

My MEP Projects: Y9

Y9 Project: The Gaokao



Name: _____

You've probably heard of the Gaokao, the exam taken by millions of Chinese students to gain entrance to college. It is a bit like A Levels but much more stressful because the stakes are so high. This is the key chance for students to get into higher education and improve their life prospects. So important is the exam to students and their families that the whole of China comes to a standstill on the two or three days the exam takes place. In this project you'll learn lots more about school life in China and how teenagers cope with the exam. Hopefully, though, you won't have to share their stress!

Go for it!

Task 1: The name of the exam...no wonder it's shortened!

The word 'Gaokao' comes from 高 (gāo 'high') and 考 (kǎo 'exam'). The full title of the exam is:

普通高等学校招生全国统一考试

Task 1a

Let's break that down a bit...

Use a dictionary to correctly link the Chinese characters in the exam title to their pinyin and meaning. One has been done for you:

中文		Pinyin		English
普通		kǎo shì		enrol students, recruit students
高等		xué xiào		high level, advanced
学校		tǒng yī		general, common
招生		pǔ tōng		exam
统一		zhāo shēng		unified, centralized
考试		gāo děng		school

Task 1b

Suggest a good translation into English for the full title of the exam (remember that you don't need to stick to the same word order for each bit of the title when translating, think about what works best and sounds most natural in English).

Task 1c What's tested?

All students of the Gaokao take three compulsory subjects: Maths, Chinese language and a foreign language (most choose English). In addition, students choose between two specialisms: social sciences (history, politics and geography) or natural sciences (physics, chemistry and biology). Here's a quick wordsearch to help you remember some common school subjects in Chinese. Find 14 subjects (some words are on the diagonal.)

生	物	秦	杨	孟	扣	美
地	理	马	英	音	乐	术
张	金	中	文	报	侯	猪
宗	教	阮	管	周	科	化
谢	杨	历	英	手	数	学
体	育	推	史	工	鱼	熊

Fill in the table below with the words you found on the wordsearch. One has been done for you.

Character	pin yin	English		Character	pin yin	English
中文	zhōng wén	Chinese				

Task 1d The Gaokao in numbers

Here are some interesting facts about the Gaokao. Write the underlined numbers/dates/times in Chinese in the space below:

- The exam takes place on June 7 and 8 every year
- The exam takes 9 hours
- in 2019, more than 10 million students took the exam
- In 1977 only 5% of students taking the exam were given college places
- Because there are many more colleges now, in 2018 81% got places

Do you remember how to do percentages in Chinese?
It's really easy:
百分之 + the percentage number
so, 70% is 百分之七十

Task 2: Talking about the Gaokao

Watch this two-minute clip where young Chinese remember their Gaokao. Mostly they are talking in English.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HLc16huiRx4>

Task 2.1

Now listen again and write down in English a few quotes from the speakers:

1. The comment that most surprised you.....
2. The comment that most shocked you.....
3. The comment that you found most interesting.....

Explain in English the reason you found this last quote interesting:

Task 2.2 Talking about the Gaokao in Chinese

Here are some key phrases and words linked to the Gaokao:

to take the Gaokao	参加高考	cān jiā gāo kǎo
to pass and get into uni	考上大学	kǎo shàng dà xué
to get high marks	得到高分	dé dào gāo fēn
to encourage someone	给 X 加油	gěi X jiā yóu
the pressure is huge	压力很大	yā lì hěn dà
I'm feeling very nervous!	我觉得非常紧张!	wǒ jué de fēi cháng jǐn zhāng!

And here's a reminder of some ways of talking about the future:

I want to...	我想。。	wǒ xiǎng....
I hope.....	我希望。。	wǒ xī wàng....
I must.....	我必须。。	wǒ bì xū....

Imagine you are messaging your Chinese friend who is about to take his or her Gaokao. In the speech bubbles below, write an exchange of messages between the two of you. Your Chinese friend's first message tells you how busy they are. Use some of the phrases above to ask them some questions about the Gaokao and write their possible replies.

Your friend

You

我现在非常忙!

