

“Why does the ball drop in Times Square?”

Deconstructing National New Year’s Traditions and Symbols

Key Lesson Strategy:

Inquiry

Lesson Overview:

Students will work together to question and learn the history behind why we celebrate New Year’s on January 1st in the United States and some of our National New Year’s traditions and symbols. Through playing an interactive timeline game and exploring centers on Times Square, Fireworks, *Auld Lang Syne*, and Father Time & Baby New Year, students have the opportunity to learn the deeper themes of this holiday and, in turn, create their own personally relevant symbols for this celebration.

Grade Level:

Upper Elementary

Objectives:

- Students will explore the meaning and history of national New Year’s traditions and symbols.
- Students will learn how and why January 1st became known as New Year’s day in the western world.
- Students will explore the history and meaning of traditions and symbols such as New Year’s celebrations in Times Square, the use of noisemakers and fireworks, singing of *Auld Lang Syne*, and Father Time and Baby New Year.
- Students will create their own more personally, and perhaps nationally, relevant symbol or tradition for the New Year’s celebration.

Materials:

- Timeline Cards
- Computers with Internet
- Copies of all student handouts for each of the centers
- Art Supplies

Lesson Plan:

Part I: Why do we celebrate New Year’s on January 1st?

1. Begin by writing the date January 1st on the board. Ask students, “Why is this day important?” Once they identify the date as New Year’s Day, ask students, “Why do we celebrate the New Year’s holiday on January 1st? ” Write this question and record student responses on the board. Ask students additional probing questions, such as “Does everyone in the world celebrate New Year’s on January 1st? ” Push students to begin critically questioning why January 1st has become the day we celebrate this holiday in the United States. Encourage students to share any background knowledge they might have in regards to different days the New Year’s holiday is celebrated around the world (e.g.,

Chinese New Year is celebrated according to the lunar calendar and often falls between late January and mid February).

2. Tell students that today they are going to have the opportunity to answer this question more fully and accurately through playing a timeline game. Inform them that they will learn more details about the days and ways other countries and cultures celebrate the New Year's holiday in future lessons, but that for today we will be focusing mainly on how January 1st became the day we celebrate this holiday in the United States.
3. Divide students into groups of 4-6 and give them the six timeline cards provided at the end of this lesson plan. Ask students to work in teams to take turns reading the cards and putting them in chronological order. You may want to make sure to review how B.C. dates reduce instead of increase and/or provide a model timeline on the board for those who struggle to grasp this concept.
4. Once teams have completed their timelines, check their work for accuracy and then ask them to create an illustration to accompany each of the timeline cards that demonstrates their understanding of the historical/cultural/geographical information on that card. Attach the timeline cards to these illustration pages.
5. As students finish the illustrations for their timeline, review the timeline information with the entire class, encouraging students to share their illustrations and new insights with the class. Review the ways in which different calendars and celebrations developed, as well as changed over time. Add these new ideas to the original ideas students shared to the question, "Why do we celebrate the New Year's holiday on January 1st?"
6. Display students' illustrated timelines in the hallway or on a bulletin board. Depending on student interest in this activity and available time, you may wish to extend student learning by asking students to research additional dates and information regarding New Year's complicated history. Students could add their findings to their timelines or a larger class timeline. Additionally, you could formally assess student comprehension of the activity through a check out slip with a question such as, "What are two new things you learned today about how January 1st became New Year's day?"

Part II: National New Year's Traditions & Symbols

1. Now that students have had an opportunity to conduct inquiry into why we celebrate the New Year's holiday on January 1st in the United States, it's time for them to investigate some national New Year's traditions and symbols in the United States.
2. Begin by inviting students to attend a New Year's party! Consider decorating your room with New Year's décor, hats, or even noisemakers prior to their arrival at school or return from Art or Music class. As they arrive to the party get them excited and let them know that they will be exploring the meaning and history of key elements of New Year's celebrations in the United States through four centers.

