

LEVELED BOOK • R

New Year Celebrations

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Written by Evan Russell

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Focus Question

What are different ways people celebrate the New Year?

Words to Know

Buddha
cultures
custom
cycles
figures

fortunes
resolutions
symbolize
traditions

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A Chinese boy celebrates the New Year by wearing red and eating a stick of candied red berries (left). Two Japanese children ring in the New Year (right).

Introduction

People around the world celebrate the New Year at different times of the year and in many different ways. In some **cultures**, people celebrate with parties. In other cultures, people usher in the New Year with fascinating and unusual **traditions**, such as wearing yellow underwear. Many cities set off stunning fireworks displays at midnight.

People around the world make **resolutions** for the New Year. A resolution is a promise to end a bad habit or begin a good one. It can be anything from eating healthier foods to being a better friend. Resolutions are an inspiring, positive way to greet the New Year.



North America

In the United States, a New Year's Eve celebration might mean a small party with family and friends. However, in Times Square in New York City, it's estimated that a million people gather together. They count down the last minute of the year as a giant ball covered

with lights drops from a tall building. Millions of people around the world watch the celebration on television. At the stroke of midnight, the crowds cheer and celebrate.

A young girl and her father celebrate the New Year in Times Square, New York City.



In the United States, college football teams play special games on New Year's Day. The most famous is the Rose Bowl game in Pasadena, California. Before the game, many people watch the Rose Parade. It has flower-covered floats and marching bands.



Floats made from thousands of flowers are part of the Rose Parade in California.

At the Mummers Parade in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, thousands of men, women, and children dress up in fancy (and sometimes ridiculous) costumes. They gather in the morning and spend the day playing music, dancing, twirling, and strutting through the city.

Do You Know?

In the southern United States, people eat a dish of rice and black-eyed peas called Hoppin' John. Some believe that if you enjoy simple foods on New Year's Day, you might be successful the rest of the year.



Central and South America



Central and South America

Eating twelve grapes during the last twelve seconds of the year is a tradition that came to Central and South America from Spain. Each grape stands for one month of the coming year, and eating them all invites good luck.

In many countries, the color of the clothes you wear on New Year's Eve is important—the



color of your underwear, that is! In some places, people hoping for riches wear brand-new yellow underwear to represent gold.

Eating twelve grapes just before the New Year starts promises good luck for each of the twelve months in the coming year—but it's difficult to swallow them all in time!



Children in Peru pose next to *muñecos* that will be burned in honor of the New Year.

The people of Peru, Panama, and Ecuador share a fascinating New Year's **custom** in which they make *muñecos* (moon-YE-kohs), or **figures**, out of straw, rags, and paper. People decorate the figures and parade them around on New Year's Eve. At midnight, people gather in the streets and set their *muñecos* on fire. Burning the figures represents the release of bad memories from the past year. People hope to start the New Year without any negative reminders of the previous year.

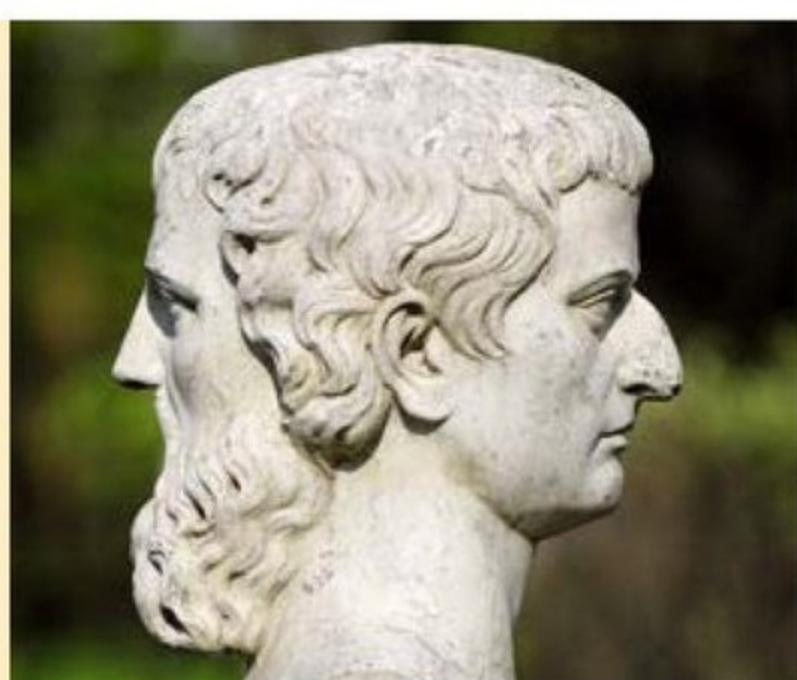


Women throw water out of a window in Uruguay to bring luck in the New Year.