Task 2.3 A useful phrase when talking about exams

我觉得非常紧张！

wǒ jué de fēi cháng jǐn zhāng!

“I’m feeling very nervous!” That’s a phrase you’ve probably used a lot.

Remember that smart trick for language learners: learn useful phrases by heart that will trip easily off the tip of your tongue when you need them. ‘I’m feeling very nervous’ is a great one of those. Write it on a post-it and stick it somewhere you’ll see it frequently – your phone? your bedroom wall? Keep it there for a week and say it (or even shout it) out loud every time you see it.

我觉得非常紧张！

wǒ jué de fēi cháng jǐn zhāng!

Task 2.4 A closer look at the word 紧张

Here’s a tip for remembering the characters in jǐn zhāng :

紧 The character jǐn means ‘tight’ like a knot and has the ‘silk’ radical 糸

张 The character zhāng means ‘stretched out’ and has the ‘bow’ (as in bow and arrow) radical 弓

Knotted like string and stretched like a bow – really appropriate images for tense and nervous!

Now find two other characters in Chinese that have the silk radical and two that have the bow radical. Write them in the table below with their English meaning. Do the radicals suit the meaning? Add a comment about that in English.

Radical	Character	Pinyin	Meaning in English	Your comment
糸				
糸				
弓				
弓				

Task 3: A Big Send-off for Gaokao students



Parents and teachers like to give their students a memorable send-off on the days of the Gaokao exam. In this article from the website The Chairman's Bao, you'll read about how the town of Maotanchang turns out to wish their students well. Click on the link below and take the following steps to ensure that you get the most out of this important learning resource.

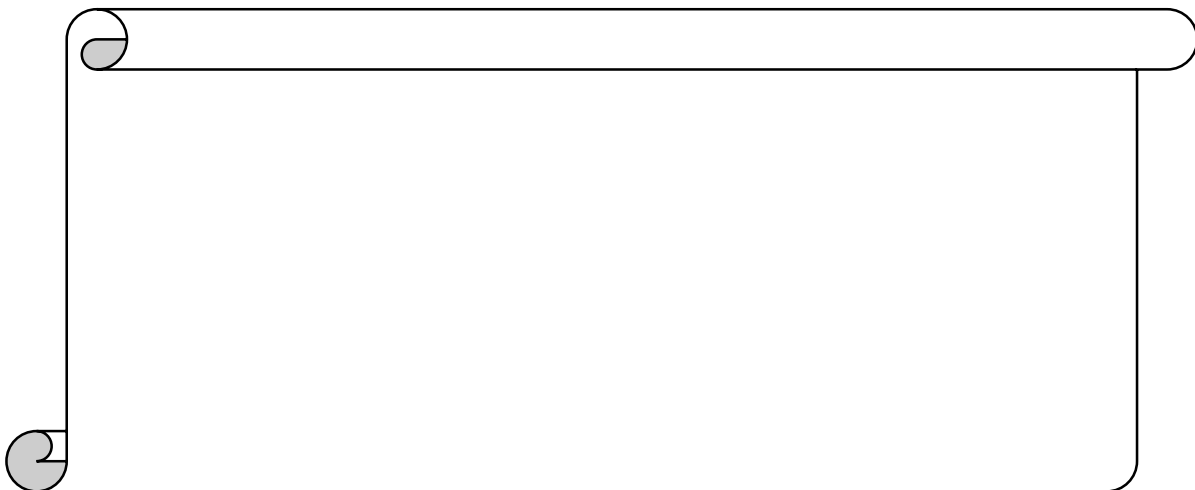
Tick each step as you complete it on the table below. Remember, **repetition, repetition** is a key trick for successful language learners. You'll listen to the short audio five times (don't worry it's only about a minute long!) *but don't skimp on it!*

[insert link to TCB Parents send of 15,000 children for Gaokao in Maotanchang](#)

Tick each step as you complete it:

Tasks	✓
Listen to the audio without looking at the text. Jot down in pinyin any words you recognize in the scroll below.	

