teacher resource guide schooltime performance series

year of the pig
Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company

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In Chinese tradition, each year is represented by one of the twelve animals of the Chinese zodiac: the rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, rooster, dog and pig. Each Chinese New Year, people celebrate with dances, feasting, festivals and fireworks. It is believed that anyone born under the auspices of that year's animal sign will enjoy a year filled with good fortune.

2019 is the Year of the Earth Pig, and Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company will present a sensational performance of festival dances to celebrate. Celebrating the Chinese New Year is an annual tradition for the Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company. Nai-Ni Chen's unique approach to choreography merges traditional and contemporary styles and aims to “fuse the dynamic freedom of the American spirit with the grace and splendor of the Asian soul.” The New York Times has called the Company’s dancers “endlessly proliferating forces of cosmic energy.”

The theatrical piece will feature beautiful traditional costumes, fan and ribbon dances, and group performances with dragons and lions. Audience members will be entertained by the graceful and skillful movement of the dancers and their infectious joy in celebrating the Year of the Pig.

The Chinese lunar calendar is very ancient, going back to the Xia (21st century BCE-16th century BCE) and Shang Dynasty (16th century BCE-11th century BCE). Although China uses the solar-based Gregorian calendar to keep in step with most other nations, the traditional Chinese calendar is ruled by the cycles of the moon and is used even today to determine the dates of annual festivals. In the Chinese horoscope, each year is also influenced by one of the five elements—Fire, Earth, Metal, Water and Wood. The Year of the Earth Pig starts on February 5, 2019 and ends on January 24, 2020.

In the Chinese zodiac, the joyful rolly-poly pig represents abundance and wealth, a sign of plenty and good tidings. During the Earth Pig Year, there will be good luck and fortune for many, not just those born under the Pig sign. Some Chinese astrologers are saying this will be a good time to also invest and make money. People born in the Year of the Pig are considered to be generous, hardworking, kind and compassionate. They love to make new friends, hang out with the ones they have, and seek to enjoy life as much as possible. Generous to a fault, they also enjoy helping others, even if it may harm their wallets. They love to spend their money on name brand luxury items for themselves and their loved ones too. Being thrifty is a bit hard for those born under this sign.

Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company is one of just a few professional Asian American dance companies in the United States. The Company’s productions take the audience beyond cultural boundaries to where tradition meets innovation and freedom arises from discipline. It has produced more than 20 national tours reaching 41 states; nine international tours to Europe, Asia and the Americas; and regular New York and New Jersey seasons. In addition to its extensive season of touring and performing, the Company has developed Arts in Education residency programs integrating dance, music, and poetry with multiple academic disciplines. Its community outreach programs include workshops with immigrant Chinese American children in Edison, New Jersey to help preserve Chinese cultural heritage.

What is your impression of China today? How does 21st century China influence the creative expression of the dances you bring to your company? In the 21st century, we now have the internet. Although access to western culture is still somewhat restricted, Chinese people have enjoyed a much wider access to western culture in recent years, and vice versa.

My work is reflective of this trend. Since I began this company, I have been building a movement vocabulary that harmonizes and bridges the Chinese and American cultures. I think we are on the cutting edge, and you will be witnessing more and more exciting work from this company because we are truly a diverse group that is working together to create something new every time we walk into the studio together.
Why have you chosen to base your company in New Jersey? Is this location particularly important to your work or to the Chinese-American community?

I lived and worked in New York City prior to moving to New Jersey. I have always enjoyed being with nature. I feel connected with its spirit and energy which inspires me to create new work. To be able to hear the birds and watch little animals running in the back yard is important to me. As a matter of fact, my observations of the changes in nature and the movements and behaviors of animals are reflected in my choreography quite closely. I moved from New York City to New Jersey to find that extra space and freedom. Ever since I started the company here, I became very involved with local Chinese community groups and have received several awards because of our performances and contributions to education in the area.

