



重陽節: Climbing High, Honoring Elders

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This issue celebrates 重陽節 (Chóngyáng Jié, the Double Ninth Festival), a day for fresh autumn air, chrysanthemums, and showing love to the older generation. Read on for the story behind the holiday, a few words to practise, and simple ways to celebrate at home.



A Letter from the Director

Dear families and learners,

Autumn is one of my favorite seasons for learning Mandarin. The air turns crisp, and the Chinese calendar brings us 重陽節 (Chóngyáng Jié), the Double Ninth Festival. It is a gentle, meaningful holiday about looking after our health and honoring the grandparents and elders in our lives.

In this issue you will find the story of where the festival comes from, a handful of useful words to practice together, and some easy ideas for marking the day as a family. I hope these pages give you a reason to start a conversation at the dinner table, or maybe even to call a grandparent and say 「祝您健康」 (wishing you good health).

Thank you for the trust you place in us, and for the patience and encouragement you give your learners every week. Learning a language is a long climb, and we are so glad to be making it with you.

Warmly,

Steve Riehle, Director

The Story of the Double Ninth



重陽節 falls on the ninth day of the ninth month of the Chinese lunar calendar. In traditional Chinese thought, nine is a 陽 (yáng) number, a strong and bright number. With two nines together, the day became known as "double yang," which is exactly what 重陽 means.

A well-known legend tells of a man who was warned that disaster would strike his village on this day. He led his family up a high hill, carrying sprigs of 茱萸 (zhūyú, a fragrant dogwood plant) and drinking chrysanthemum wine to ward off harm. When they came home, they were safe. From this story grew the custom of 登高 (dēnggāo, climbing to a high place) every Double Ninth.

Chrysanthemums, or 菊花 (júhuā), bloom in autumn and became the festival flower, a symbol of long life. Many families also enjoy 重陽糕 (Chóngyáng gāo), a layered steamed cake. Because 糕 (gāo, cake) sounds like 高 (gāo, high), eating it is a playful wish to rise higher in life.

There is one more lovely bit of wordplay. The number nine, 九 (jiǔ), sounds just like 久 (jiǔ), meaning "long-lasting." So 九九 suggests a long, long life. That is why, in modern times, the festival has become a day to honor older people, and many places also call it a day for respecting the elderly.

The poet Wang Wei captured the feeling of this holiday more than a thousand years ago, writing of being far from home on the Double Ninth: 每逢佳節倍思親 (on every festive day, I miss my family twice as much). For anyone with loved ones far away, the line still rings true.

Words to Practice This Season

Holidays are a perfect time to learn a few new words, because you can use them right away. Here are some festival words to try at home.

重陽節 (Chóngyáng Jié) means the Double Ninth Festival.

登高 (dēnggāo) means to climb to a high place.

菊花 (júhuā) means chrysanthemum.

長壽 (chángshòu) means long life.

爺爺、奶奶、外公、外婆 are the words for grandparents: father's father, father's mother, mother's father and mother's mother.



Celebrating at Home

You don't need a mountain to celebrate 重陽節. The spirit of the festival is simple: get outside, enjoy the season, and show care for the older people in your life.

Take a family walk somewhere with a view. Any hill, trail or park path counts as 登高. Along the way, challenge your learner to name what they see in Mandarin: 樹 (shù, tree), 葉子 (yèzi, leaves), 天空 (tiānkōng, sky).

Brew a pot of chrysanthemum tea, or bring a bunch of chrysanthemums to a grandparent or neighbour. Even a small bouquet says you are thinking of them.

Make a card for an elder. Younger students can write 爺爺奶奶好 (hello, Grandpa and Grandma) or 祝您長壽 (wishing you a long life). Older learners might try a few sentences about a favourite memory together.

Call or video chat with family who live far away. If your learner can say even one greeting in Mandarin, it will likely be the highlight of someone's day.

The best celebrations are the ones that turn a new word into a real moment of connection.

Why Honoring Elders Helps Us Learn

Many of us first hear Mandarin from a grandparent, or wish we could speak it with one. That is part of what makes 重陽節 so special for language learners. It reminds us that a language is not just a school subject. It is a bridge between generations.

When children practice Mandarin with older relatives, something wonderful happens. Grandparents slow down, repeat patiently, and share words, songs and stories that no textbook includes. Children, in turn, feel proud to be understood. Both sides are giving each other a gift.

If your family doesn't have Mandarin-speaking elders nearby, the lesson still holds. Respect and patience make learning easier for everyone. A learner who feels encouraged takes more risks, and taking risks is how fluency grows.

From the Mandarin Learning Center to you and your family, Have a wonderful ChongYangJie. :)