year of the Rabbit, why not invite friends and family to school to share the work you have done. Your pupils could demonstrate their Chinese language skills, share their artwork and stories and astound their visitors by making these popular rabbit shaped custard buns.

### Partner School Activities

If you are working with a partner school you could share photographs of your Year of the Rabbit celebrations.

# Recipe for rabbit-shaped custard buns

## For the custard you will need:

- 6 large egg yolks
- 120g caster sugar
- 50g cornflour
- 260g whole milk
- 80g unsalted butter
- 40g milk powder

## Method

- Put the egg yolks in a large bowl.
- In a separate bowl, mix the sugar and cornflour together.
- In a small saucepan, combine the milk, butter, and milk powder, and bring the mixture to a boil.
- Whisk the sugar-cornflour mixture into the egg yolks, then pour the hot milk mixture into egg mixture, making sure to whisk while pouring to stop the eggs scrambling
- Put the bowl over to a pan partially filled with water. Bring the water to a gentle simmer and cook the custard over it, stirring constantly until it thickens. This should take about 5 minutes. Continue cooking for another 1-2 minutes.
- Pour the custard filling into a heatproof bowl, cover with a piece of plastic wrap, and steam for 30 minutes.
- Remove from the steamer, place into a container with a lid, and refrigerate. Cool completely before using.



# Recipe for rabbit-shaped custard buns



## For the steamed bun dough

- 525g plain flour, plus extra for dusting
- 1½ tbsp caster sugar, plus a pinch of salt
- 1 tsp fast-action dried yeast
- 50ml milk
- 1 tbsp sunflower oil, plus extra for brushing and for the bowl
- 1 tbsp rice vinegar
- 1 tsp baking powder

## Method:

- Mix together the flour, caster sugar and ½ tsp salt in a large bowl. Dissolve the yeast and a pinch of sugar in 1 tbsp warm water, then add it to the flour with the milk, sunflower oil, rice vinegar and 200ml water. Mix into a dough, adding a little extra water if needed.
- Tip the dough onto a lightly floured work surface and knead for 10-15 mins, or until smooth. Put in a lightly oiled bowl, cover with a damp cloth and leave to rise for 2 hrs, or until doubled in size.
- Tip the dough out onto a clean work surface and punch it down. Flatten the dough with your hands, then sprinkle over the baking powder and knead for 5 mins.

## To make the rabbit buns:

- Make 16 balls out of the custard filling and 18 (one more than needed) balls out of the dough. Flatten and shape 16 balls into circles, with the outer edge thinner than the centre.
- Place a ball of custard in the centre of each dough circle and encase the filling with the dough. Press and seal the dough well. Slightly elongate the bun into an oval-egg shape. Place seam-side down onto a piece of parchment.
- Take one of the remaining balls of dough and divide into 2/3 and 1/3. Colour the 2/3-ball with a very small drop of red or pink food colouring, and the remaining 1/3 with a 1/2-teaspoon of cocoa powder. Knead the colouring in very well.
- Create 48 pea-sized pink balls, and 32 rice-grain-sized cocoa balls; with the pink ones, shape a pair of ears and a tail for each bun. Make pairs of eyes with the cocoa ones. Stick them in place on the buns with a dab of water.
- Allow to rise, covered, for about 15 minutes.
- Steam in a bamboo steamer for 10 minutes and serve immediately.

Enjoy - you can freeze any that you don't eat.



# Find out more

**We hope your pupils enjoyed the activities in this pack. There are lots more ways you can get involved in international work with China and other countries:**

## **Find a partner school**

International school partnerships can inspire pupils by bringing the world into the classroom through joint learning activities which bring language learning to life. They also offer teachers the chance to share experiences and learn new practices from colleagues in other countries. Browse our database of schools looking for partners and find guidance and support to help you make the most of your partnership at <https://www.britishcouncil.org/school-resources/partner>

## **Access resources**

Check out our global learning resources, including classroom activities and lesson plans: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/school-resources/find/classroom>

## **Learn Chinese**

Host a Chinese Language Assistant. It's easy to organise and you can share the assistant with other local schools. Information about the Primary Programme of Study at the Confucius Institute can be found at: <http://bit.ly/2cVRnkl>

To find out more about implementing Chinese teaching in your school contact the UCL IOE Confucius Institute for Schools at [chinesenetworks@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:chinesenetworks@ucl.ac.uk)

## **Get recognition**

Sign up to our prestigious British Council International School Award scheme to earn accreditation for your international work: <https://bit.ly/383onFp>

## **Chinese Art**

Rabbit line drawings: <https://www.dreamstime.com/royalty-free-stock-photos-chinese-s-rabbit-year-ink-painting-image17617048> (dreamstime.com)

8th-9th c Tang Dynasty glazed pottery figure of a rabbit: <https://collections.artsmia.org/art/90695/figure-of-a-rabbit-china>

Find out more art and drawing activities in this project from The National Gallery at: <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/learning/take-one-picture>

And don't forget  
next year is the

# Year of the \_\_\_\_\_?