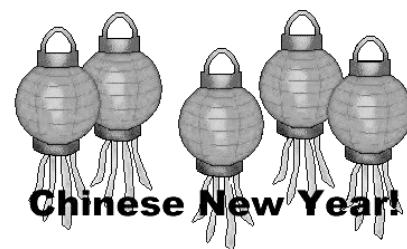


Name: _____

The Chinese Calendar

February 1 is the first day of the Chinese holiday called Spring Festival. Spring Festival lasts for 15 days and marks the beginning of the Chinese year. The Chinese year does not start at the same time our year starts because the Chinese use a *lunar* calendar that is different from our *solar* calendar.



Our calendar is based on the solar year. A solar year is the amount of time it takes the earth to make one complete revolution around the sun. In order to keep track of how far along the earth is in its cycle, we've divided our solar year into 12 months, each with approximately the same number of days.

In most years, our calendar has 365 days. Yet it actually takes the earth $365\frac{1}{4}$ days to circle the sun. This means that at the beginning of a new year, the sun hasn't quite made it back to where it started the year before. Why does this matter? It matters because we want the months that go with each season to stay the same from year to year. If we start each year a $\frac{1}{4}$ day early, the seasons and months will eventually get out of whack. To keep this from happening, once every four years—on leap year—we wait for the earth to catch up with our calendar by adding an extra day to the month of February.

The Chinese calendar is based on the lunar month. A lunar month is the amount of time it takes the moon to orbit the earth. A Chinese month always starts with a new moon and lasts until the next new moon. (*Our* months have nothing to do with the phases of the moon.)

The Chinese year always starts at the beginning of a lunar month. Most Chinese years are made up of 12 lunar months. But it takes the earth about 10 days longer than 12 lunar months to circle the sun. The Chinese calendar takes care of this by adding an extra lunar month to the year (giving it 13 months) about once every 3 years. This serves the same purpose as our adding an extra day once every 4 years.

Each year in the Chinese calendar is named after an animal. The names of the years rotate in a 12-year cycle, called the Chinese Zodiac. The zodiac cycle begins with the rat and ends with the pig. After the 12th year, the names recycle, starting all over again with the rat. The year that starts on February 1 is the *Year the Tiger*, the third year in the 12-year cycle.

Name: _____

The Chinese Calendar

China is not the only country to celebrate the Lunar New Year. People in countries like Japan, South Korea, and Vietnam also use the lunar calendar to mark important holidays, including the New Year.

1. What is the *theme* (main idea) of this essay? What is it mainly about?

2. Our calendar is based on a solar year. What is a solar year?

3. Why is our year divided into months?

4. What is a leap year? Why do we have one?

5. The Chinese calendar is based on a lunar month. What is a lunar month?

6. Why do some Chinese years have 13 months and not 12?

7. What is the Chinese Zodiac?

8. Do you like the idea of naming years after animals?