



DOUGLASCOLLEGE
I-CARE Program
Individualized Community
Adult Reading Education

Winter 2026

Breakthrough

A Year of Celebrations



Breakthrough Winter 2026 includes a special piece written by one of our learners.

Inside, you will find the a story about how we celebrate the new year together in Metro Vancouver.

Plus, there are some games designed for you.

Mary and Nuala

Breakthrough is a publication of the I-CARE Adult Literacy Program at Douglas College.

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If you would like copies of the ***Breakthrough*** publication or have suggestions or questions, please contact us at 604-527-5409 or icare@douglascollege.ca

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Our City, Our Celebrations

On January 1, many people in Metro Vancouver welcome the new year. Families gather, friends hug and laugh. They chat and make plans for a fresh start. In our city, we celebrate the New Year many times. New year parties happen all year long.

Metro Vancouver is home to people from all over the world. Each group brings its own culture and traditions when they celebrate the new year. Because of this, New Year's Day is not just one day in Metro Vancouver!

Celebrations are in every season and in every part of the city. Some groups celebrate the new year in winter. Others celebrate in spring, summer, or autumn. Together, we tell the story of the many cultures in this city. It also shows how beautiful Metro Vancouver is when we all learn from each other, and celebrate together.

Words to Know

Ancestors	Family members who lived a very long time ago, like your great-great-grandparents.
Bountiful	Having a large amount of something. It means there is plenty for everyone.
Crescent moon	A thin moon shaped like a spoon. It appears at the start of a new month.
Equator	An imaginary line around the middle of the Earth. It is like a belt that divides the world into a top half and a bottom half. A famous country on this line is Brazil.
Equinox	A day with nearly 12 hours of day and 12 hours of night everywhere in the world.

Generations	People of different ages in a family or community, from old to young. Grandparents, parents, and children are three generations.
Gregorian calendar	A calendar based on the time it takes for the Earth to go around the Sun. It has 12 months, from January to December. Each month has between 28 and 31 days.
Gratitude	A feeling of being thankful for what you have.
Harvest	The time of year when people pick and collect food from the land.
Longhouse	A large, long building. It is used by Indigenous groups for living and for meeting together.
Lunar calendar	A calendar that follows the moon. A new month starts when we first see the thin moon in the sky.

Parade	A large group of people walking together in the street to celebrate. There is often music and dancing.
Potlatch	A special ceremony for Indigenous people. The family who invites the guests gives them food and many gifts. This shows the family's kindness and care.
Prosperity	Having enough food, money, and everything you need to live well.
Reflection	Quiet time to think about your life and what has happened in the past year.
Renewal	Making something feel new or strong again.
Symbolic	This describes using one thing to stand for a bigger idea. For example, a red heart is symbolic of love.



A Year of Celebrations

In Metro Vancouver, New Year celebrations do not only happen on January 1. It happens many times throughout the year!

Where Cultures Come Alive

When you walk through the streets, you will hear many languages. You may also smell spices from kitchens. Communities with different cultural backgrounds bring flavours, festivals, and languages to the local neighbourhoods.

There are also Indigenous roots. The Musqueam, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, and Stó:lō Nations have lived in the area for thousands of years. Their New Year traditions remind us of community, connection, and respect for the land and nature. That is what makes life in Metro Vancouver exciting!

Here is how some of the different communities in the area celebrate their New Year traditions throughout the year.

J anuary

In Canada, many people use the Gregorian calendar. For them, New Year's Day is January 1. In this section, we see how different people welcome the New Year on that day.

Scottish Culture – Hogmanay:

The Scottish celebration of the Hogmanay lasts from New Year's Eve through January 1. Although customs vary, they usually include singing the centuries-old song, "Auld Lang Syne," showing the importance of remembering the past.



Scan this QR code to watch the video on YouTube.

