



Dragon Boat Festival - History and Tradition

Reading Worksheet — Level F | tahricteaches.com

The Dragon Boat Festival, known as Duanwu Jie (端午节), is one of East Asia's most enduring **cultural** celebrations. Observed on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, the festival combines **commemoration**, athletic competition, and culinary tradition. It is recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage, reflecting its deep significance across Chinese-speaking communities worldwide.

The festival honors Qu Yuan, a **patriotic** poet and minister of the Chu state. When his country fell to enemies and his rivals conspired against him, Qu Yuan drowned himself in the Miluo River as an act of **protest**. Locals raced their boats to retrieve his body and threw rice parcels into the water to keep fish away — giving rise to both the dragon boat race and the tradition of **zongzi**.

Dragon boat racing is the festival's most **iconic** activity. Teams of paddlers follow a drummer's beat, racing decorated wooden vessels at high speed. Modern competitions involve teams from dozens of countries, requiring both physical strength and precise **coordination**. The sport has become one of the world's fastest-growing water sports.

Zongzi — sticky rice **parcels** wrapped in bamboo leaves — vary by region. Northern varieties tend to be sweet, while southern zongzi are often **savory**, filled with pork or salted egg yolk. Families prepare them together, passing folding techniques as a form of cultural **transmission** from generation to generation.

The Dragon Boat Festival is now celebrated in Southeast Asia, overseas Chinese communities, and Western cities where dragon boat clubs attract **diverse** participants. Its global spread shows how traditional practices adapt without losing their cultural core. For many, the festival is ultimately about community, physical challenge, and the shared pleasure of **ritual**.

A. Vocabulary

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|------------------|-------|--|
| 1. commemoration | _____ | a. the ability of people to work together effectively |
| 2. patriotic | _____ | b. the passing of something from one generation to another |
| 3. protest | _____ | c. having strong love and support for one's country |
| 4. iconic | _____ | d. a strong expression of disagreement or objection |
| 5. coordination | _____ | e. widely recognized as a symbol of something |
| 6. parcels | _____ | f. small wrapped packages |
| 7. savory | _____ | g. having a salty or spicy flavor, not sweet |
| 8. transmission | _____ | h. an action to honor and remember a person or event |

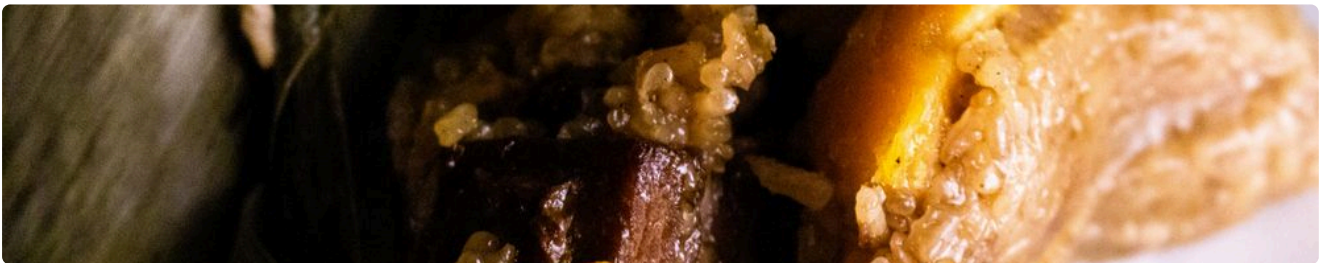
B. True or False

- ___ 1. The Dragon Boat Festival is recognized by UNESCO.
- ___ 2. Qu Yuan was a soldier who died in battle.
- ___ 3. Rice parcels were thrown in the river to feed the fish.
- ___ 4. Dragon boat races use drummers to keep paddlers in rhythm.
- ___ 5. Zongzi fillings are the same across all regions of China.
- ___ 6. Dragon boat racing is now practiced internationally.
- ___ 7. Northern Chinese zongzi are often savory.
- ___ 8. The festival only survives in Taiwan and China.
- ___ 9. Qu Yuan drowned himself as an act of protest.
- ___ 10. Cultural transmission means passing traditions to the next generation.

C. Fill in the Blanks

Word Bank: commemoration, patriotic, iconic, coordination, savory, transmission, protest, diverse

- 1. The festival is a _____ of Qu Yuan, a poet who loved his country.
- 2. Qu Yuan was a _____ minister who sacrificed himself for his beliefs.
- 3. Dragon boat racing is the festival's most _____ activity.
- 4. The sport requires physical strength and precise _____.



D. Comprehension Questions

- 1. Why did locals throw rice into the river during the original festival?
- 2. How do regional zongzi traditions differ between north and south China?
- 3. What does the global spread of dragon boat racing suggest about cultural traditions?

E. Discussion Questions

- 1. Should countries preserve traditional festivals even when the original meaning is no longer widely known?
- 2. How has the Dragon Boat Festival changed from its origins? Is this change a good thing?

Answer Key

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A. Vocabulary: 1-h, 2-c, 3-d, 4-e, 5-a, 6-f, 7-g, 8-b

B. True/False: 1-T, 2-F, 3-F, 4-T, 5-F, 6-T, 7-F, 8-F, 9-T, 10-T

C. Fill Blanks: 1-commemoration, 2-patriotic, 3-iconic, 4-coordination

D. Comprehension:

1. To prevent fish from eating Qu Yuan's body
2. Northern zongzi are sweet; southern zongzi are savory with meat or egg
3. That traditions can adapt and spread globally while keeping their cultural meaning