

Winter Festivals

Sarah Gudgeon

When we think of winter festivals in Italy and England we automatically think of Christmas, but in an ever increasing multi-cultural context, with children in our classes from different religions and backgrounds, it might be time to broaden our knowledge. This article takes a look at four major celebrations around the world: **Hanukkah** which is celebrated by the Jewish community; **Al-Hijrah** which marks the Muslim New Year; **Chinese New Year**; and of course, the **Christian Christmas**. There is a lot of information in this article and suggestions for further activities but why not make the most of the non-Italian students in your class as well and ask them for some input? They can provide personal tales of how they celebrate with their families and friends and can help out with pronunciation. Inclusion of non-Italian students in this way will make them feel valued and enable them to offer a valid contribution to the school community.

HANUKKAH is known as 'The Festival of Lights'. It is an eight day celebration which takes place between the end of November and the end of December to mark the time when Jews regained control of Jerusalem over 2500 years ago after it had fallen under the rule of the Syrian king Antiochus. The king had tried to make the Jewish people worship Greek gods but they refused and

after a three year war they were able to reclaim their temple. However, it was in bad condition and needed a lot of cleaning up. They lit the *Menorah* (a lamp) and even though there was only one small jar of oil, enough to keep it alight for just one day, it stayed lit for eight days. Jewish people saw this as a sign of God's presence in the temple, so every year during Hanukkah they light one candle on the *Hanukiah* (an eight-stemmed candelabrum) every evening.

Jewish people say special prayers and exchange presents with family and friends during this holiday. They also give *Hanukkah gelt* to the children. *Gelt* is Yiddish (the language spoken by Jews from central and eastern Europe and their descendants) for money and the children sometimes receive chocolate coins too. The children also play with a *dreidel* (spinning top) and there is a famous song called '*Dreidel, Dreidel, Dreidel*' too. Why not listen to it with your class? You could even make a dreidel from cardboard. Look at this website for instructions:

<http://www.activityvillage.co.uk/make-a-dreidel.htm>

If you want to try some typical Hanukkah food then give this recipe from the *about.com* website to your students and ask them to make it at home - under the strict supervision of their parents or another responsible adult. This is also a great opportunity for students to share their new knowledge with their parents; they can tell them about the festival of Hanukkah while they are cooking together and also teach them some culinary vocabulary.





Potato Pancakes (*latkes*)

INGREDIENTS

- 5 potatoes
- 2 onions
- 3 eggs
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1/4 tsp. pepper
- between 1/4 to 3/4 cup flour
- oil for frying

PREPARATION

1. **Peel** potatoes. Place in a bowl of cold water so they won't turn brown.
2. When ready to prepare the *latkes*, **drain** the potatoes. Place potatoes and onions in a food processor fitted with a knife blade. **Pulse** until smooth. Drain mixture well.
3. **Pour** potato mixture into a large bowl. Add **beaten** eggs. Add salt and pepper. Add enough flour so that the mixture holds together.
4. Pour 1 inch of oil into a large, deep frying pan. **Heat** the oil over medium-high heat.
5. Carefully drop 1/4 cup of the potato mixture into the hot oil.
6. Flatten the pancake slightly so the centre will cook.
7. Fry for several minutes on each side until golden brown and cooked through.

GLOSSARY

peel	= pelare
drain	= scolare
pulse	= passare al mixer
beaten	= sbattute
pour	= versare
heat	= riscaldare

To further develop digital literacy skills ask the children to use a search engine to find some more Jewish recipes or alternatively, encourage cooperative learning by asking any Jewish children in the class to share their favourite recipes.

AL-HIJRA is the name given to the Muslim new year and it is on the first day of the month of Muharram. The date for 2013 is the 4th of November. This day celebrates the *Hijra* in 622 CE (CE is Common Era, a way of talking about dates without using AD, which refers to Christianity, the years are equivalent to those

referred to as AD) when the Prophet Muhammad moved from Mecca to Medina and set up the first Islamic state. Muslims don't outwardly celebrate this day with special rituals as they do with *Eid-ul-Fitr* and *Eid-ul-Adha*; it is more a day for spiritual reflection. Muslims still follow the same rules that were established in 622 CE so they might use the day to think about their own behaviour in accordance with these rules and maybe to think about some 'New Year Resolutions'.

