

TRADITIONAL EAST ASIAN HOLIDAYS



LESSON FOUR THE MID-AUTUMN FESTIVAL DR. XIAOBING LI



The Mid-Autumn, or Moon Festival celebrates the harvest and the family, similar to Thanksgiving in America. It takes place on the fifteenth day of the eighth month in the Chinese lunar calendar. During the festival, all families have a big reunion and enjoy the bright, full autumn moon. The local temple fair is a cultural and social event in both Asia and America. In ancient times the fair included religious ceremonies and sacrifices and has transformed into market exchanges and entertainment. The temple fair takes place in the open ground in or near a temple.

During the holiday, artisans set up booths to show and sell paintings, handcrafted items, and clothing. A stage is put together for local musicians to perform traditional songs, dances, and quyi (Asian folk performing arts, including ballad singing, storytelling, and comedies). Everyone can sample snacks, exchange recipes, ride on a horse or a camel, enjoy the shows, and watch local sporting events such as martial arts tournaments.

The traditional food for the Mid-Autumn Festival is round moon cakes. Because of its shape, like that of the moon, the moon cake symbolizes union. Although moon cakes are considered desserts and not main meals, there are over one hundred kinds of moon cakes in many flavors and with various fillings such as nuts, lotus seed paste, egg yolk, bean paste, crystal sugar, sesame seed, ham, shrimp, vegetables, and more.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Have you been to a local party celebrating the Mid-Autumn Festival? What was your favorite part: activities, food, or people?
2. Why do the Asian people call their holiday cake the "moon cake"?
3. When you are shopping for moon cakes at the local Asian supermarket, what flavors or fillings could you look for?