Do you work solely with dancers of Asian descent? Is it important to you to merge and share the culture and traditions of other cultures? If so, why?

Our dancers are from around the world. Each dancer contributes to the Company’s new work. Their presence and participation in the creative process bring new perspectives and abilities, and allows us to foster mutual understanding between the artists and audience. We believe that by introducing different cultural ideas into the modern dance form, we can help audiences learn more about the commonalities and differences between cultures. These understandings are critical in resolving conflicts, developing collaboration and even breaking new ground.

Why is it important to celebrate Chinese New Year? How has the celebration changed as Chinese people have moved to the United States and other lands?

Chinese New Year is the most important celebration for Chinese people all over the world. It is a way to continue our traditions and honor our ancestors. The celebration is not as elaborate here in the US as it is in China, Taiwan and other Asian countries. In some Asian countries, the celebration can last for seven to fifteen days. However, in the US, many Chinese communities still make the festival a significant event, with a big, twelve course banquet, the Lion Dance, Dragon Dance, music, paper cut decorations, and lucky charms of golden nuggets to bring prosperity for the New Year. Many audience members from the New York/New Jersey area come to our performances at NJPAC each year as part of their family tradition to celebrate Chinese New Year.

Do aspects of the performance change from year to year to reflect a different animal spirit?

Yes, the program does change from year to year. We try to relate the program to the personality trait of each animal. There are legends and folklore about each animal in the twelve Zodiac cycles that we explore. We also find different approaches to connect to the special year. For example, according to ancient theory, there are five elements in the universe, in addition to the animal signs, that cycle in rotation year after year. They are Metal, Earth, Water, Fire and Wood.

What do you hope audience members will take away from the Year of the Pig celebration?

Most importantly, audience members should have fun and enjoy the time they spend in the theater. It is more than a celebration of the heritage of an ancient country in the East. It is a celebration of life in general. When the performers and audience come together in a gathering like this, it is about sharing the experience of warmth and happiness. I believe my audiences will be mesmerized by the grace and excitement they see on stage. The joy of the experience will not stop by exiting the theater. It should be just the beginning of a desire to explore more.
Prepare for the performance

What is the Chinese New Year?
Introduce students to the Chinese New Year through videos, pictures, and slideshows. Help students understand the traditions of Lunar New Year and how they may be similar to traditions we already celebrate.

Video: The Story of Chinese New Year:
youtu.be/1mC_yo-A4u8

Article: About the Chinese Zodiac: travelchinaguide.com/trips/social_customs/zodiac.

Student Activity

| Grade 6-8: | | Grade 3-5: |
|---|---|
| Have students create an artistic dance work that tells the story of their past and their dreams for their future goal. Encourage students to think not only about their personal past, but their cultural history. Allow students to brainstorm their ideas on paper before they begin creating. | Have students think back to the twelve Chinese zodiac animals discussed in the "Prepare for the Performance" stage. Have students generate a short dance phrase that represents the characteristics of a specific Chinese zodiac. Next, have students change the size, level or setting in which they perform their phrase. Then, have students swap zodiacs with another student and perform their phrase. Lastly, students can perform the opposite characteristic of their zodiac. | Have students create a short dance phrase that represents the characteristics of a specific Chinese zodiac. Next, have students change the size, level or setting in which they perform their phrase. Then, have students swap zodiac animals with another student and perform their phrase. Lastly, students can perform the opposite characteristic of their zodiac. |

Note: Although Chinese zodiacs change by the year, most students in class may have the same birth year. It may be helpful to have each animal represent a birth month instead of a year for this activity.

Experience the performance

Before the performance, share with students that this upcoming year will be 'The Year of the Pig'. Have students brainstorm traits that may be associated with the pig and other animals in the Chinese zodiacs. Ask students to take mental note of anything specific the dancers do that may represent the different animals of the Chinese zodiacs e.g. specific props, repetition of movement, costumes.

