

Lunar New Year 2022: A Time For Joy
Jenna Cao, Athens Academy Class of 2023

February is upon us and the Lunar New Year has arrived, bringing with it sounds of laughter, exploding firecrackers, and the mouthwatering aroma of traditional foods, such as bánh tét, a Vietnamese steamed rice cake made with yellow bean and pork.

The Lunar New Year is celebrated in countries throughout Asia, such as China, Thailand, Vietnam, and many others. The lunar calendar dictates the date of the new year as well as the Chinese zodiac that repeats itself on a twelve-year cycle, with 2022 falling on the year of the tiger.

“My family celebrates Tết (Vietnamese New Year) by making traditional dishes such as bánh tét and bánh chung as well as going to the local community gathering to celebrate each year,” Hart County High School sophomore Catherine Nguyen says.

In Vietnam, Tết is a national holiday and most people take off from work to celebrate. My family in Vietnam, along with the rest of the country's citizens, mark the occasion over three days. The first day is spent with family to celebrate our ancestors, the second with friends, and the third with teachers, from both past and present.

“As a Vietnamese person, I feel great pride in being able to celebrate this, as it is a chance for us to connect with our heritage and is a reminder of how beautiful our culture is,” Nguyen says.

Although the holiday is fun, there are many more culturally significant things to celebrate than just eating the delicious food. The Lunar New Year is a great way to keep traditions alive, especially in America, during a time when the Asian American community is facing a rise in discrimination.

In the past few years, there has been an increase in anti-Asian hate crimes, which many in the community felt were ignored. These crimes came to our own backyard when the Atlanta spa shootings occurred in early 2021, claiming the lives of eight people, six of whom were Asian women.

“When I first learned about the Atlanta spa shootings last year, I remember being angry because a lot of people were ignoring the event and saying that it was not a hate crime. There was a period of time when I felt unsafe being outside on my own, and I feel for any Asians who have felt ridiculed and alone in the past pandemic year,” Athens Academy junior Amy Tran says.

According to a recent poll conducted in October 2021 by NPR, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, 1 in 4 Asians living in America feared for their safety.

For everyone who felt afraid in 2021, a year of social distancing and isolation, Lunar New Year 2022 offers a joyous way to come together as one, celebrate our community, and encourage peace and happiness.

So as the clock ticks by and Feb. 1 approaches, I look forward to dressing up in my traditional Áo dài (Vietnamese dress) and attending my local church's New Year's party with my friends and family. While there, I will play Bầu cua tôm cá (Vietnamese dice game), receive red envelopes for good luck, and reflect on the resiliency of my culture and its ability to rise above the hardships that it faces.