"Auld Lang Syne – Highland Saga

Official New Year's Eve Performance"

@highlandsaga

Japanese Culture - お正月 (Oshogatsu):

The Japanese New Year is a time for renewal and reflection.



Source: tokyoweekender.com

Families gather for a special feast. Colourful dishes are served in wooden boxes carrying symbolic meaning for good fortune, health, prosperity, and happiness in the coming year.



Source: kokoro-jp.com

Kadomatsu, a decoration with three cut pieces of bamboo and pine are placed at entrances for blessings of good fortune, longevity, and a bountiful harvest.

- The Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre in Burnaby typically hosts a public Japanese New Year celebration event with traditional games, food, and culture in early January.

February

Some cultures use a lunar calendar but add an extra month every few years. This extra time keeps the New Year in the same season.



Source: [freepik.com](https://www.freepik.com)

While many East Asian cultures have their own special foods and traditions, they follow a similar calendar system. This is why Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese cultures all celebrate at the same time. It is a season for families to come together and wish for a lucky year ahead.

Chinese Culture – 春節 (Spring Festival):

- ❖ A family reunion dinner on New Year's Eve is very important. It shows family love and togetherness. It is a time for family to be together and give thanks.
- ❖ Red packets filled with money are given by elders to children and younger people. The red packet represents good luck and happiness. It shows blessings for a good life and success.
- FLAG On the day of the annual Chinese New Year Parade in Vancouver Chinatown, you will see many dancers who wear colourful lion and dragon outfits. They leap through the streets to celebrate. The 2026 parade is on Sunday, February 22. It starts at 11:00 AM.

Korean Culture – 설날 (Seollal):

- ❖ Korean families eat Tteokguk on New Year's Day. This rice cakes soup is a must-eat dish. Many people say you do not grow a year older until you finish your bowl!



Source: Getty Images

These white rice cakes mean a clean, new start. Eating the soup brings good luck and success for the year ahead.

Vietnamese Culture – Tết Nguyên Đán:

- ❖ Bánh Chung is made from sticky rice, mung beans, and pork. It is very important for Vietnamese families in the new year.



Source: go-vietnam.vn

This square cake symbolizes the earth and the sky. Families offer the cake to their ancestors to show love and respect. They ask for blessings and good luck in the new year.

Squamish Culture - tsá7tsaxw xa̱ws syelánem

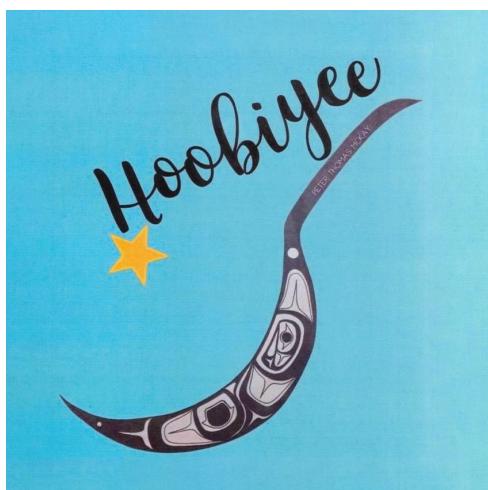
The people of the Squamish Nation and other Coast Salish peoples follow the lunar calendar.

- ❖ During the winter, they meet in longhouses to get ready for the new year. They celebrate new beginnings and their connection to nature.
- ❖ Elders share traditional stories with songs and dancing. They teach the young people about their history. This helps everyone feel proud of who they are.
- ❖ They also hold potlatch feasts to show their gratitude. They share what they have to show they care for everyone in the community.

Nisga'a Culture – Hoobiye

The Nisga'a Nation celebrates the New Year when the first crescent moon appears around February or March. At that time, the moon looks like their traditional wooden spoon. This shape is a sign that there will be a good harvest in the coming year.

- ❖ There are drumming, dancing, and feasting. These show respect for their culture and traditions.
- ❖ It is also a celebration of the arrival of oolichan. This fish is the first source of fresh food after the long winter months.
- ❖ The Nisga'a Ts'amiks Vancouver Society usually puts on the Hoobiye celebration at the PNE Forum in Vancouver.



