

Background Information: Calendars and Lunar Cycles

There are several types of calendars in use today. This paper will discuss the Gregorian, the lunisolar and the lunar calendars. The calendar that we use in our western daily lives is the Gregorian calendar. Divided into twelve months, its length is based on the 365 _ days it takes for the earth to travel in a full circle around the sun. Because there is that extra _ day in every year, an additional day is added every four years. When this happens, it is called a 'leap year'.

Traditionally, the western calendar is used to determine beginnings and ends of seasons as well as special days, like holidays. It has been in use since its creation in 1582 by Pope Gregory. However, before that time most westerners used the Julian Calendar, established by Julius Caesar in 46 BC.

The second type is the lunisolar calendar. It is based on a combination of the sun and the moon. In this calendar, a month is measured by the time it takes for the moon to be placed directly between the earth and the sun. This calendar has twelve months annually, except for seven times every 19 years, when a thirteenth month is added. This results in the holidays being moved every year, but staying within a season. An example of changing holidays would be the Jewish celebration of Chanukah which is always around the beginning of December, but not necessarily on the same day every year.

The third calendar is lunar and is based on the cycles and phases of the moon. The days in the month are determined by the time it takes for the full moon to wax and wane until a full moon arises again. This is the type of moon used by both the Saanich peoples. What you will be studying in this activity is referred to as the "Saanich" Year rather than the "Saanich Calendar" because it shows the integration and flow of activities that occurred when the Saanich peoples lived a traditional life that was linked to nature. The moons in the Saanich year are markers, not calendar months. Their "year" was more than 365 days. If you compare the Saanich year to the western system you will see that some years there have been 13 moons and sometimes they have 12. As well, you will see that sometimes there are 29 days between moons and sometimes there are 30 days. As the authors noted, this system may seem confusing at first but one must remember that nature is very complex should not be reduced to a calendar or a clock.

Read over the [Thirteen Moons](#) of the WSANEC (Saanich) Peoples.

- Click on each picture for an enlarged version of the artist's depiction of the moon.
- Click on the name of the moon below each picture for a description of WSANEC activities typically occurring during that moon.