According to the Chinese calendar, the year 2019 will be 'The Year of the Pig'. During the performance, analyze the movements of the dancers and the information shared by the company members. See if you notice anything specific that may represent any of the twelve animals of the Chinese zodiac.

Reflect, respond and read

Connecting With The Company

Grade 5-6: Have students reflect on the performance through an open discussion. Through written response, have students share their experience in a letter encouraging others to go see the performance.

Grade 6-8: Have students read the Artistic Vision for Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company. Ask students to reflect on the performance and write a response connecting what they saw to what they read.

Questions for Student Reflection

- What was unique about this dance performance?
- What was your favorite part of the performance? Why?
- What did the company members use to help celebrate the Chinese New Year?
- How does the artistic vision relate to what you saw in the performance?

Focus

Zodiac Dance Phrase
Have students think back to the twelve Chinese zodiac animals discussed in the "Prepare for the Performance" stage. Have students create a short dance phrase that represents the characteristics of a specific Chinese zodiac. Next, have students change the size, level or setting in which they perform their phrase. Then, have students swap zodiacs with another student and perform their phrase. Lastly, students can perform the opposite characteristics of their zodiac.

Zodiac Swap
Think back to what we discussed about the Chinese New Year before the performance. Using the twelve animals of the Chinese zodiac:
1. Create a dance phrase that represents a specific animal within the Chinese zodiac.
2. Change the size, level or setting in which you perform your phrase.
3. Swap zodiac phrases with a partner and perform their phrase.
4. Perform the opposite characteristics of your partner's zodiac.

Originates

Creating Your Future
Have students create an artistic dance work that tells the story of their past and their dreams for the future. If necessary, students can work in small groups where each student contributes a part of the tradition and future goal. Encourage students to think not only about their personal past, but their cultural history. Allow students to brainstorm their ideas on paper before they begin creating.

New Year, New Me
The 15 days of the Chinese New Year are a time to reflect on the passing year and celebrate the future. Create an artistic work that reflects on your past and celebrates the future. As you are creating your work, think about your personal story and traditions. How can your dance represent who you are and where you are going?

Rehearse

Dance Rehearsal
Continue to monitor student work to ensure they are on track to share it with others. Ensure students have clearly communicated their story through words, dance, music, etc. Students further along in the rehearsal process can be encouraged to add additional visual elements (costumes, pictures, props) to their creation. Also, students can create names for their works based on what it represents.

Final Rehearsal
As Nai-Ni Chen does in her works, remember to explore the resilience, will power and strength that you see in your community and communicate it to everyone. Through costumes, pictures or props, can you add any visual element to your dance that would enhance your creation? Also, based on what your creation represents, what would you name it?

Make magic

Performance
In a formal or informal setting, have students present their creations to one another. Encourage students to watch one another carefully in order to cite specific emotions or events they saw. Students can also leave Fortune Feedback or positive feedback notes for one another to encourage them to strive for the future goals.

Show Time!
It is now time to share your work! Be creative, clear and have fun!

Fortune Feedback
When watching other groups perform, think about a positive fortune you can leave for another student. Write them a positive note to encourage them to keep their goals in sight the rest of the year.

English Language Arts
NJSLS.A.1.SL.1.5

Social Studies
6.1.4.D.13
6.1.4.D.20
NJ Arts Standard
1.2 History of the Arts and Culture

Social Studies
6.1.4.D.20
NJ Arts Standard
1.4 Aesthetic Response and Critique

Arts and Culture
6.1.4.D.18
6.1.4.D.13
NJ Arts Standard
6.1.4.D.20
NJ Arts Standard
1.4 Aesthetic Response and Critique

Social Studies
6.1.4.D.10
NJ Arts Standard
1.3 Performance

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Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company: Year of the Pig

New Jersey Student Learning Standards

Social Studies

6.1.A.D.13. Describe how culture is expressed through and influenced by the behavior of people
6.1.A.D.18. Explain how an individual’s beliefs, values, and traditions may reflect more than one culture.