Listen to the audio again while reading the text	
Listen to it again while reading the text	
Hover your mouse over the words you don't know, the website will give you the translation	
Listen to it again while reading the text	
Click on the small green scholar's hat at the top left hand corner of the picture. This will take you to some matching and missing word exercises. Do these exercises.	
Choose five Chinese characters that are new to you in this article. Click on each character. This will take you to the Stroke Order and Writing Tool. Use this to check and practice stroke order for those characters.	
Listen to the audio one more time without reading the text. Enjoy how much better you understand it now!	



Task 4: Romance and the Gaokao don't mix!

It's every parent's fear that their son or daughter will mess up their Gaokao year by falling in love. No wonder, then, that this is the theme of many teen movies or dramas. One of the most famous of these is the comedy 青春派 qīng chūn pài 'Youth Style' released in 2012.

The film is on YouTube with English subtitles:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oMUxdwumGd0>



Watch the first 10 minutes of the film and answer the following questions in English

1. How many days before the Gaokao does the film begin?
2. What is the name of the girl that Ju Ran has fallen for?
3. When Ju Ran has made his declaration of love, his classmates chant 答应他!
答应他! dā ying tā! dā ying tā! What is the English meaning of 答应 dā ying?
4. After the class has been dismissed from the photo shoot, whom does his teacher phone?
5. How old is Ju Ran's girlfriend?
6. What changes to her life has Ju Ran's Mum made to make sure she is available to help him through the Gaokao?
7. When Ju Ran's Mum is telling him off in the house, what is written on the white board behind her?
8. Ju Ran's Mum tells him twice “手机拿出来!” Write the pinyin and the English meaning of that phrase.
9. When Ju Ran is in class, he tells the teacher “坐不下” Why?
10. The camera focuses on Ju Ran's Gaokao test paper. What is the only thing he has written on it?

Finally, jot down a few things that you now know about the Gaokao which are shown in the first ten minutes of the movie.

.....

.....

Hopefully the first ten minutes will have whetted your appetite to watch the rest of the movie...it's a classic!

Task 5 The battle against the cheats.

With the stakes so high, some people are tempted to cheat. As technology has advanced, the methods of cheating have become more sophisticated. Here are some of the ways people have tried to cheat:

- gadgets such as mobile phones and smart watches
- ear phones linked to outside help
- substitutes pretending to be pupils and taking the exam for them

Task 5.1

Using the internet, research some of the most extreme examples of cheating uncovered by Chinese police and list 3 ways the authorities have tried to clamp down on cheating. Write down your findings in the scroll below:

A large, empty scroll graphic with a white background and a black border. The scroll is unrolled, showing a large rectangular area for writing. The top and bottom edges of the scroll are slightly curved, and there are small grey circles at the top-left and bottom-left corners, representing the scroll's binding.

Task 5.2

The Chinese for 'to cheat' is 作弊 zuò bì. Here's a useful expression for when you're playing games in Chinese:

别作弊!

bíe zùo bì!

Don't cheat!

Here are five Chinese expressions using 作弊。 Draw a line linking the Chinese to the correct English translation of the phrase and then write the pinyin under the Chinese characters in each expression

My brother sometimes cheats

我没有作弊!

不能考试作弊!

Don't play cards with him. He often cheats

I didn't cheat!

不要和他打牌! 他常常作弊

我弟弟有时作弊!

你是说我作弊吗!

Are you saying I cheat!

You mustn't cheat in exams

Task 5.3 Illustrate some of these expressions

Choose two of the expressions above and draw cartoons with speech bubbles to illustrate those expressions. You can use stick figures if you like!



Task 6 Keeping up morale

Teachers and parents all around China think up different ways of keeping the students' morale high in the run-up to the exam. Recent press reports tell of teachers dressing up in costumes and parents wearing red for good luck.



Now you're going to read an article from The Chairman's Bao about a teacher giving her students 'red envelopes' to spur them to success.

Click on the link below and tick each step on the table below as you complete it.

