

Celebrate the Year of the Monkey with The Wing!



Journey with Newspapers In Education and Wing Luke Museum to learn how different Asian Americans celebrate the New Year.



Playing the qeej. Photo courtesy of Yee Xiong. Photo by Byron Dazey.

The Hmong are an ethnic minority group who migrated from China to the mountainous regions of Southeast Asia about 5,000 years ago. Many Hmong came to the United States after the Vietnam War.

The Hmong New Year is called *Peb Caug* (bay – CHAO). Based on the lunar calendar, *Peb Caug* usually occurs during the full moon at the end of the twelfth lunar calendar month in November, after the rice harvest season in Laos. In the United States, most Hmong Americans celebrate *Peb Caug* for one or two days on a weekend in November or December, depending on the city. The largest annual Hmong New Year celebration in the United States is in Fresno, California from December 26 to January 1!

NEW YEAR TRADITIONS

For many Hmong, the New Year is the most important community event and begins with festivities in the home. It is a time when family comes together to honor the elders who are still living, give thanks to the ancestors for blessing them, and perform special rituals asking for the ancestors to protect the family from misfortune and illness in the coming year.

Hmong New Year community celebrations include various traditional activities, many that have been continued in the United States, such as performing traditional duet folksongs called *Kwv Txhiaj* (gu-TSIA) or playing a bamboo instrument called a *Qeej* (Keen). Young teenagers participate in a ball-tossing game, known as *Pov Pob* (poh-POH). In this courtship activity, the girls and boys line up and gently toss a small ball back and forth, using this time to get better acquainted.

Many Hmong are preserving the language and have Hmong names. Tsengyang Vang, one of the authors of this article, shares a story about how she was named.

"In 1979, my parents and siblings left a refugee camp and arrived in Oregon. A small church provided my family with a trailer home and odd farm jobs. A member of the church, Evelyn, helped my parents a lot since they knew little English. In April of 1981, I was born!"

Hmong farmers in Asia had limited access to meat. This is why sacrificing chickens or a pig has long been a New Year tradition. These are then cooked into multiple simple dishes. Rice, along with other basic vegetable dishes, is also part of the menu. Modern Hmong New Year food also includes foods from other Asian cultures, like papaya salad and curry soups.

PRESERVING HMGONG HISTORY AND CULTURE

New Year is also a time for families to wear their best clothes. *Paj ntau* (Pa-DAU) are textiles with geometric designs sewn into them that adorn women's skirts, men's collars and baby carriers. Other kinds of *paj ntau* have images sewn into them conveying a significant event. The Hmong did not have a written language until the 1950s. Therefore, stories were told orally and used *paj ntau* to teach Hmong culture from generation to generation. Following the Vietnam War and the fall of Laos in 1975, many Hmong people fled to refugee camps in Thailand. There, Hmong women began to create intricate story cloths to document their experiences fleeing the war through dangerous escapes and life in the refugee camps.

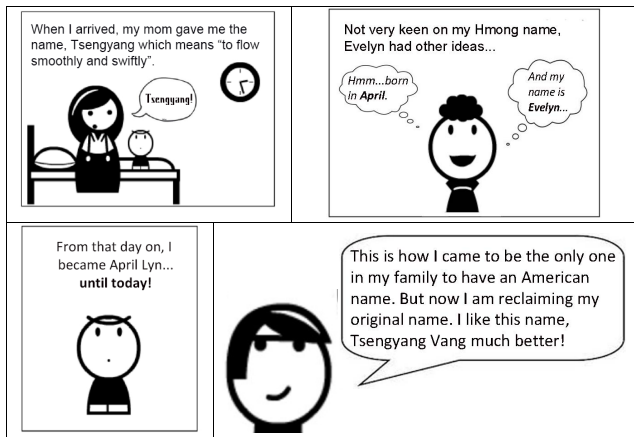


Detail of story cloth showing Hmong escaping Laos by crossing the Mekong River. Wing Luke Museum Collections.

This article is geared for grades K-5. The Teacher's Guide includes extension plans for these articles and lesson plans for grades 4-9 (based on past NIE Asian New Year articles printed in 2013).

Special thanks to Tsengyang Vang, Mai Bee Vue and Zer Vue.

To learn more about Hmong Americans, check out a book list compiled by Benling Wong (with The Seattle Public Library) and the Wing Luke Museum at wingluke.org/2016newyear.



Dressed up for Hmong New Year. Photo courtesy of Bliá Xiong. George Moua photo.

SEATTLE CHINATOWN—INTERNATIONAL DISTRICT ANNUAL LUNAR NEW YEAR FESTIVAL
Hing Hay Park
Maynard Ave S. and S. King St.
cidba.org/events Saturday, Feb. 13
11 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Learn more about The Wing's current New Years All Year Round tour featuring Japanese, Vietnamese and Hmong New Year celebrations; an interactive and fun experience for Pre-K through 5th grade. For more information, including other tour options for all ages, email tours@wingluke.org.

