

# CELEBRATIONS



## Lunar New Year

Lunar New Year is celebrated in the springtime by many Asian cultures including Bhutan, Tibet, China, Korea, and Vietnam. It goes by different names in those countries and sometimes even lands on different days. If you celebrated the New Year on January 1, think of this as a second chance for a fresh start. The themes of the celebrations are renewal, luck, health, and family and for many of these countries, it is the biggest event of the entire year. Everything shuts down for a few days and people gather, have picnics, visit family and friends, cook, eat, and make lots and lots of offerings. Some countries have parades and fireworks.

At the Middle Way School we have been exploring ways to make this day feel very special for the children, something they look forward to all year.

So far, each year we have invited the monks from [the local Tibetan monastery](#) to come and do a small ceremony. The students always love to watch ceremonies and rituals and to participate in small ways, throwing things in the fire, making offerings of flowers. One year we had a lovely dancer come and lead the children in a dance of the spheres to represent the rotation of the earth. We cooked momos (dumplings) for the parents and enjoyed snacking together. We also instituted what we call a Prayer Parade, which we do whenever there is a big day to celebrate. The children came to school wearing red. They were equipped with lots of flower petals, [koshi bells](#), candles, and incense and walked around the entire perimeter of the school singing various songs.

We also hand out one crisp dollar to each child in a red envelope, usually with a [protection cord](#) (also called a blessing cord) sent to us by one of the lamas who love our school. The children are instructed not to spend the money but to collect it and keep it somewhere safe. The string can be tied on a wrist, around the neck, or attached to a backpack or placed into a sacred space. One year we invented a ceremony around a disco ball where each child encircled the ball and we wished each child a very happy and healthy new year.

In the weeks leading up to New Year, we introduce art projects and activities related to the themes of the new year. Some animal years lend themselves to different kinds of activities. For the dragon year (2019) we had so much fun making [dragon twirlers](#) and reading all the dragon books. For the rat year (2020) we watched [a video](#) by our friend Chase and read various books about mice then we premiered our [school play about the life of the Buddha](#). There seem to be fewer books about Oxen. Next year's Tiger Year should be a lot of fun.

Here are some resources for your own Lunar New Year planning. We would love to expand this list with any creative thinking you have. Please contact [noa@middlewayeducation.org](mailto:noa@middlewayeducation.org) with your ideas, lesson plans, history, and other resources we can include. Enjoy! And 新年快乐!

### Guiding Questions

- Does everyone celebrate the same new year?
- What other calendars are there? *Hebrew, Gregorian, Lunar ...so many!*
- If you could decide when to start the year, when would it be and why?
- What year is it? Why is it 2021? (see humanities below)
- How do they celebrate Lunar New Year in other countries (Bhutan, Tibet, China, Korea)? (SEE BELOW)
- Which animal year were you born in? [chart](#)

### PREPARATION

- In the days before new year, students can work together to give the classroom and grounds a really deep clean, especially the altars and sacred spaces.
- They should also clean their rooms at home.
- Teachers can help clean shared spaces, organize paperwork, clear out clutter.
- Artwork and old work can all be sent home.
- The night before everyone can bathe and give an extra scrub.

### CELEBRATION IDEAS

- All children wear red to school
- Administrators prepare red envelopes for each child with one crisp dollar
- Invite special guests and families
- Do a prayer parade
- Have a daytime fireside singalong
- Decorate the school with red lanterns that the children make
- Perform a school play

### ACTIVITIES in the FIVE DOMAINS

#### Sciences

- Delve into moon studies (MWS has a series of activities around the moon which will be uploaded soon)
- Make it a math problem! 2021 is 4718 in Chinese years. How much of a difference is there? What year was someone born? 2021 minus their age.
- In-depth habitat study of the animal whose year is starting (dragons might be difficult!)

#### Humanities

- Explore one of the cultures that celebrates Lunar New Year. Invite guests, school families, lamas, and others to talk about how they celebrate.
- Students can learn what BC and AD mean. *Anno Domini* is Latin for "in the year of the Lord," referring to the birth of Jesus Christ. Discussion of Jesus as a historical figure. Also

## MWS CELEBRATIONS | LUNAR NEW YEAR

explain that C.E., the abbreviation for "Common Era" is also used to mark time. B.C. means "before Christ" and B.C.E. is before the common era.