Source: northcoastreview.blogspot.com

Scan this QR code to watch the video on YouTube.

*“Celebrating the start of Hoobiye,
the Nisga'a new year”*



@cbcbritishcolumbia

Spring

In Canada, spring starts around March 20. On this date, the sun is directly above the Earth's equator. This is called the March Equinox.

Spring is a time for many cultures to celebrate a new beginning. As the flowers grow and the weather gets warm, many people in Metro Vancouver celebrate their New Year.

Persian Culture – نوروز (Nowruz)

People from the Iranian, Afghan, and Kurdish cultures celebrate Nowruz. It means the “New Day.” It is a way to welcome the start of spring. It is celebrated at home quietly for a fresh start.

- ❖ On the last Tuesday night before the New Year starts, people celebrate Chaharshanbe Suri. It is the final celebration of the old year. People jump over small bonfires at this ancient Persian festival of fire. This is a way to say goodbye to the past and leave bad things behind.

- ❖ Nowruz starts on the first day of spring. Before Nowruz begins, the family sits around a special table called the Haft-Sin. They wait for the exact moment of the March Equinox to celebrate the New Year together.



Source: mypersiankitchen.com

The table has seven items. In the Persian language, the name of each item starts with the letter “S.”

1. Somagh (sumac)
2. Serkeh (vinegar)
3. Senjed (dried fruit from lotus tree)
4. Samanoo (sweet pudding)
5. Sabzeh (sprouts)
6. Sib (apple)
7. Sir (garlic)

Each item means something special, like hope, a fresh start, and prosperity for the new year.

- ❖ Chaharshanbe Suri is usually at Ambleside Park in West Vancouver. It has music and dancing at the celebration. In 2026, the Festival of Fire is on March 17. Nowruz is on March 20.

Punjabi Culture – ਵੈਸਾਖੀ (Vaisakhi)

- ❖ People with roots in the Punjab region of India celebrate this old harvest festival every year. Most of these people follow the Sikh religion. Vaisakhi happens on April 13 or 14. It is the most important day of the year for them.
- ❖ Vaisakhi is a colorful public celebration. The streets turn bright orange and yellow during the celebration. These colors show courage. They also look like the wheat in the fields when it is ready for the harvest.
- ❖ Surrey has the largest Vaisakhi parade in the world. You can walk along the route to see different shows. There are big platforms on wheels moving slowly down the street. Sometimes people stand on these floats to wave or play music. Local businesses and families also give out free food to everyone. It is a time to show gratitude. In 2026, the parade starts at 9:00 AM on Saturday, April 18.

Hindu Culture – चैत्र नवरात्रि (Chaitra Navaratri)

The Hindu New Year also uses an extra month every few years to make sure the New Year celebration always happens during the spring harvest, usually in March. Hindus are people who follow the Hindu religion. Many of them come from India or Nepal.

- ❖ Chaitra Navaratri is a nine-day celebration. During these nine days, people pray for health and good luck. They also pray for safety and a happy life.
- ❖ Some people will only eat one full meal a day after sunset. They will not eat meat or grains. This helps their body and mind feel clean and strong for the New Year.
- ❖ In 2026, the celebration is from March 19 to March 27. Many people visit the Hindu temple to celebrate. These Mandirs are in Burnaby, Surrey, and Vancouver. People go there to pray and sing. They also share special food, like fruits and nuts, with their friends and family.

Summer

The Islamic New Year follows a pure lunar calendar. It does not add an extra month every few years to stay in the season. Because the lunar year is shorter, the New Year moves through all the seasons over time.

In 2026, the Islamic New Year is expected to start on June 16. This means it will be in the summer instead of the winter or spring.