3. Before introducing the four centers, kick off the party by showing a four-minute video about the history of the New Year's holiday from the History Channel (<http://www.history.com/topics/new-years/videos>). This video will serve as a review of the first part of the lesson and as an introduction to elements of the second part of the lesson. Upon finishing the video ask students to share information they already learned, as well as some new ideas they learned from the video.
4. Next divide students into four teams and explain that they will be rotating through a series of four centers to learn more about the history and meaning of some of our national New Year's traditions and symbols. Each center is described below. Student handouts are attached. Allow students approximately 10-15 minutes at each center.

Center 1: Why does the ball drop in Times Square in New York City?

Students work together, using multiple resources such as primary source images, online videos, and websites to learn about the history behind this famous American tradition! Students first analyze primary source images of early New Year's celebrations in Times Square and the original and more recent ball that is dropped for the celebration. Next students view a video from the *History Channel*, followed by online research from websites such as the official Times Square New Year's Eve website. Students then share what they have learned by creating a Venn Diagram comparing and contrasting the similarities and differences between early New Year's celebrations in Times Square and the celebrations there of today, noting the origins of the ball dropping and how technological changes have impacted this tradition.

Center 2: Make some noise! Why do we celebrate with fireworks and noisemakers?

Students first play a quick game in which they choose the correct answer for why cultures around the world have celebrated the New Year's holiday with noisemakers and fireworks. (Make sure to go over the correct answer, which is “noisemakers and fireworks have historically been used to ward off evil spirits and bring good luck” at the end of all of the centers.) Next students watch online video clips of New Year's fireworks displays in cities in the United States and around the world. They then locate these cities and countries on map of the world.

Center 3: Decoding *Auld Lang Syne*

Students listen to and read the lyrics of *Auld Lang Syne* online. Then students write down what they think the song is about, prior to learning the history of the song, analyzing the lyrics, and learning the meaning of the lyrics. Last, students answer questions about the song and make connections between the larger meaning of the song and their own lives.

Center 4: Symbols of Change: Father Time & New Year Baby

Students critically analyze the image of “Father Time and Baby New Year” by working with a partner to deconstruct it and question its underlying meaning. Upon initial analysis and learning history behind the image, students explore the main theme of the image and suggest alternative ways to symbolize endings and beginnings.

Part III: Reconsidering the Themes of National New Year's Traditions and Symbols

5. As students finish the New Year's party centers, bring the class back together to debrief what they have learned about National New Year's traditions and symbols. Ask students to think more deeply about the larger themes of each of these traditions and symbols and the connections across these. Ideas may include the following:

- Times Square: Celebration/ Anticipation
- Fireworks: Warding off evil spirits/elicit good luck
- Auld Lang Syne: Memories, Friendship
- Father Time & Baby New Year: Beginnings/Endings, Death/Rebirth

6. Encourage students to think more deeply about these larger themes and to make personal connections to these themes. Ask students to use the arts to dig into these themes, creating a more personally, and perhaps even more nationally relevant, representation of the holiday's underlying meaning. Students could design a new symbol, write a different song, or create an alternative tradition that encompasses the reflective potential of this holiday in the United States and around the world, sharing these with one another and their school community to help promote critical thinking about current and future New Year's celebrations.

Why do we celebrate New Year's on January 1st?

