

# Celebrating Asian Heritage

## Lesson 4: Culture



To celebrate Asian heritage, one must understand more than what countries are within its borders, how many people live there, what their government and economic systems are like, and the foods that they eat. One must also understand what brings the communities together in tradition and celebration.

Most countries celebrate their dates of independence, and religious holidays are also marked throughout the year. Predominant religions in Asia are Buddhism and Islam, with a noteworthy presence of Hindus and Roman Catholics. Atheism is common in some Communist-ruled countries.

One of the most widely celebrated holidays is the Chinese New Year, or Lunar New Year. It is celebrated around the world, not just in China. The exact date changes because it follows the lunar calendar, but it usually falls in late January or February. Traditions include

sweeping the house to make way for good fortune to come, sharing a family feast, decorating with candles and charms that symbolize happiness and wealth, and gifting red envelopes with money.

In addition to understanding these cultural ties, it also is important to celebrate the contributions that Asians and Asian Americans have made to our state and nation.

### Influential Asian Americans

- **Sports:** Dr. Sammy Lee (Korean descent), first Asian American to win an Olympic medal; also served in U.S. military. Apolo Ohno (Japanese), most decorated U.S. Winter Olympic athlete.
- **Military:** Col. Young Oak Kim (Korean), first Asian American to command combat infantry unit. Maya Lin (Chinese), did not serve but won contest to design Vietnam Veterans Memorial.
- **Politics:** Dalip Singh Saund (Indian), first Asian elected to U.S. Congress. Norman Mineta (Japanese), first Asian American to serve on a U.S. Presidential Cabinet.
- **Arts:** Amy Tan, author of bestselling novel "The Joy Luck Club." Yo Yo Ma, world-famous cello player. Vera Wang, founder of \$300 million fashion business. (All of Chinese descent.)
- **Cinema:** Two actresses and songwriters from Oklahoma - Teresa Victoria Carpio (Chinese and Filipino), born in Oklahoma City, and teenager Malese Jow (Chinese and Choctaw), of Tulsa.



Dragon in Chinese New Year parade.

**ACTIVITY:** Look up the occasions that are most widely observed in the country you have been following throughout the Celebrating Asian Heritage lessons. What are they and what traditions surround these events? What influential Asians and Asian Americans can call the country you selected "home"?

**BONUS!** Take all the information you have gathered about the Asian country you selected and create a project to share what you have learned. The project can be a report, poster or other type of presentation. Present your work to your classmates, and listen as they present theirs!

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