Get your year 4/5 students to complete a fact file about the Muslim new year. Read out the answers, ie. 'The name of the Muslim New Year is ...', and get them to fill in the table. They could even do a research project on *Eid-ul-Fitr* and *Eid-ul-Adha* as well and build up a portfolio of the different Muslim festivals. This will help to improve their digital literacy skills, something that will be important when they make the transition to the *scuola secondaria di primo grado*.

Name of Muslim New Year:

Month:

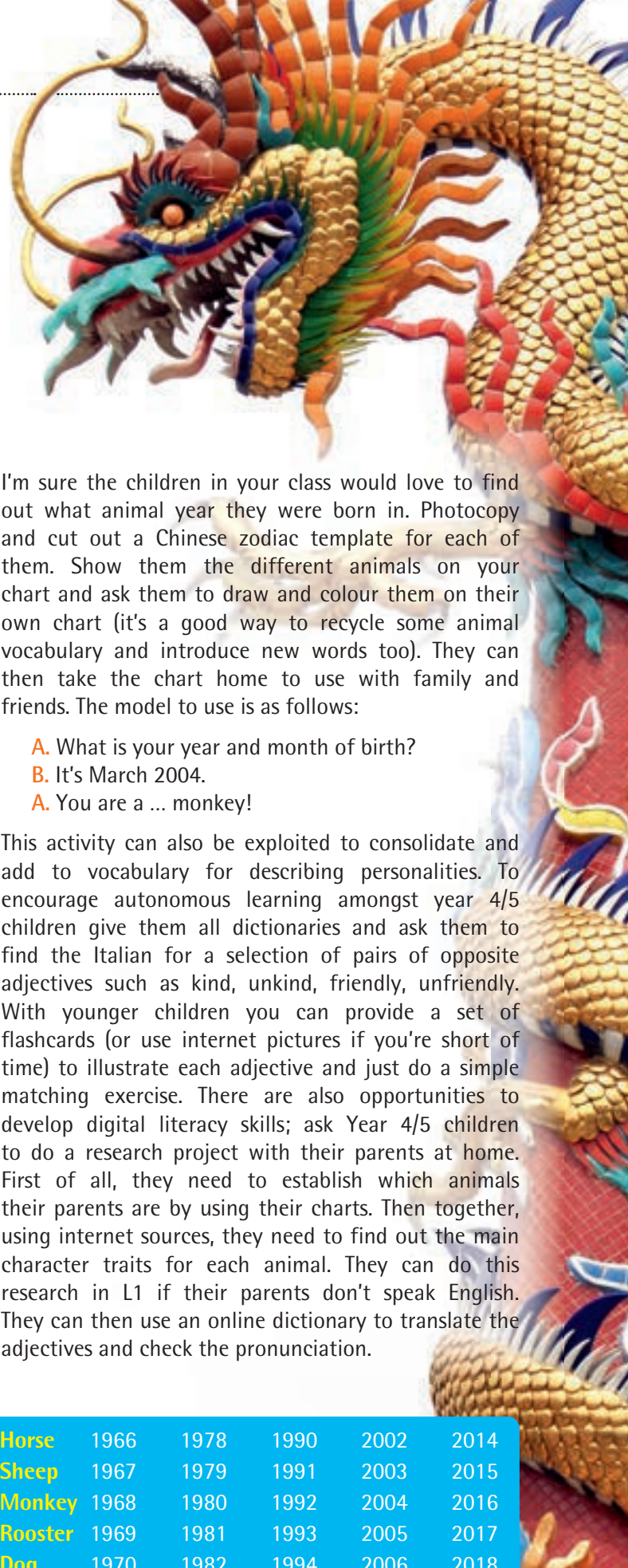
2013 Date:

What does it celebrate?

What do Muslims do then?

Other festivals:

CHINESE NEW YEAR is celebrated between the 21st January and the 21st February. Each year is the year of one of twelve animals and it is said that people born in that year will have particular character traits. For the Chinese community the New Year symbolises new life and is the time for ploughing and sowing crops. Before the start of the celebrations, which last fifteen days, they clean their houses to sweep away any bad luck. They then put their brooms away again as they want to make sure they don't accidentally sweep out any good luck during the celebrations. On New Year's Eve they decorate their houses with good luck phrases such as 'health', 'happiness' and 'wealth' and wear new red clothes. Red is the colour of fire and is said to scare away evil spirits which is also the reason why they let off fireworks at midnight. On New Year's Day, children can expect to find a red envelope filled with money and sweets under their pillow and then the celebrations end with a lantern festival and a dragon dance.