Timeline Cards

<p>Around 5000-3000 B.C.</p> <p>Who: Ancient Egyptians</p> <p>Where: Egypt</p> <p>What: The Ancient Egyptians originally celebrated the New Year when the Nile River flooded, but this was hard to predict and could vary by 80 days. They then started celebrating the New Year when the brightest star in the sky, named Sirius, appeared after the rising of the first new moon, which happened around the time the Nile flooded during mid-summer.</p>	<p>Around 2500 B.C.</p> <p>Who: Babylonians</p> <p>Where: Babylon, Mesopotamia (located 55 miles south of present-day Baghdad, Iraq)</p> <p>What: The Babylonians celebrated the New Year in late March, probably around March 21. On this day there was an equal amount of sunlight and darkness. Spring was also beginning. They celebrated with a big eleven-day religious festival called Akitu (named after the barley that they would harvest in the spring). During the festival a new ruler was crowned or his reign was renewed.</p>
<p>1400 B.C.</p> <p>Who: Chinese</p> <p>Where: China</p> <p>What: The Chinese celebrated the New Year according to the lunar calendar they developed, which followed the phases of the moon. They would celebrate the New Year during the middle of the 12th month right before the full moon and their celebrations would last 15 days. Although the Chinese do not use this calendar anymore, they still celebrate the New Year based on the lunar calendar, with the date often falling between late January and the middle of February.</p>	<p>Between 500 B.C. and 46 B.C.</p> <p>Who: Babylonians & Persians</p> <p>Where: Babylon (Present-day Iraq), & Persia (Present-day Iran)</p> <p>What: Various cultures around the world such as the Babylonians and Persians were beginning to create more formal calendars. The Persians created a 365 day calendar divided into 12 months of 30 days each, with five extra days at the end of the year. The Babylonians created a calendar with alternating 29-30 day months. Prior to this these groups began their New Year around September 20 with the autumnal equinox (when the sun can be observed vertically overhead).</p>
<p>46 B.C.</p> <p>Who: Julius Caesar, Roman Emperor</p> <p>Where: Rome (Present-day capital city of Italy)</p> <p>What: Julius Caesar hired astronomers and mathematicians to develop what became known as the Julian calendar. This calendar had 365 days with 12 months and a leap day added to February every four years. On this calendar January 1st became known as the first day of the New Year because it was the first day of the month named after the Roman god Janus, who is the god of beginnings. The Romans celebrated New Year's by offering gifts to Janus and having parties.</p>	<p>1582 A.D.</p> <p>Who: Pope Gregory</p> <p>Where: Rome, Italy</p> <p>What: Although Julius Caesar's Julian Calendar was used for almost 1,600 years, during the Middle Ages Christians changed the New Year to be held on Christian holidays like December 25. In 1582, Pope Gregory updated the Julian calendar and created the Gregorian calendar, which made January 1st New Year's Day again. We still use the Gregorian calendar to this day.</p>

Why does the ball drop in Times Square in New York City?

***Working with classmates, use multiple resources to learn the history
behind this famous American tradition!**

1. Begin by analyzing the two primary source images of early New Year's celebrations in Times Square. Answer the following questions. Make sure to record your ideas!

- What do you notice about these images?
- What does the city look like?
- How are people dressed?
- Can you read any of the signs on the buildings? Do you know any of these brands today?

2. Analyze the two primary source images of the original ball that was dropped and the 2000-2007 ball that is dropped. Answer the following questions. Make sure to record your ideas!

- What similarities and differences do you notice between the two images?
- Why do you think there are men standing around the original ball?

3. It's time to watch a video that shows the history of the New Year's celebration in Times Square from the *History Channel*! Select the video of the Times Square Ball Drop (Bottom right) <http://www.history.com/topics/new-years/videos>

*Make sure to take notes throughout this video. You may want to replay it to review some of the fun facts that are shared in it!

4. If there is time, read other online sources listed below about the history of celebrating New Year's Eve in Times Square in New York City and especially the history of the ball dropping.

Brief history of the New Years' Ball - Time Magazine Article
<http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1869058,00.html>

Times Square New Year's Eve Official Website

General History of New Year's Eve in Times Square
http://www.timessquarenyc.org/nye/nye_history.html