Islamic Culture – المُحَرَّم (Muharram)

- ❖ The Islamic New Year is a quiet time to think about life and what matters.
- ❖ Families may gather for simple meals and quiet gatherings. They usually avoid loud celebrations.
- ❖ It is also a time to give to the poor and do good deeds. Doing these things helps people start the year with a clean heart and a focus on helping others.

A utumn

For the Stó:lō Nation, the year follows the moon, not the calendar. Their New Year begins around mid-October, with the first new moon of the season.

Stó:lō Culture – Sílólem

The Stó:lō people are the “People of the River.” Their calendar follows the moon and the changes in nature. They have lived in the Fraser River Valley in southwestern British Columbia for thousands of years. Their New Year is a time to prepare for winter and honour the river that gives life.

- ❖ As the weather turns cold, the New Year marks a shift from working outside to gathering inside. During this time, canoes are put away. This symbolizes washing away the old year and moving forward into the new year.

- ❖ October is when salmon return to the river to lay their eggs. This is a very important event for the Stó:lō people. During the New Year, they show respect for the salmon and the water. They hope the river will stay healthy and the salmon will return every year to feed the community.
- ❖ It is a time for the community to gather, share traditional meals, and tell stories that have been passed down for many generations. These stories help keep the history of the Stó:lō people alive. By eating together and talking, the community stays strong and ready for the cold winter months ahead.

Polar Bear Swim – Do you dare?



The Polar Bear Swim is a West Coast New Year's Day tradition. Every January 1, thousands of brave people gather at English Bay for the Vancouver's Polar Bear Swim.

Source: 02026-polar-bear-swim-poster-fb

It is a long-running and fun tradition. People dress in different costumes and run into the icy English Bay water. They take a dip and feel the cold shock. Participants believe it helps the body adapt and become stronger.

Vancouver's Polar Bear Swim began in 1920 with only 10 swimmers. It was started by a Greek immigrant named Peter Pantages and his friends.



Source: vancouverisawesome.com

Since then, it has grown into one of the largest and oldest clubs of its kind in the world. Today, almost 9,000 people take the challenge.



Scan this QR code to watch the video on YouTube.

“2026 Vancouver Polar Bear Swin”

@vancouverparkboard

LunarFest – A Lantern City

Do you remember seeing huge and beautiful lantern displays in downtown Vancouver during the 2010 Winter Olympics? That was the very first LunarFest!



Photo: hasegawa miho

In 2010, ten Canadian and Taiwanese artists created a “lantern forest” along Granville Street. The theme was Love, Life, and Light.



Lanterns have always been used for light. They are easy to carry around and can be hung up to light up an area. Decorative lanterns are very beautiful and come in many colours and sizes.