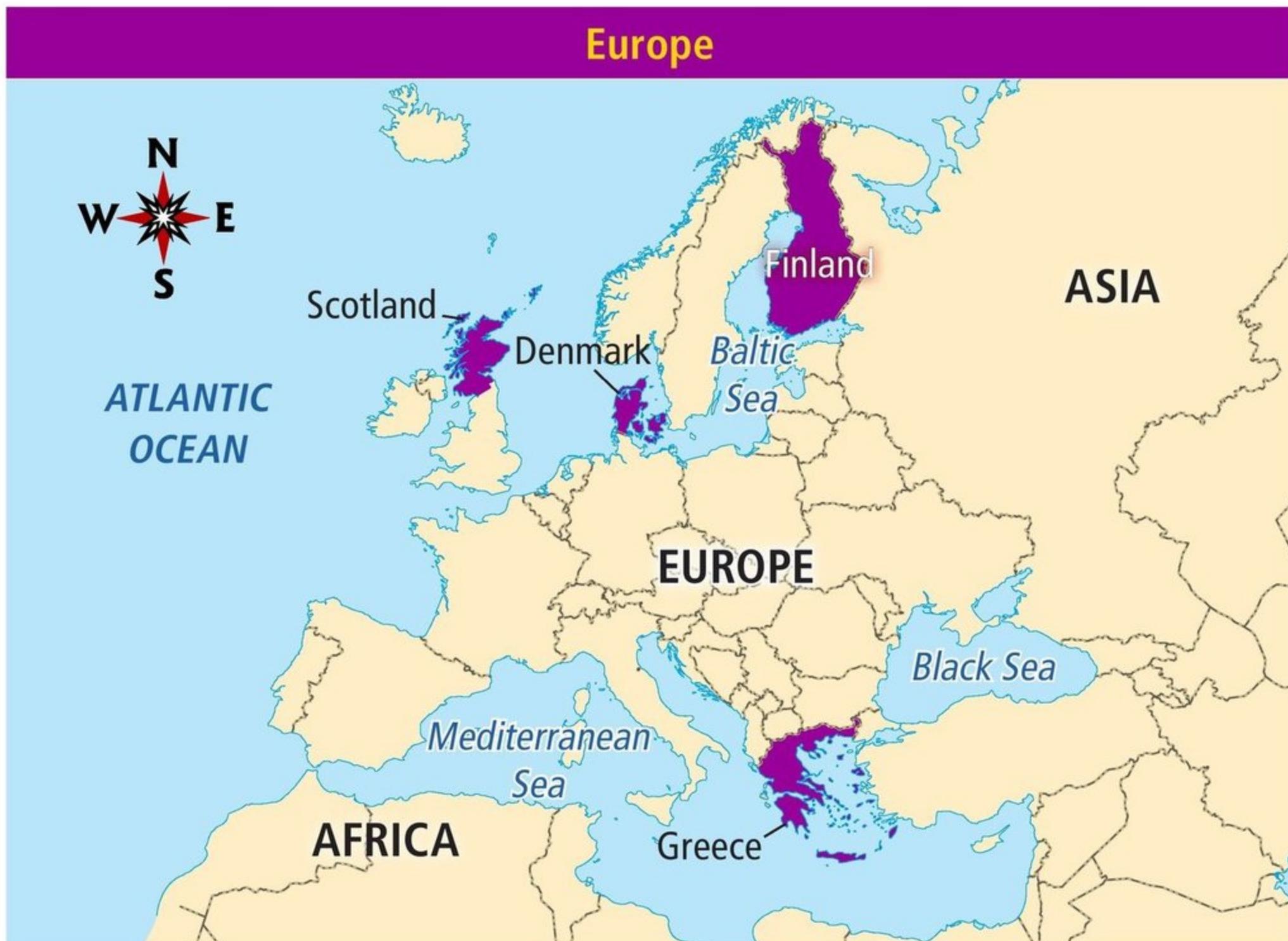
In many countries, people say goodbye to bad luck by pouring water out of windows onto the streets below. Another popular New Year tradition is cleaning your home before midnight so that good luck feels welcome. It's a good idea to start the New Year fresh and clean!