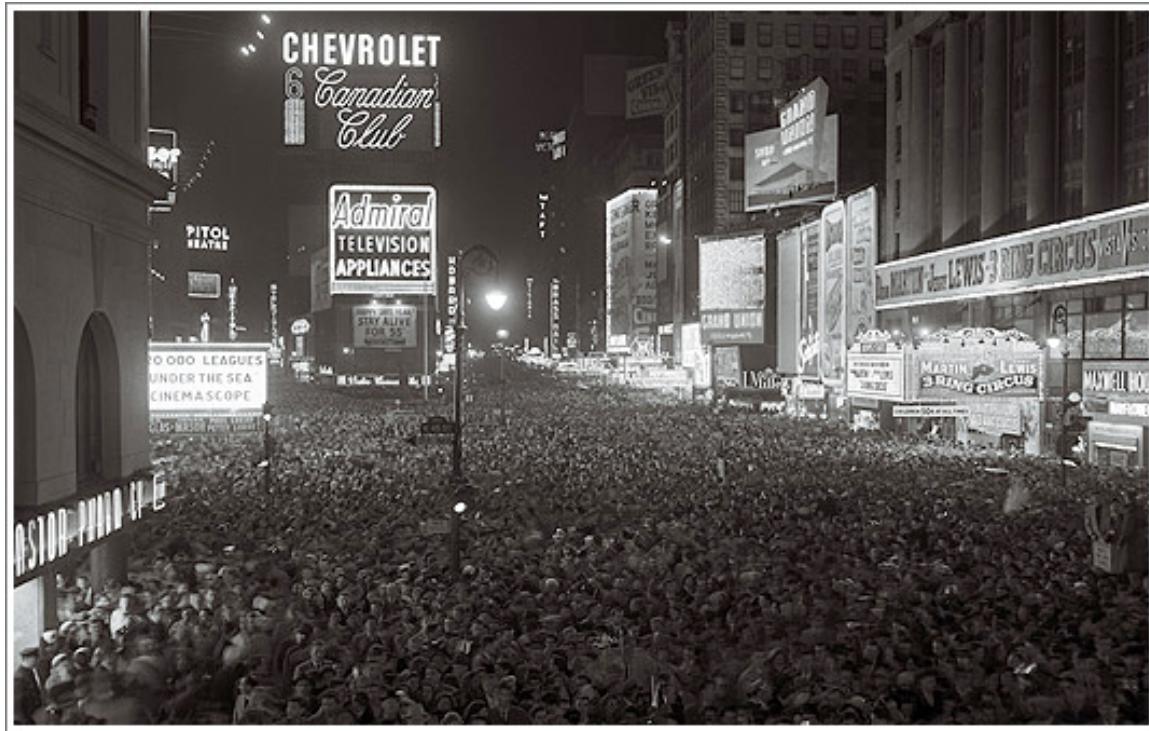
History of Ball Dropping in Times Square on New Year's Eve
http://www.timessquarenyc.org/nye/nye_ball.html

Interactive Timeline of Times Square
http://www.timessquarenyc.org/then_now/then_now_timeline.html

5. To show all that you have learned, create a Venn Diagram that compares and contrasts the similarities and differences between early New Year's celebrations in Times Square starting in 1904 and New Year's celebrations in Times Square today. Make sure that your Venn Diagram includes information both about Times Square and the ball dropping, specifically:

- Why and how did the New Year's celebration in Times Square begin?
- Who came up with the idea to drop a ball? What was this early ball dropping like?
- How did technology changes affect the ball dropping and overall celebration?

**Primary Source Images of New Year's Eve Celebration
in Times Square, New York City**



Times Square, New York City – Early New Year's Celebration
From: http://www.timessquarenyc.org/nye/nye_history.html



Times Square, New York City – Early New Year's Celebration

From: http://www.timessquarenyc.org/nye/nye_history.html



Original Ball dropped in Times Square, New York City
New Year's Eve Ball, 1978. Photo credit: *The New York Times*.
From: http://www.timessquarenyc.org/nye/nye_ball.html



2000-2007 Version of Ball dropped in Times Square, New York City
(Ball first used for year 2000 New Year's celebration)

From: http://www.timessquarenyc.org/nye/nye_ball.html

Make some noise!
Why do we celebrate with noisemakers & fireworks?

Cultures around the world have been celebrating the New Year with noisemakers and fireworks.

Why do you think they celebrate with noisemakers & fireworks?

Choose the correct answer below!

A Cultures around the world have thought that celebrating with noisemakers is fun and that colorful fireworks make the holiday more special.	B Cultures around the world have thought that celebrating with noisemakers and fireworks will ward off evil spirits and bring good luck.	C Cultures around the world have used loud noisemakers and fireworks to keep people awake so they can ring in the New Year at midnight.
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Make some noise! Why do we celebrate with noisemakers & fireworks?

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. What is your answer to “Why do we celebrate with noisemakers & fireworks?”

2. View video clips of New Year’s fireworks displays in the following cities across the United States and around the world. Which of these fireworks do you think are the best and why?