6.1.A.D.20. Describe why it is important to understand the perspectives of other cultures in an interconnected world.

English Language Arts

NJLSA.W.2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work. Perceive and analyze artistic work. Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work. Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation. Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

NATIONAL ARTS STANDARDS

For more detailed information on the standards, visit these websites:
NJ ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS
https://www.education.govt.nz/curriculum/2016/ela

NJ SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS
https://www.education.govt.nz/curriculum/2016/ss

NJ WORLD LANGUAGE STANDARDS
https://www.education.govt.nz/curriculum/apss/llw

NJ ARTS STANDARDS

NATIONAL ARTS STANDARDS
nationalartsstandards.org

Cultural Connections

Chinese food history and influence

For centuries since the first seafaring boats were built, Chinese people have left the motherland in droves to seek their fortune elsewhere as entrepreneurial merchants and adventurers sailors. This grand diaspora stretches across the globe—from Taiwan to Africa. And everywhere they went, they brought their unique cuisine. More than any other import, besides themselves, Chinese food has been a smashing success when it comes to being readily adopted and savored by non-Chinese. For many, it often serves as a gateway to the culture and the people.

China as a country is huge and diverse. Climate and landscapes vary from the humid tropical climate of the Southern Coasts to the dry, and Gobi Desert. The different cuisines are as varied as the landscape.

In Southwest China, Sichuan cooking is famous for its use of fiery peppers—especially the Sichuan pepper, lots of garlic, and other pungent, heady flavors. Famous dishes from the region are lip-tingling dan dan noodles and hot and sour soup. Some people call Sichuan a “heavenly country” because of the incredible food and the bounty of natural resources and the fertile agricultural land.

Hunan cuisine, of course, hails from the Hunan Province, an inland southeast region along the Yangtze watershed. The dishes here are known for their hot and spicy flavor profiles and utilize techniques such as smoking, braising, frying, and stewing. Popular dishes include pearly meatballs, which are balls of ground meat covered in steamed glutinous rice, and pork spare ribs steamed in bamboo. Yum!

Cantonese cuisine is from the province of Guangdong, which is in South China and faces the South China Sea. Cantonese cooks utilize many different types of protein—from the usual pork to the exotic such as frog legs. Stir frying and steaming is two of the most popular cooking methods in Cantonese cuisine. Cooks use different sauces like black bean, hoisin, plum and oyster. Notable dishes from this region are chow mein, lo mein and roast sucking pig. Because of the large wave of Cantonese immigrants, many non-Chinese are familiar with Cantonese dishes even if they don’t know that they originate from Canton.

Because of the Chinese diaspora, Chinese influence show up in dishes in other Asian countries, such as Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Since the earliest days of human civilization, people from the southern parts of China have been sailing to the Philippines, which have a large Chinese Filipino population. The 7,000 archipelago boasts national dishes that have deep Chinese roots, such as pancit—a delicious stir fry noodle dish with vegetables and protein like chicken, lumpia—basically eggrolls, and siopao—steamed buns stuffed with vegetables or meat.

American Chinese Cuisine

Chinese cuisine in America reflects the immigrant ingenuity of survival and adapting to local ingredients and palate. Many Chinese laborers sailed to America in the 19th century to build railroads and work in mines. Due to racism and prejudice, government officials did not allow them to own land, forcing them into ghettos—otherwise known as “Chinatowns.” Entertising Chinese immigrants, many of them men, cooked for themselves to remember home and then started to open restaurants to cater to fellow Chinese and then Americans who were curious about the new cuisine. This milieu has given rise to uniquely American Chinese takeout staples like beef and broccoli, chop suey and fried crab rangoon, wonton skins filled with cream cheese and artificial crab. Fortune cookies are definitely not from China. They were invented in California and are actually a version of a similar Japanese treat. General Tso’s chicken, named after a Chinese military leader, and was also invented in America. Chinese cuisine in America has been adapted to be thicker, sweeter and blander for the typical American palate.

Some Chinese restaurants cater to both Americans and Chinese. Often times, there will be an American menu and a Chinese menu with “bone-style dishes” like cold beef tendon and braised chicken feet.
vocabulary

Acrobatics

The performance of extreme gymnastic feats, such as walking on a tightrope or swinging on a trapeze. Acrobatics require excellent balance, agility, and coordination. In China, this ancient art form traces its roots to the Xia Dynasty 4,000 years ago.

B.C.E. “Before Common Era,” meaning any date prior to the year 1 C.E. (Common Era). B.C. (Before Christ) means the same thing as B.C.E. AD (Anno Domini, which is Latin for “in the year of the Lord”) means the same as C.E.

Buddhist

Someone who practices Buddhism, a religion or philosophy drawn from the teachings of Gautama Buddha or Siddhrtha Gautama, commonly known as the Buddha. “The Awakening One.” Buddhism originated in India between the mid-6th century and mid-4th century B.C.E. It spread from India to China, Korea, Japan, and other parts of Asia. Buddhism emphasizes meditation and developing one’s spirituality.

Confucianism

A way of life formulated by the philosopher Confucius in 6th and 5th century B.C.E. He spread from India to China, Korea, Japan, and other parts of Asia. Confucianism emphasizes meditation and developing one’s spirituality.

Dance

A traditional art form traces its roots to the Xia Dynasty 4,000 years ago. BCE “Before Common Era,” meaning any date prior to the year 1 C.E. (Common Era). B.C. (Before Christ) means the same thing as BCE. AD (Anno Domini, which is Latin for “in the year of the Lord”) means the same as C.E.

Tao Te Ching

10    Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company: the keystone of this philosophy.
11    that contains the basic teachings of
12    or guidance or the natural order of the
13    sometimes describes a way of living
14    living in harmony with the Tao which
15    Chinese tradition of Taoism, also known
16    as Daoism. This philosophy emphasizes
17    living in harmony with the Tao which
18    means the “way,” “path” or “principle.”
19    Tao can’t be exactly described but it
20    describes a way of living or
guidance or the natural order of the
21    universe. Humans must learn what the
tao entails in order to achieve wisdom
and peace. The Tao Te Ching is a book
that contains the basic teachings of
Lao Tzu, whose writings are considered the
corestone of this philosophy.

Lunar

A term to mean relating to the moon or of the moon. From Luna, the Latin
word for the Moon. Usually embodied in Ancient Rome as a woman wearing
a crescent crown on her head and driving a chariot with horse or oxen.

Pipa

(pronounced “pee-pa”) A four-stringed lute, somewhat like a guitar. With over 2000 years of
history, the pipa is one of the oldest
Chinese musical instruments.

Peking Opera

A style of performance with roots deep in Chinese culture and history. A Peking Opera-style performance has singing, acting, martial arts and music. It is known for its rich costumes and flamboyant makeup. It has been recognized by UNESCO on the “Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.”

Zodiac

A coordinate system of twelve divisions based on twelve celestial constellations used in astronomy and astrology. The twelve divisions are traditionally called “signs.” The Chinese zodiac (zhèngxiǎo in Chinese, literally meaning “birth likeness”) is derived from the similar concept as in western astrology.

websites

Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company Official Website

nainichen.org

Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company Official Facebook Page

facebook.com/NaiNChenDanceCompany

Nai-Ni Chen biography

nainichen.org/Company/OLBio.htm

Spotlight on Nai-Ni Chen: Not Alone: A Modern Dance Performance at Aljira

aljirablog.tumblr.com/10025267999

Chinese New Year

history.com/topics/holidays/chinese-new-year

10 Interesting Facts about Chinese New Year

chinahighlights.com/travelguide/festivals/new-year-facts.htm

Celebrating on Chinese New Year’s Day

thoughtco.com/chinese-new-years-day-687469

Chinese New Year Food

foodandwine.com/chinese-new-year

Cleaning Up for Chinese New Year

wellblogs.nytimes.com/2009/01/26/
cleaning-up-for-chinese-new-year

Chinese Immigrants in the United States

migrationpolicy.org/article/chinese-immigrants-united-states

10 Disappearing Chinese New Year Traditions

chinahighlights.com/travelguide/intro/social_customs/zodiac

The Legend of the Zodiaco

cinesofuncalendar.com/zodiac/Legend.htm

About the Chinese Astrology

karmaweather.com/The-5-chinese-astrology-zodiac-elements

Videos

Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company Demo

youtu.be.com/tzGpUj9Fqk

Watch Auditions for Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company

youtu.be.com/skkzAg7kSU

Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company Presents “Year of the Rooster”

youtu.be.com/XUyt147TGU

Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company: Song of the Phoenix

youtu.be/hhp0B1hYn_A

New York Dance Up Close: Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company on Singular Movement

youtu.be.com/chGEtswdco

Traditional Chinese Dance

youtu.be.com/NonB1JU3k

Beijing residents celebrate Chinese New Year with fireworks displays

theguardian.com/world/video/2015/feb/19/

beijing-celebrates-chinese-new-year-fireworks-displays-video

Books

The Year of the Dog by Grace Lin (chapter book, Gr. 3-5)

The Year of the Rat by Grace Lin (chapter book, Gr. 3-5)

The Year of the Tiger: Tales from the Chinese Zodiac by Oliver

Chin (picture book, Ages 4-8)

Sam and the Lucky Money by Karen Chinn (picture book, Ages

4-8)

In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson by Bette Bao Lord

and Marc Simont (novel, Gr. 4-7)

The Cambridge Illustrated History of China by Patricia Buckley

Ebery (Cambridge University Press, 2010)


The Silk Roads: A New History of the World by Peter Frankopan

(Vintage, 2017)

China A to Z: Everything You Need to Know to Understand

Chinese Customs and Culture by May-Lee Chai and Winberg

Chai (Plume, 2014)

The Chinese in America: A Narrative History by Iris Chang


Chinese Dance: In the Vast Land and Beyond by Shih-Ming Li

Chang and Lynn E. Frederiksen (Wesleyan, 2016)

Travelchinaguide.com/intro/social_customs/zodiac

Travelchinaguide.com/intro/social_customs/zodiac

Video
In-School Residencies: Drama + Social Studies. Dance + Math. It all adds up in NJPAC’s In-School Residencies in which professional teaching artists partner with educators to bring the arts into the classroom. Each 7- to 10-week program culminates in a student performance or an interactive family workshop. All programs address state and national standards. NJPAC is the regional provider in New Jersey for international arts programs like the NJ Wolf Trap Program and Dancing Classrooms Global.

Assemblies: NJPAC presents engaging school assembly programs that are presented by professional artists that invite students into the enchanting world of live performance. NJPAC’s assembly series promotes cultural awareness and invigorates learning by presenting works that are connected to your school’s curriculum.

Professional Development: NJPAC Professional Development engages classroom teachers, arts specialists and teaching artists as integrated teams that combine arts pedagogy, content, classroom management and social behavioral strategies to ignite and inspire arts-rich classrooms. Working as a team empowers teachers to share practice and strategy. Our goal is to inspire artistic and intellectual capacities in students, building competence and confidence in both students and teachers.

Saturday Programs: NJPAC’s Saturday programs are geared towards students at every level—from those who dream of starring on Broadway to those who are still learning their scales. Students work with professional artists to build technique and develop their own creative style in film, contemporary modern dance, hip hop, jazz, musical theater and symphonic band.

Summer Programs: Want to begin to explore the arts? Or immerse yourself in the study of one genre? Then join us at NJPAC next summer in one of seven programs that spark the creativity in every child through the study of music, dance and theater.

For more information or to schedule an appointment, please call our education sales team at 973.353.7058 or email artseducation@njpac.org. Visit njpac.org/education

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