Two-Faced!

The month of January is named for the ancient Roman god Janus. Janus was the god of doors, gateways, and beginnings. He is usually shown with two faces. One face looks backward at the old year and the other looks forward into the New Year.



This statue of Janus was made in Russia.



Europe

In Denmark, people collect old and broken dishes and mugs all year long. On New Year's Eve, they smash them onto the doorsteps of family and friends. Finding a heap of broken dishes by the front door means good luck.

In Finland, people melt tin to guess next year's **fortunes**. If the tin cools in the shape of a heart, it means love or marriage. If it cools in the shape of a circle, it means good luck. Tin that cools in the shape of an anchor means you may need help in the year to come.

In Greece, people bake a cake with a coin hidden inside. If you get the slice with the coin, then you should have luck in the coming year!

Hogmanay is the name of the New Year celebration in Scotland. For Hogmanay, Scottish people clean their homes by midnight. After dark, groups of people parade through the streets holding torches and swinging balls of flame. Some fireballs are giant, weighing up to 9.1 kilograms (20 lb.)! At midnight, people sing a song about remembering old friends, called “Auld Lang Syne.” Another Scottish tradition is called *first-footing*. For good luck, the year’s first visitor to a home must be a male with dark hair bearing gifts of coal, bread, and something to drink.



A man swings a ball of fire at a New Year celebration in Scotland.

Southeast Asia



Southeast Asia

In the Philippines, round objects **symbolize** coins and good luck. On New Year's Eve, Filipino people wear clothes with polka dots to invite luck in the New Year. They gather and eat twelve different types of round fruit. Filipino people also clean their homes before New Year's Eve. At midnight, they open all their windows to invite good fortune in.

In parts of Southeast Asia, people celebrate the traditional New Year in late March or mid-April. This is the end of the dry season in Cambodia and other countries. It is a very hot and dusty time of year—a time for water festivals!



Two girls pour water over a statue of Buddha in Cambodia.

To prepare for the New Year, people clean dusty statues of **Buddha** with water. They save the water for priests, who gently pour it onto their shoulders for good luck.

Water Fight!

In Thailand, the water festival is called *Songkran*, and it usually lasts from April 13 to 15. Parade floats spray crowds with water, and children chase one another with water blasters and water pails. It might easily be 38° Celsius (100° F) in Thailand on New Year's Day. When it's this hot, a water fight is the perfect way to celebrate!





A boy blows the shofar, a ram's horn, in honor of the Jewish New Year at a school in Los Angeles, California (left). People herd buffalo at a parade for the Islamic New Year in Indonesia (right).

Changing New Years

In some cultures, the New Year happens at a different time every year. The Islamic New Year, called *Al-Hijra* (al HI-jruh), is based on a lunar calendar. This means that it follows the **cycles** of the Moon. A lunar year is around eleven days shorter than the 365-day solar year, which is based on Earth's movement around the Sun. The Chinese New Year, called the Spring Festival, and the Jewish New Year, called *Rosh Hashanah*, follow both the solar and lunar calendars.



People wearing red hold up a dragon at a parade to celebrate the Chinese New Year in London, England.

Conclusion

Many New Year's traditions are shared internationally. House cleaning before the New Year is common in many cultures, many cities celebrate with fireworks at midnight, and many people make resolutions for the coming year. New Year traditions around the world share a hope for a fresh start—and a desire to celebrate with music, dancing, and fun!

How will you celebrate the New Year?



Children around the world celebrate the New Year with music and dance.

Glossary

Buddha (*n.*) the title given to the person who started the Buddhist religion (p. 13)

cultures (*n.*) the ideas and customs of certain groups of people (p. 4)

custom (*n.*) a traditional way of doing something in a certain culture (p. 8)

cycles (*n.*) sets of events that keep repeating in the same order (p. 14)

figures (*n.*) forms or shapes, especially human shapes (p. 8)

fortunes (*n.*) predictions about the future; successes or failures (p. 10)

resolutions (*n.*) decisions or promises to do certain things (p. 4)

symbolize (*v.*) to represent an idea with an object, picture, or sign (p. 12)

traditions (*n.*) beliefs or customs that are passed down from year to year and generation to generation (p. 4)

New Year Celebrations

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Connections

Writing and Art

How do you celebrate the New Year?

Draw a picture and write about what you do.

Social Studies

Compare your New Year celebration to a celebration in the book using a Venn diagram. Include how and when the celebrations take place. Use facts from the book and outside resources.



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