



# The California Three Rs Project

*Rights, Responsibility, and Respect*

## Teaching About Chinese New Year

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Chinese New Year, or Spring Festival, falls on the first day of the first month of the new lunisolar calendar each year. The Lantern Festival that falls on the fifteenth day brings an end to the New Year season, though for China and other Asian countries, Spring Festival is a week-long holiday.

The Chinese lunisolar calendar is based on astronomical observations of the sun's longitude and the moon's phases. Though shrouded in history, some scholars believe that Emperor Huangdi introduced the calendar between 2500 to 3000 BCE. The Chinese lunar calendar is used to determine festivals, so the dates of these festivals vary each year.

Chinese New Year Dates		
Year	Date	Chinese Zodiac Animal Sign
2016	February 8	Monkey
2017	January 28	Rooster
2018	February 16	Dog

At home, many Chinese Americans celebrate by burning incense, doing special prayers, and making offerings to ancestors and traditional gods. The celebrations of Chinese New Year are diverse, reflecting various ethnic customs and the combined influences of Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and Chinese folk religions. Like western Christmas, contemporary Chinese New Year's celebrations include decorations, family gatherings, and big meals. Chinese New Year has become a colorful fusion of cultural traditions.



A stone tablet of the zodiac in Qingchangzhou shan, People's Republic of China. (Flickr Commons/Blake Lennon, used under a [CC BY-NC 2.0 license](#).)

The symbols of the Chinese calendar are believed to stretch back to the Buddha himself. According to one tradition, Buddha summoned all the animals to visit him just before his death, but only 12 appeared. In appreciation, Buddha named a year after each of them. In time, people born in a particular year were described by the characteristics ascribed to the animal representing that year. For reference, please see the website of the Chinese Culture Center of San Francisco below.

As schools teach about this important holiday, a great activity for students is to research the East Asian heritage in their own community and find out what types of Chinese or Lunar New Year celebrations are taking place among the Asian Americans and others locally.

The study of Chinese New Year fits best with California History-Social Studies standards in grades four and below, but as an important holiday celebrated by a large portion of the Asian community in California and the rest of the world, older students will gain insight and understanding through further study of this traditional Asian holiday. The following resources are offered as a starting point for such a study.



Chinese New Year celebration in New York City. (Global Jet/Flickr Commons, used under a [CC BY 2.0 license](#).)

## WEB RESOURCES

### Chinese New Year

[http://www.religionfacts.com/chinese\\_religion/holidays/chinese\\_new\\_year.htm](http://www.religionfacts.com/chinese_religion/holidays/chinese_new_year.htm)

This Religion Facts site provides an introduction to Chinese New Year and the traditional aspects of the celebrations such as the special foods and the Dragon Dance.

### Chinese New Year

[http://www.educ.uvic.ca/faculty/mroth/438/CHINA/chinese\\_new\\_year.html](http://www.educ.uvic.ca/faculty/mroth/438/CHINA/chinese_new_year.html)

This rich site has information about how the Lunar New Year is calculated, the 15-day celebration of the Chinese New Year, traditional foods, decorations, and customs and superstitions of the holiday.

### Chinese New Year

<http://www.history.com/topics/chinese-new-year>

This History Channel site has background and resources on Chinese New Year, or Spring Festival as it's been called since the 20th century. It is the most important social and economic holiday in China.

### Chinese New Year - Wikipedia

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese\\_New\\_Year](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_New_Year)

Chinese New Year is the most important of the traditional Chinese holidays and is celebrated all over the world. Altogether it is a 15-day celebration but traditions vary place-to-place.

### Chinese New Year: The Year of the Horse

<http://www.infoplease.com/spot/chinesenewyear1.html>

This Info Please site says that Chinese New Year is the longest and most important celebration in the Chinese Calendar. The Chinese year 4712 begins on Jan. 31, 2014.

Examples of Local Lunar New Year Festival

San Francisco <http://www.chineseparade.com/>

Alhambra <http://www.alhambranewyearfestival.com/>

Riverside <http://lunarfestriverside.com/>

Disneyland <https://disneyland.disney.go.com/events-tours/lunar-new-year/>

### Video Clips of Chinese New Year Celebration

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apimBggTeBA&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRVhf9Yrdjw&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKrR9uoh3WU&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ciU0TIH2O9U&feature=related>

### The Chinese Zodiac Story

<http://www.topmarks.co.uk/chinesenewyear/zodiacstory.aspx>

This online book is a retelling of one of the legends associated with the origins of the Chinese zodiac animals.

### Chinese Zodiac

<http://www.c-c-c.org/menu-resources/zodiac/>

The Chinese Culture Center of San Francisco provides background information on the animal-symbols of the Chinese zodiac.

## WEB LESSONS AND ACTIVITIES

### Chinese New Year

<http://www.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/awr09.socst.world.glob.chinesenyr/chinese-new-year/>

This lesson on PBS Learning Media is based on a Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly interview conducted by Bob Abernathy about the religious significance of and the meaning behind the Chinese or Lunar New Year. MS-HS

### Tet, the Vietnamese New Year

<http://teacherlink.ed.usu.edu/tlresources/units/byrnes-celebrations/wardtet.html>

Comparing Tet with other holidays provides a window into comparative cultures that will enrich many classrooms. However, students should not make altar remembrances of their own relatives, as suggested in the lesson, but may view and discuss photos of those altars created by people celebrating Chinese New Year. Elementary

### Lions, Dragons, and Nian: Animals of the Chinese New Year

<http://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plan/lions-dragons-and-nian-animals-chinese-new-year>

This EDSITement site features three lessons about the most important festival in the Chinese calendar, the New Year or Spring Festival. Primary

### Chinese New Year

<http://www.apples4theteacher.com/holidays/chinese-new-year/kids-crafts/> Here are crafts and activities related to Chinese New Year. Primary

### Arts and Crafts for Chinese New Year

<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/crafts/chinesenewyear/> Scroll to the bottom of the page for crafts designed for children of multiple ages. Elementary

### Chinese New Year: Everything You Need

<http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/unit/chinese-new-year-everything-you-need>

This Scholastic Instructor site offers a series of lessons and activities to learn about Chinese culture and traditional New Year celebrations and symbolism. Registration required. Elementary- MS

### Celebrate the Chinese New Year

<http://www.lessonplanspage.com/OSSLAArtCelebrateChineseNewYearK3.htm>

Reading materials teach children about the celebration of the Chinese New Year and crafts projects provide relevant materials for the lantern festival and Dragon parade. Primary

### The Chinese New Year Starts Today

<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/calendar-activities/chinese-year-starts-today-20424.html>

This Read Write Think lesson was posted last year but offers lots of ideas for integrating Lunar New Year into the language arts curriculum. It links to excellent web resources.

## CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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The material above is available at the California Three Rs Project (CA3Rs) website at <http://ca3rsproject.org>. For further information contact the CA3Rs:

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