[insert link to TCB Teacher sends Hong bao to Gaokao students](#)

Tasks	✓
Listen to the audio without looking at the text. Jot down in pinyin any words you recognize in the scroll below.	
Listen to the audio again while reading the text	
Listen to it again while reading the text	
Hover your mouse over the words you don't know, the website will give you the translation	
Listen to it again while reading the text	
Click on the small green scholar's hat at the top left hand corner of the picture. This will take you to some matching and missing word exercises. Do these exercises.	
Choose five Chinese characters that are new to you in this article. Click on each character. This will take you to the Stroke Order and Writing Tool. Use this to check and practice stroke order for those characters.	
Listen to the audio one more time without reading the text. Enjoy how much better you understand it now!	

Task 7: Describing a Picture.



Here's a picture of the extreme measures taken by one school in China to ensure no cheating takes place in the Gaokao exam. As you can see, the students sit the exam out in the open. Write **3 sentences** and **3 questions** in Chinese characters about the picture.

Sentences:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Questions:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Task 8: Imperial China's make-or-break exam

Exams that determine people's future are nothing new in China. For many centuries, any man wishing to become a government official in China had to sit the civil service exam. To become a government official was considered the most prestigious career possible and passing the exam could mean security and prosperity not just for the candidate himself but also for his entire family. No wonder then that this exam, known as the 科举 (kē jǔ), dominated the lives of whole segments of society.



Candidates were locked into small cells for three days and nights with just a board for a desk and a bucket for a toilet. They had to bring their own food and water into the cell. The exam tested rote knowledge of the Confucian Classics as well as the ability to apply these ancient texts to problems of government.



And there was no age limit on re-takes. Some men went on trying to pass into their old age!

Task 8.1

To find out more about this exam, read the explanation on the link below (or listen if you prefer: there's a three-minute recording at the end of the webpage). Then try the short quiz when you've finished. Record your score out of 10 here:

https://www.ducksters.com/history/china/civil_service_government.php

Task 8.2 A poem about failing the exam!

Almost every man who learnt how to read and write took the exam at some time in their life, and many failed it. In fact, some of China's most famous writers and poets failed. No wonder failing the exam became the subject of novels and poems. Here's a poem by the famous Tang Dynasty poet, Mèng Jiāo (孟郊) (751–814). He only finally passed when he was nearly 50!

Failing the Examination

*For a dawn moon, hard to hold its light,
For a sorrowful man, a heart troubled.
Who says that all things flower in spring? -
Can't they see the frost on the leaves?
An eagle, losing its powers, sick:
Wrens that soar on borrowed wings.
Cast off once, cast off again -
My feelings like a knifeblade's wound.*

Translation: Stephen Owen

In the table below is the original poem in Chinese **BUT the lines are jumbled up**. Your task is to see if you can work out which line is which by spotting as many familiar characters as you can. There are eight lines in the poem, so number them 1 -8 (one has been done for you) Many of the characters will be unfamiliar to you, of course, but use your knowledge of radicals to try to crack the puzzle!

	Line number
独见叶上霜	
愁人难为肠	
弃置复弃置	
鹤鹤假翼翔	6
情如刀剑伤	
晓月难为光	
雕鹗失势病	
谁言春物荣	



Task 9: Reviewing this project

Which tasks in this project did you find most interesting and why? Which tasks were the hardest? Which task did you not enjoy doing and why?

Complete the following three sentences **in Chinese characters**. You'll find some useful vocabulary in the box below:

1. 我觉得最有意思的练习是 task number..... 因为

.....

2. 我觉得最难的练习是 task number..... 因为

.....

3. 我不喜欢 task number..... 因为

.....

Language Tips!

练习	<i>liàn xí</i>	“task/exercise”
难	<i>nán</i>	“difficult”
有意思	<i>yǒu yì si</i>	“interesting”
没意思	<i>méi yì si</i>	“boring”



Your Achievements

Congratulations on completing 1 MEP Project!

- You now know lots about the Gaokao exam and how important it is in China.
- You've reviewed your knowledge of school subjects in Chinese.
- You've watched part of a well-known teen film
- You've acquired some good vocabulary for when you play games in Chinese
- You've learnt about the Chinese imperial exam system
- and you've even deciphered bits of a poem in literary Chinese.

***If your teacher signs
you off,
you will collect 1
Badge!***