

When Should The New Year Begin?

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We take it for granted that January 1st is the start of a new year, but this was not the case for most of history. Stretch your students' ability to think from multiple perspectives by discussing the various dates people have celebrated the new year.

The Beginning of January

“January” came into existence with Julius Caesar’s Julian Calendar of 45 BC. January, named for the Roman god *Janus*, was the first month and its first day marked the new year.

The Julian calendar gave way to the Gregorian calendar in 1582, now considered the international standard. However, this standardization didn’t officially set January 1st a new year celebration.

December 25 and March 25 competed for the honor in many countries due to Christianity’s rise: December 25th marks Jesus’ birth while March 25 represents the day the angel Gabriel visited Mary.

This new year’s confusion continued until very recently. In fact, the new year in all British territories was officially March 25th **until 1750!**

Here’s **a table** showing how long it took for January 1st to become standard across Europe.

The New Year on Other Calendars

Naturally, calendars that don’t even have a *January* cannot

celebrate the new year on January 1st. Here are the dates of new year celebrations based on non-Gregorian calendars.

The Iranian New Year, or **Nowruz**, occurs around the 21st of March on the Gregorian Calendar. It is tracked using the **Solar Hijri calendar**. This new year date is celebrated by many other countries in the area.

Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year, and its date falls between September or early October.

The French used a **special calendar** for 12 years following the French Revolution. It placed new years near our September 23 (also known as Ian's Birthday!).

The **Islamic New Year** comes about eleven days earlier each year on the Gregorian calendar. In 2008, it occurred in late December, but in 2013 it will fall in early November.

And the **Lunar New Year**, celebrated throughout Asia, occurs somewhere between January 21st and February 21st.

What Would You Do?

As a mind-stretching activity, group up and consider what day of the year would make most sense to celebrate a new year. Ignore the conventions of the Gregorian calendar. Great possibilities include:

- the end of winter
- the longest day of summer
- the date of the fall harvest
- a special historical event

FINAL PRODUCT:

- a) Write a multi-stanza poem introducing your new New Year, with creative evidence supporting your choice.
- b) Tweet about it! Tweet your new New Year in 140 characters or less. Include justification for idea. Add at least 5 hashtag responses
- c) Create a Wikipedia article about your new New Year. Use the real Wikipedia entry as a basis. Use the correct format.