Photo: mary.ahsai

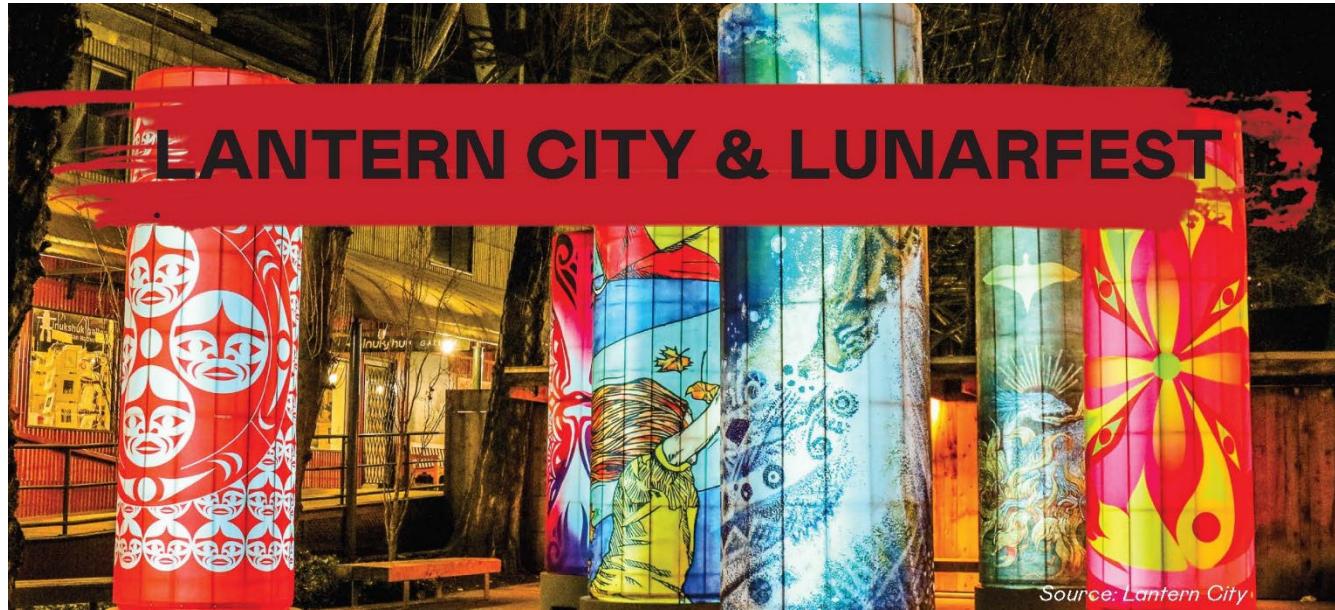
Many Asian festivals use decorative lanterns to celebrate. They symbolize hope and a bright future for the New Year.



Photo: mary.ahsai

Vancouver will once again turn into a Lantern City in 2026. From February 14 to March 9, different places across Vancouver will show large art lanterns for everyone to enjoy.

Remember to visit places like the Vancouver Art Gallery, Robson Plaza, and Granville Island to see the beautiful lanterns!



Source: admin.granvilleisland.com

Vincent van Gogh

by Sarah V.

I like Vincent van Gogh because his paintings are different.



Vincent van Gogh did a painting of fishing boats. I like the fishing boats because of their colors and shapes.

“Fishing Boats on the Beach at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer”

<https://www.vangoghmuseum.nl>

Vincent Van Gogh's paintings are very good but gross as well. One gross painting to me is “The Potato Eaters.”

The picture is green and black. They are creepy people. Vincent Van Gogh cares about people. They are working very hard. In the picture people are in the kitchen.

Scan this QR code to see the painting.



I like Vincent Van Gogh's paintings.

Game Time



Match the Season and Activities:

Draw a line to connect the New Year celebration to the correct month or activity.

Korean New Year

June (Summer)

Hindu New Year

February (Winter/Spring)

Japanese New Year

Winter

Stó:lō New Year

Beautiful lanterns

LunarFest

October (Autumn)

Polar Bear Swim

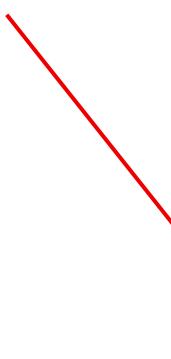
January 1

Islamic New Year in 2026

Icy water

Gathering in Longhouses

March (Spring)