- Tibetan and Bhutanese Lunar New Year is called Losar
- [Learn to write/say Happy New Year in Chinese](#) and [here](#). Or other languages (Losar Tashi Delek in Tibetan and Bhutanese)

### Movement

- Create a playlist of songs from each country
- Research and teach some dances from the different regions
- Creative movement inspired from the 12 different animals
- Make momos! Tibetan dumplings take a lot of fine motor skills

### Contemplation/Dharma

- Make offerings of light, incense, flowers, music, money, life, food
- Life release (Tshertar): Set free some creatures free that are being used for bait or feed (be very careful to use only indigenous species)
- Making or reconfirming aspirations (resolutions)
- Visit a temple
- Contemplate impermanence and change (see [impermanence unit](#))

### Arts

- [Lanterns](#), candle making or butter lamp making
- [Make prayer flags](#) or this [activity](#) from the Rubin Museum or hang pre-made ones
- Design your own money - what symbols would you use?
- [Make origami envelopes](#) out of red paper and gold paint or [this one](#)
- Compose a song that includes all 12 animals
- Learn to tie [auspicious knots](#)

## BOOKS

There is a need for more books about lunar new year. These are what we could find:

[\*Why Cats Chase Mice: A Story of the Twelve Zodiac Signs\*](#) (Japanese Fairy Tale Series) by Mina Harada Eimon (Author). Heian Intl Pub Co (1993), Edition: First, 32 pages

[\*Chelsea's Chinese New Year\*](#). (Cloverleaf Books) by Lisa Bullard (Author), Katie Saunders (Illustrator)

[\*Chinese New Year\*](#) (Rookie Read-About Holidays) by David F. Marx (Author)

[\*Chinese New Year Wishes: Chinese Spring and Lantern Festival Celebration...\*](#)by Jillian Lin (Author), Shi Meng (Illustrator)

[\*Harmony: A Treasury of Chinese Wisdom for Children and Parents\*](#). by Sarah Conover (Adapter), Chen Hui (Adapter), Ji Ruoxiao (Illustrator)

[\*Maisy's Chinese New Year\*](#): A Maisy First Experiences Book Hardcover – Picture Book, December 8, 2020 by Lucy Cousins (Author, Illustrator)

We will be uploading a booklist about the moon soon.

## OTHER RESOURCES

- [Photos](#) of MWS celebrations
- [The Chinese Astrological Years](#)
- [Why the 12 animals](#) from the BBC
- [Oprah](#) on Lunar New Year
- Watch a [dragon parade](#) - how would students build their own dragon?
- Learn how different cultures celebrate new year at this time:

[CHINA](#)

[BHUTAN](#)

[TIBET / HIMALAYAS](#)

[VIETNAM](#)

Or at slightly different times

[LAOS](#) (summertime)

[CAMBODIA](#)

[JAPAN](#)

## A STORY

At the time of Buddha, there lived an old woman who had very few material possessions. She was called "Relying on Joy." She used to watch the kings, princes, and people making offerings to Buddha and his disciples, and there was nothing she would have liked more than to be able to do the same. So she went out begging, but at the end of a whole day, all she had was one small coin. She took it to the oil-merchant to try to buy some oil. He told her that she could not possibly buy anything with so little. But when he heard that she wanted it to make an offering to Buddha, he took pity on her and gave her the oil she wanted. She took it to the monastery, where she lit a lamp. She placed it before Buddha, and made this wish: "I have nothing to offer but this tiny lamp. But through this offering, in the future may I be blessed with the lamp of wisdom. May I free all beings from their darkness. May I purify all their obstructions, and lead them to enlightenment."

That night the oil in all the other lamps went out. But the beggar woman's lamp was still burning at dawn. The Buddha's disciple Maudgalyayana came to collect all the lamps and when he saw that one was still alight, full of oil and with a new wick, he thought, "There's no reason why this lamp should still be burning in the daytime," and he tried to blow it out. But it kept on burning. He tried to snuff it out with his fingers, but it stayed alight. He tried to smother it with his robe, but still, it burned on.

The Buddha, who had been watching, said, "Maudgalyayana, do you want to put out that lamp? You cannot. You cannot even move it. If you were to pour the water from all the oceans over this lamp, it still wouldn't go out. The water in all the rivers and the lakes of the world could not extinguish it. Why not? Because this lamp was offered with devotion and with purity of heart and mind. And that motivation has made it of tremendous benefit." When Buddha had said this, Relying on Joy approached him, and he made a prophecy that in the future she would become a perfect Buddha, called "Light of the Lamp."

On this auspicious day, may our offerings be accompanied by the great aspirations for the flame of Dharma to touch more people and remain forever inextinguishable.

As retold by Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche

