



Lesson Guide

Chinese and Western Zodiacs: So Different. So Similar

Vocabulary List (*list of words or phrases that are related to the topic for which the lesson guide is being created for*)

1. **Astrology:** *the divination of the supposed influences of the stars and planets on human affairs and terrestrial events by their positions and aspects. (merriam-webster.com)*
2. **Astronomy:** *the study of objects and matter outside the earth's atmosphere and of their physical and chemical properties (merriam-webster.com)*
3. **Celestial:** *of or relating to the sky or visible heavens*
4. **Lunar New Year:** *the new year according to the Chinese and other lunar calendars*
5. **Chinese Zodiac:** *a traditional classification scheme based on the [lunar calendar](#) that assigns an [animal](#) and its reputed attributes to each year in a repeating twelve-year cycle. (wikipedia) It becomes a sixty year cycle when the elements are taken into account.*
6. **Compatible:** *capable of existing together in harmony*
7. **Fundamental:** *serving as a basis supporting existence or determining essential structure or function*
8. **Gregorian Calendar:** *A calendar beginning with January 1st and in general use introduced in 1582 by Pope Gregory XIII as a revision of the Julian calendar, adopted in Great Britain and the American colonies in 1752, marked by the suppression of 10 days or after 1700 11 days, and having leap years in every year divisible by four with the restriction that centesimal years are leap years only when divisible by 400*
9. **Millennia:** *one thousand years*
10. **Mythology:** *a popular belief or assumption that has grown up around someone or something (merriam-webster)*
11. **Vedic:** *of or relating to the Vedas, the language in which they are written, or Hindu history and culture between 1500 b.c. and 500 b.c.*
12. **Western Zodiac:** *an imaginary band in the heavens centered on the ecliptic that encompasses the apparent paths of all the planets and is divided into 12 constellations or signs each taken for astrological purposes to extend 30 degrees of longitude (merriam-webster.com)*
13. **Zodiac Cycle:** *the time period it takes to pass through all the signs of the zodiac*

Suggested Discussion Topics

1. **What are the 3 most followed zodiac systems?** *Chinese, Western and Vedic.*
2. **What led to astrology?** *It has been argued that astrology began as a study as soon as human beings made conscious attempts to measure, record, and predict seasonal changes by reference to astronomical cycles. (wikipedia)*
3. **Why do you think astrology, something not based in science, survived and was passed down through the ages?** *Wish to know where one is heading, Answer questions like “Why am I here” Where am I going? Why am I the way I am? Bring comfort in times of crisis.*
4. **In addition to your main zodiac sign:**
 - a. **The Chinese Zodiac system has an “Inner animal” and “Secret animal” - what determines these and what characteristic traits do these describe?** *Main sign (birth year): the outer you, Inner animal (birth month): the person you believe you are or wish to be, Secret animal (birth hour determined by position of sun, not clock): the person you are but that you prevent the rest of the world from knowing about.*
 - b. **Similarly, for the Western Zodiac system there are the “Moon” and “Ascendant” signs. What do these represent?** *Sun or star sign (position of sun using birth month and day): your core or conscious self. Basis of personality, interaction with others and life path. Moon sign: (position of moon at birth using day, exact time and time zone) your inner self. Basis of emotions, fears and longings. Ascendant sign: (degree the sun rose on the eastern horizon when you were born) your social mask or how you present yourself, relate to the outer world and how people perceive you.*
5. **Shelter, food, clothing, transportation, safety and communication are fundamental needs.**
 - a. **What might the statement “Humankind’s fundamental unity” mean?** *In the video, it alludes to the fact that there are many different zodiac systems in this world but they all were developed to answer the same questions for different groups of people, over hundreds of millennia so fundamentally, humans are all similar in their continued quest for these answers.*
 - b. **Besides astrology, what might be other symbols of Humankind’s fundamental unity?** *Religion; large brain capable of extremely abstract thought; all cultures developed agriculture and domestication of animals; use of science and technology to solve problems; infinitesimally small genetic variation (less than 0.5%); use both written and spoken languages; long term family units; transmit cultural norms down many generations.*

6. **Discuss whether or not you feel “free will” affects astrological predictions?**
(Individual answers. Possibly yes, since humans have the power to make decisions or possibly no, because your decisions have already been taken into account.)
7. **What are some of the contributions astrology and stargazing have made to the development of other useful technologies/practices?** *Open sea navigation, astrolabe, marking passage of time, marking the seasons for planting and other uses.*
8. **What are the astrological origins of these 8 words? Disaster, Influenza, consideration, Desire, Saturnine and Lunacy.**
 - a. **Disaster** *From the Greek for “bad star” (dys aster), this word of medieval origin signifies the way stars and planets were thought to be responsible for catastrophic events on Earth.*
 - b. **Influenza** *Italian for “influence”, this nasty viral disease tends to appear in outbreaks (often seasonal) that were thought to be caused by the influence of an evil star.*
 - c. **Consideration** *Once, a big decision demanded careful consultation with the stars (Latin: con sidus).*
 - d. **Desire** *You know when you wish upon a star? That’s when you wish de sidus.*
 - e. **Saturnine** *A gloomy, melancholic disposition was typical of people governed by Saturn.*
 - f. **Lunacy** *Temporary bouts of insanity were believed to be induced by changes in the cycle of the moon (Latin: luna).*
 - g. **Starboard** *Sailing in the Mediterranean Sea, the Phoenicians used the Northstar as a navigation guide. Sailing west, the Northstar was always on the right side of the ship, or starboard, for them.*
 - h. **Port** *- is the left side of the ship because while sailing east going home, the Northstar is always on the left side of the ship.*

Suggested Activities

1. There are 2 popular legends describing how the 12 Chinese zodiac animals were chosen. What is the legend involving a race? What is the legend involving Buddha? The animals and the order they finish/arrive is purportedly connected to their behavioral characteristics. What order did they arrive in and what were the characteristics explaining why they arrived in the order they did? Keeping the character traits, what 12 animals would you have chosen for the zodiac and why would you make that change?
2. What is your Animal-Sun sign? Name 5 people you know well and find their Chinese zodiac sign (animal), their Western zodiac sun sign and their combined Animal-Sun sign. Look up the individual characteristics and see if you can find the combined Animal-sun sign characteristics. Note which description seems to fit the person best. What predictions would the compatibility chart have for you as a friend, business partners or possible love interest?



3. Look up at the sky on a cloudless night and spot some Western Zodiac constellations visible in your night sky. Note that you can see most of them without a telescope or binoculars, but you should try to avoid areas with interfering streetlights or other artificial illumination. The countryside is best, but a safe park will do. DIAGRAM AND NAME A FEW OF THEM. Here are some references to help you:
<https://www.astro4dev.org/2017/03/20/north-vs-south-constellations-moon-phases/>
<https://www.skyatnightmagazine.com/advice/southern-hemisphere-cheat-sheet/>
<https://thebackyardgnome.com/how-to-identify-constellations-in-the-night-sky/>
4. In San Francisco, to commemorate the Year of the Tiger, there are 6 life-sized tiger sculptures. What are their names and where are they located? Each tiger is decorated with features that reflect upon the culture, people, and traditions surrounding Chinese New Year. What do the features on each tiger represent? If possible, visit and take photos of each.
5. Many countries have celebrated the Lunar New Year with Chinese zodiac animals on their postage stamps. Find one example for each of the 12 zodiac animals, each from a different country and locate the 12 countries on a world map. Do the stamp designs carry any special meaning?