

## Festivals and Celebrations

### Chinese New Year WebQuest – Teacher's notes

Chinese New Year will be celebrated on February 9th in 2005 and on January 29th in 2006. The year 2005 will be the year of the rooster and 2006 will be the year of the dog. Why isn't Chinese New Year celebrated on the same day each year? Why are the Chinese years named after animals? In this **WebQuest** your students will find the answers to these questions and discover how the Chinese celebrate their New Year.

Each activity covers a different aspect of the Chinese New Year: the Chinese calendar, celebrations, traditional food, and decorations. Divide your students into groups of between two and four. Alternatively your students can work as individuals. Allocate each individual / group an activity. Ask your students to visit the websites and find the answers to the questions for their allocated activity.

Next, ask your students to prepare a short presentation for the class about what they have discovered. Inform students they may illustrate their presentation using posters, postcards, or anything else suitable that they can find.

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#### Activity 1: The Chinese calendar

##### Answers:

- a) Combined solar and lunar; ordinary year: 12 months; leap year: 13 months
  
- b) Lord Buddha summoned all the animals to come to him before he departed from earth. Only 12 came to bid him farewell and as a reward he named a year after each one in the order they arrived.
  
- c)
  - Rat: Imaginative, charming, generous, quick-tempered, over-critical
  - Ox: Born leaders, demanding, good with their hands
  - Tiger: Bold, adventurous, charming, risk takers

- Rabbit: Affectionate, co-operative, pleasant, sentimental, superficial
- Dragon: Popular, enthusiastic, fun-loving
- Snake: Romantic, deep-thinking, wise, charming, stingy
- Horse: Hard-working, intelligent, independent, friendly, selfish
- Sheep: Charming, elegant, artistic
- Monkey: Intelligent, successful
- Rooster: Hard-working, boastful
- Dog: Honest, faithful
- Boar: Honest, tolerant

d) Answers will vary according to the age of the student.

#### Websites:

<http://webexhibits.org/calendars/calendar-chinese.html>

Calendars through the ages

<http://www.new-year.co.uk/chinese/calendar.htm>

Chinese New Year calendar

<http://www.romanization.com/chinesenewyear>

Chinese New Year dates

<http://www.c-c-c.org/chineseculture/zodiac/zodiac.html#Sign%20Background>

Chinese zodiac page

#### Activity 2: The celebration

##### Answers:

a)

##### Day 1

Welcoming of the gods of the heavens and earth. Many people abstain from meat on the first day of the New Year because it is believed that this will ensure long and happy lives for them.

##### Day 2

The Chinese pray to their ancestors as well as to all the gods. They are extra kind to dogs and feed them well as it is believed that the second day is the birthday of all dogs.

##### Day 3 / 4

Sons-in-laws pay respect to their parents-in-law.

##### Day 5

Po Woo. On this day people stay home to welcome the God of Wealth. No one visits families

and friends on the fifth day because it will bring both parties bad luck.

Day 6

Chinese visit their relatives and friends freely. They also visit the temples to pray for good fortune and health.

Day 7

Farmers display their produce. These farmers make a drink from seven types of vegetables to celebrate the occasion. The seventh day is also considered the birthday of human beings. Noodles are eaten to promote longevity and raw fish for success.

Day 8

Fujian people have another family reunion dinner, and at midnight they pray to Tian Gong, the God of Heaven.

Day 9

Make offerings to the Jade Emperor.

Day 10-12

Friends and relatives should be invited for dinner.

Day 13

Eat simple rice congee and mustard greens (choi sum) to cleanse the system.

Day 14

Preparations to celebrate the Lantern Festival which is to be held on the 15th night.

b)

Cleaning houses, shooting firecrackers, paying debts, refraining from using foul language, refraining from washing hair, avoiding references to past year, wearing red.

c)

Based on Emperor Han Wu Di's almanac, which uses the first day of the first month of the Lunar Year as the start of Chinese New Year. A village in China, thousands of years ago, was ravaged by an evil monster one winter's eve. The following year the monster returned and again ravaged the village. Before it could happen a third time, the villagers devised a plan to scare the monster away. Red banners were hung everywhere; the colour red has long been believed to protect against evil. Firecrackers, drums and gongs were used to create loud noises to scare the beast away. The plan worked and the celebration lasted several days during which people visited with each other, exchanged gifts, danced and ate tasty comestibles.

d) Japan, Korea, Vietnam

**Websites:**

[http://www.educ.uvic.ca/faculty/mroth/438/CHINA/15-day\\_celebration.html](http://www.educ.uvic.ca/faculty/mroth/438/CHINA/15-day_celebration.html)

15 day celebration of Chinese New Year

<http://www.web-holidays.com/lunar>

General information on Chinese New Year

<http://www.educ.uvic.ca/faculty/mroth/438/CHINA/taboo.html>

Taboos and superstitions of Chinese New Year

**Activity 3: Traditional food**

**Answers:**

a) *Jai* is a vegetarian dish eaten on New Year's Day by Chinese families. The ingredients symbolise the following:

- Lotus seed: signifies having many male offspring.
- Ginkgo nut: represents silver ingots.
- Black moss seaweed: homonym for exceeding in wealth.
- Dried bean curd: homonym for fulfilment of wealth and happiness.
- Bamboo shoots: term sounds like "wishing that everything would be well".
- Fresh bean curd / tofu: not included as it is white and unlucky for New Year.

b) Red dates, lotus seeds, and an eight-sided tray symbolize prosperity.

c) Fish is eaten during the Chinese New Year to ensure long life and good fortune.

d) Shrimp toast, sesame chicken, steamed rice, green tea, plum wine, fortune cookies, hot sour soup, and sweet and sour shrimp

**Websites:**

<http://www.web-holidays.com/lunar/recipes/index.asp>

Chinese food and menus

[http://www.educ.uvic.ca/faculty/mroth/438/CHINA/traditional\\_foods.html](http://www.educ.uvic.ca/faculty/mroth/438/CHINA/traditional_foods.html)

Traditional New Year foods

## Activity 4: Decorations

### Answers:

a) Living rooms are decorated with vases of pretty blossoms, platters of oranges and tangerines and a candy tray with eight varieties of dried sweet fruit. On walls and doors are poetic couplets and happy wishes written on red paper.

Flowers symbolize rebirth and growth, wealth and high positions in one's career. Oranges and tangerines are symbols for abundant happiness. Candy trays are used to start the New Year sweetly.

b) *Yanliuqing* paintings were first introduced between 1573 and 1620. They are colourful pictures which depict flowers, butterflies, and people in fancy dress.

c) Peanuts symbolise long life.

d) *Spring Couplets* are poetic couplets of calligraphy written with fragrant India ink. People paste them on both sides of their main doors.

### Websites:

<http://www.chinapage.com/newyr.html>

China the beautiful

<http://www.educ.uvic.ca/faculty/mroth/438/CHINA/decorations.html>

Chinese New Year decorations

[http://www.gio.gov.tw/info/festival\\_c/spring\\_e/slogans.htm](http://www.gio.gov.tw/info/festival_c/spring_e/slogans.htm)

Spring Couplets