Fill in the Blanks

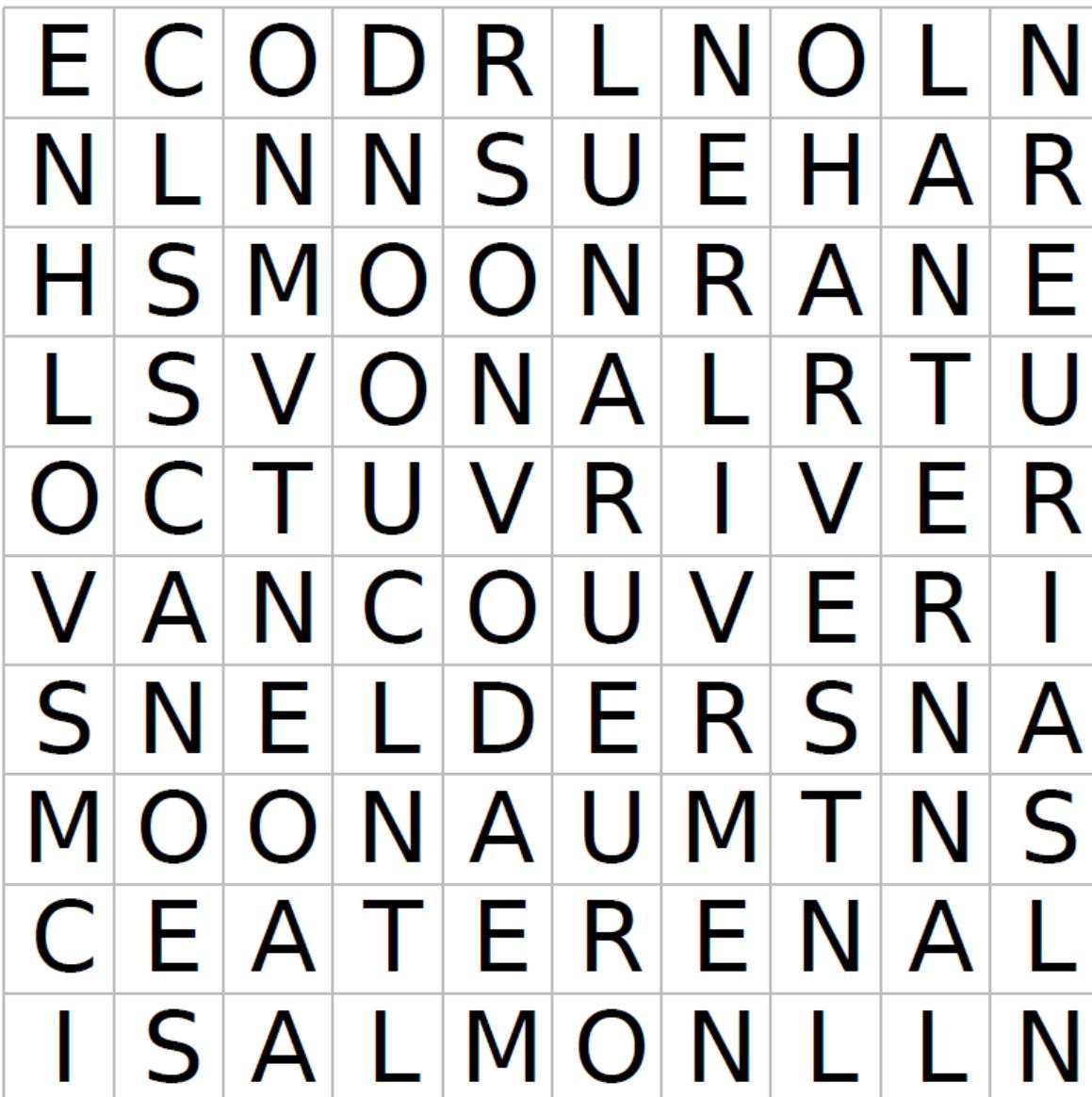
Choose a word from the box to finish each sentence.

canoes	shock	Lunar
symbolic		renewal
Bay	cultures	salmon

1. The Polar Bear Swim happens at English _____
2. The _____ Calendar follows the moon.
3. The _____ swim up the river in October to lay eggs.
4. Putting away _____ is a symbol of a new start.
5. Different _____ make Vancouver a colourful place.
6. Swimmers say the icy water gives them a “cold _____.”
7. A red heart is _____ of love.
8. The Japanese New Year is a time for _____.