New York City, New York - United States
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=53jPZBCICdg>

Las Vegas, Nevada – United States
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=47iBznTVRgA>

Walt Disney World (Orlando, Florida) - United States
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RWgqMpez93M>

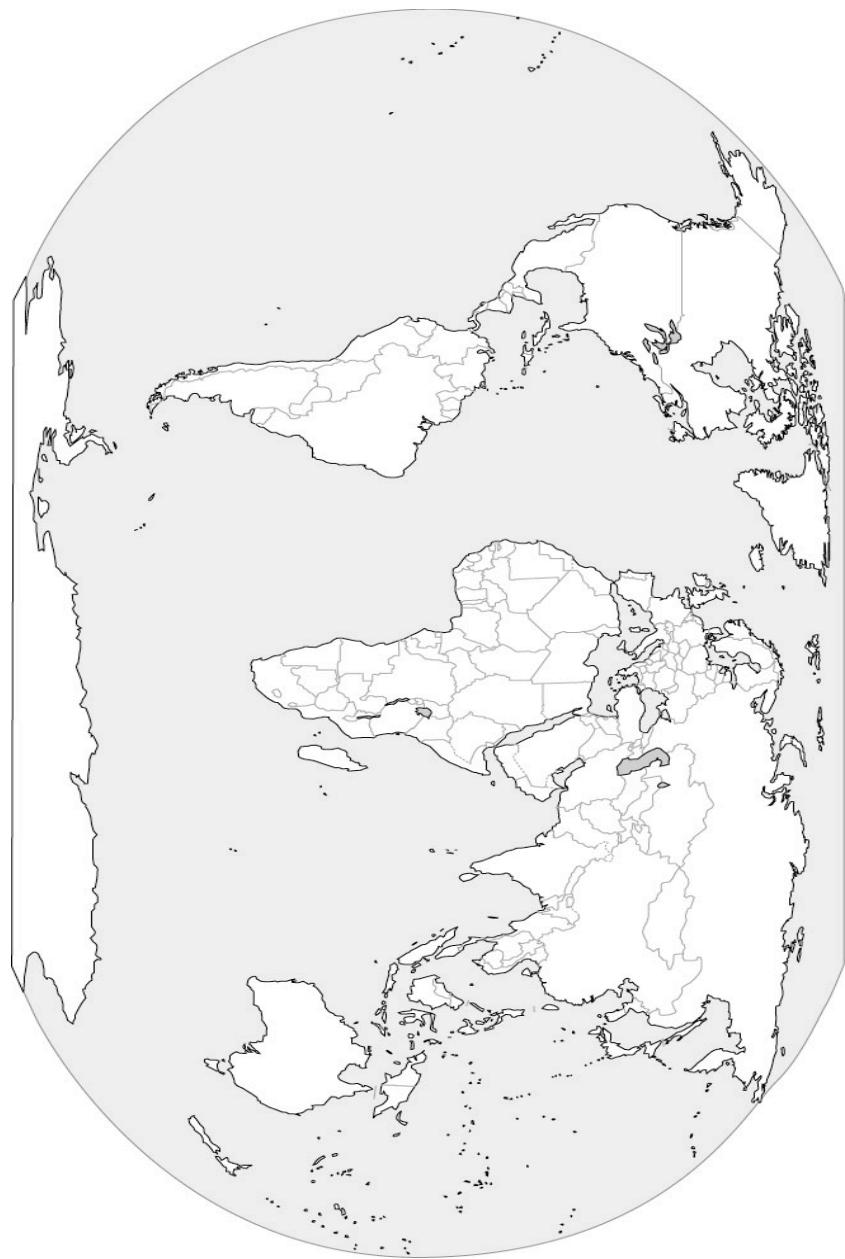
Taipei, Taiwan
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rUsZMHwC4I&feature=related>

Paris, France
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LlMbcRHxe0I&feature=related>

Sydney, Australia
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1699ga06aTI>

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TktezXhWUq0>

3. After watching the video clips, locate the city and country of the places you viewed on the blank world map.



Decoding *Auld Lang Syne*



1. Listen to the first minute of the traditional New Year's song, *Auld Lang Syne* online. Read the lyrics as the song is playing. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=acxnmaVTIZA>
 2. What do you think this song is about? What do the lyrics mean to you?
 3. Review the lyrics, meaning of the lyrics, and fast facts at the bottom of this document and discuss the following questions:
 - How did this song become an American New Year's tradition?
 - Why do you think we sing this song for the New Year's holiday?
 - What is the deeper meaning of this song? Give an example from your life that connects to this song.
-