I'm sure the children in your class would love to find out what animal year they were born in. Photocopy and cut out a Chinese zodiac template for each of them. Show them the different animals on your chart and ask them to draw and colour them on their own chart (it's a good way to recycle some animal vocabulary and introduce new words too). They can then take the chart home to use with family and friends. The model to use is as follows:

- A. What is your year and month of birth?
 B. It's March 2004.
 A. You are a ... monkey!

This activity can also be exploited to consolidate and add to vocabulary for describing personalities. To encourage autonomous learning amongst year 4/5 children give them all dictionaries and ask them to find the Italian for a selection of pairs of opposite adjectives such as kind, unkind, friendly, unfriendly. With younger children you can provide a set of flashcards (or use internet pictures if you're short of time) to illustrate each adjective and just do a simple matching exercise. There are also opportunities to develop digital literacy skills; ask Year 4/5 children to do a research project with their parents at home. First of all, they need to establish which animals their parents are by using their charts. Then together, using internet sources, they need to find out the main character traits for each animal. They can do this research in L1 if their parents don't speak English. They can then use an online dictionary to translate the adjectives and check the pronunciation.



Rat	1960	1972	1984	1996	2008	Horse	1966	1978	1990	2002	2014
Ox	1961	1973	1985	1997	2009	Sheep	1967	1979	1991	2003	2015
Tiger	1962	1974	1986	1998	2010	Monkey	1968	1980	1992	2004	2016
Rabbit	1963	1975	1987	1999	2011	Rooster	1969	1981	1993	2005	2017
Dragon	1964	1976	1988	2000	2012	Dog	1970	1982	1994	2006	2018
Snake	1965	1977	1989	2001	2013	Pig	1971	1983	1995	2007	2019

Now onto CHRISTMAS. Christmas is a holiday that we all love here in Italy but how much do we actually think about its true significance anymore? We tend to get so caught up in Christmas preparations that we don't stop to think about what it's supposed to be a celebration of. For Christians, the 25th of December is the day that the birth of Jesus, the son of God, is celebrated. His mother Mary was visited by the Angel Gabriel to tell her that she would have a baby boy called Jesus. Mary, who was an ordinary girl, was shocked by the appearance of the angel but accepted her fate as 'God's servant'.

Later, Mary and her husband Joseph travelled from their home in Nazareth to Bethlehem to register for a census which had been ordered by the Roman Emperor. Jesus was born in a stable in Bethlehem because there was no room at any of the inns. Afterwards he was visited by a few wise men from the East who had followed the Star of Bethlehem and they brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Shepherds also visited the baby Jesus as they had been told of his birth by angels whilst they were out watching their flock. Christians believe that Jesus' humble beginnings show that God wanted him, to be closer to humans and their pain. They also believe that God sacrificed his only son to save mankind - but that would bring us on to Easter, a Spring Festival!



Christians celebrate this holiday in many ways, by going to mass, having lunch with friends and family, decorating their homes and of course exchanging cards and presents. There are lots of beautiful hymns that are sung at this time of year such as *Away in a Manger* and *O Little Town of Bethlehem*, plus lots of non-religious songs. Why not download the music and lyrics and organise a Christmas concert or take the children carol singing in the local square with some volunteer parents as chaperones? You can try this website:

www.carols.org.uk

The period before Christmas is known as Advent and many people use advent calendars to count down the days until the 25th.

Why not get the children in your class to make an advent calendar? Before they do it, elicit all the things that they associate with Christmas (angels, bells, Christmas trees, presents etc) and ask them to draw one of these things in each 'window' on their advent calendar. They could also write the word under the picture. Below is a Template (1). Give one for each child and then get them to stick it onto card so that it's a bit stronger.

Template (1)

Template (2)

18	24	12	1	8
7	11	4	13	19
23	25	21	3	2
22	5	17	14	9
15	10	6	16	20

Once they've done all their pictures (Template 1), get them to draw a Christmas scene on Template (2) and then randomly write the numbers 1-25 on it, with one number per 'window'. They need to cut around each 'window' and then press the flaps back down. Finally, they have to stick template (2) over template (1). Their calendar is ready.

Sarah Gudgeon teaches both children and adults in a private language school in Milan. She is co-author of On Holiday with Geronimo Stilton, English Roundabout and Primary Teaching Files 1, 2, 3 and 4, 5 LANG-Pearson Longman.