Word Search 1



MOON

LANTERN

RIVER

CANOES

SALMON

LUNAR

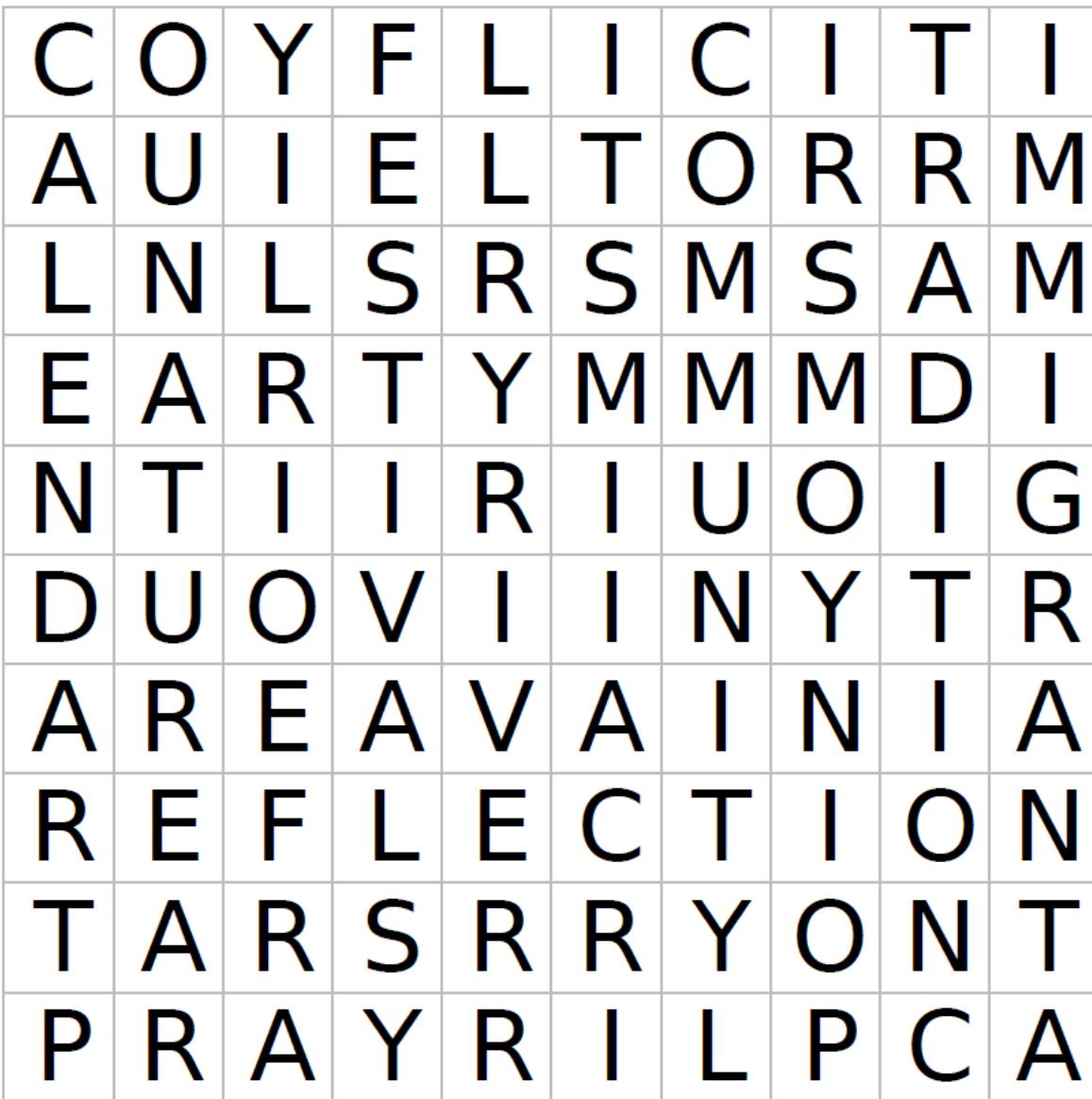
VANCOUVER

HARVEST

ELDERS



Word Search 2



COMMUNITY

FESTIVALS

IMMIGRANT

TRADITION

RIVER

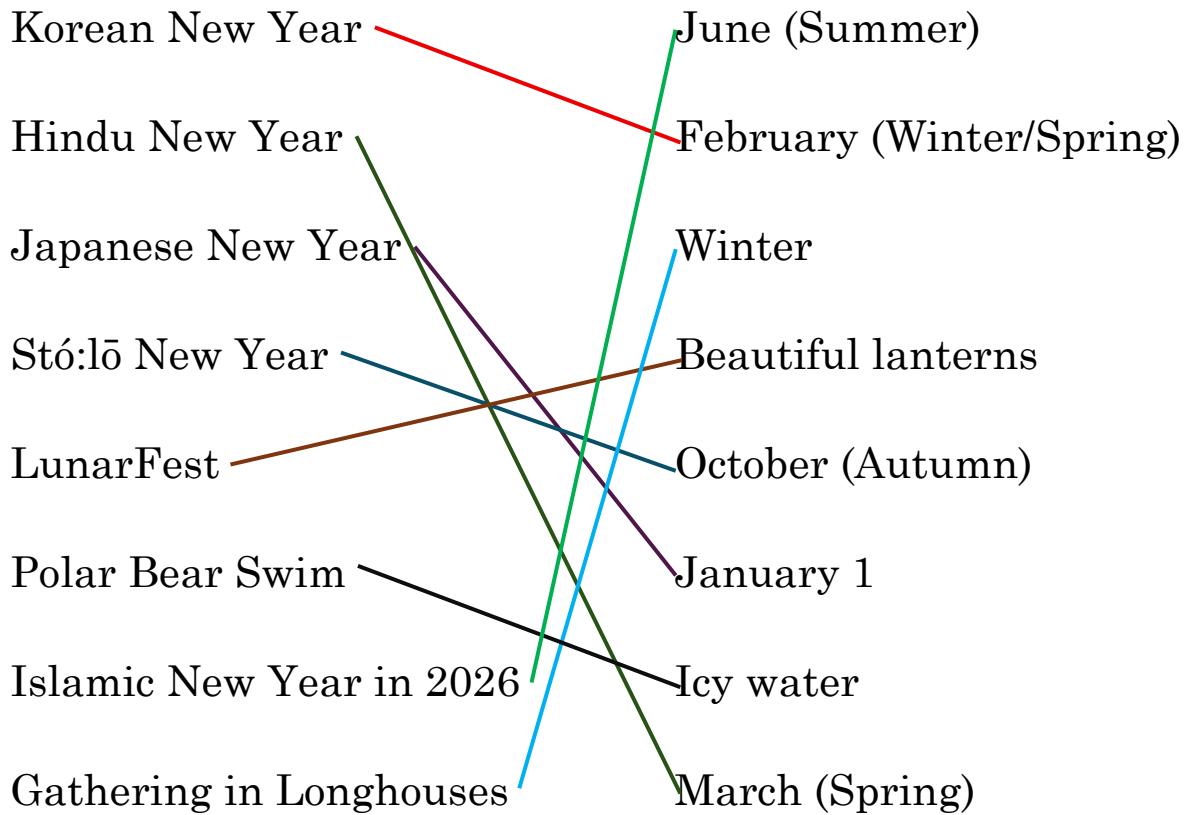
CALENDAR

REFLECTION

NATURE

PRAY

Answer Keys



1. The Polar Bear Swim happens at English **Bay**.
2. The **Lunar** Calendar follows the moon.
3. The **salmon** swim up the river in October to lay eggs.
4. Putting away **canoes** is a symbol of a new start.
5. Different **cultures** make Vancouver a colourful place.
6. Swimmers say the icy water gives them a “cold **shock**.”
7. A red heart is **symbolic** of love.
8. The Japanese New Year is a time for **renewal**.

Word Search Solution 1



Word Search Solution 2