Lyrics

**Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And never brought to mind?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And auld lang syne!**

Chorus:

**For auld lang syne, my dear,
For auld lang syne.
We'll take a cup o' kindness yet,
For auld lang syne.**

From: http://www.carols.org.uk/auld_lang_syne_song.htm

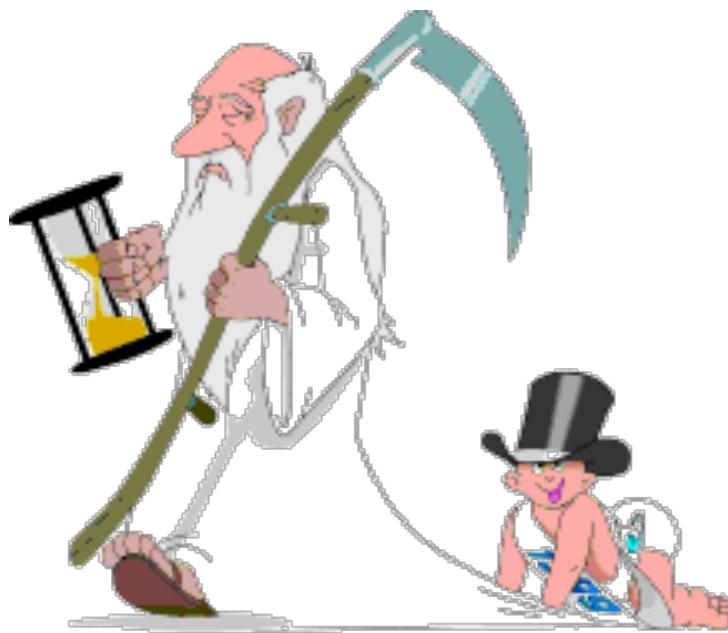
Meaning of the Lyrics:

- The song is about memories of the past.
- Auld Lang Syne means “Long, long ago” or “Old long since”
- The song asks:
 - Should old friends be forgotten?
 - Should we forget the past?
- The song raises a toast to celebrate memories, friends, and the past.

Fast Facts:

- Written in 1788 by Robert Burns in Scotland and was originally a poem
- Sung to the tune of a Scottish folk song
- Sung in Great Britain to celebrate the New Year’s holiday
- Immigrants brought the tradition of singing this song at New Year’s to the United States
- The song has became an “American tradition”

Father Time & Baby New Year



From:

<http://misyte.tripod.com/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderpictures/2newyear.gif>

Father Time & Baby New Year

- Father Time symbolizes the passage of time and the death of the old year.
- Baby New Year symbolizes fresh beginnings and the beginning of a new year.
- Many cultures around the world have traditionally had a god-like figure like Father Time who makes decisions about death and new beginnings.
 - Ancient India had the god Yama, who reigned over death and justice. Yama is over 3,500 years old and makes decisions about reincarnations.
 - Ancient Rome had the god Pluto, who ruled the underworld.
 - Ancient Greece had the god of time, Chronos.
 - The English and Northern Europeans had the Grim Reaper.

From: <http://www.canada.com/life/Year+traditions+hail+from+depths+antiquity/1126441/story.html>

Symbols of Change: Father Time & New Year Baby

The image of Father Time & Baby New Year is a popular New Year's holiday symbol, but what does this symbol represent?

Complete the following to find out!

1. With a partner look carefully at the image of Father Time & Baby New Year. Talk about the following questions. Write down your answers below.

- Who is in this picture?
- What are they wearing? Why?
- What are they holding? Why?
- What do you think this image means? Why?
- What do these characters symbolize?
- Why do you think this image is popular for the New Year's holiday?

2. Turn over the image to find out what this image means.

3. How did you and your partner's initial ideas about this image connect or disconnect to the historical facts about the image?

4. Now that you know the history behind the image, what is the deeper meaning of this image? What does it actually symbolize?

5. Brainstorm a list of ideas for ways you could represent the same meaning of this image, but in a different way. List and sketch some of your ideas on the back of this page.