

Read-Aloud Story – Grade 4

Slide #1. Title: Celebrating a New Year in Iran

Slide #2. Hi. My name is Bobby, but my real name is Babak (BawBACK). My dad comes from a country called Iran, where they speak Persian. Babak is a Persian name, but most people here call me by my nickname “Bobby.” My mother is from the U.S., and I have always lived in Tucson, Arizona. I am 10 years old and in 4th grade.

Slide #3 and 4. We are going to visit my cousins in Iran! Iran is a country in the Middle East, in western Asia.

Slide 5. Can you see what other countries and bodies of water are “in the neighborhood”? We will be visiting the city of Shiraz. Can you find it on the map? It’s down in the southwestern part of the country, rather near the Persian Gulf. I am glad that we are going there because my dad says it’s not as cold or as big as Tehran, the capital.

Slide #6. I am very excited about that because it is the time of No Ruz, the Persian New Year, which is a BIG holiday in parts of Asia. It is widely celebrated in more than 8 different countries – and some people even celebrate it here in Tucson! But it started in Iran, and my dad says that it is much more fun to celebrate there.

Slide #7. No Ruz is not at the same time as our new year. No Ruz is around March 21, the first day of spring! Can you imagine why that day is a good time to begin a new year? My dad says the new year begins then because it is the first day of spring – when the cold of winter is ending, and new life is beginning to grow. It is also the time of year when the days start getting longer and the nights get shorter. So daylight is winning out over nighttime!

Slide #8. We travel to Iran one week before the new year – on an airplane, of course! (Someone in my school laughed at me and told me that everyone in Iran rides camels. My father said not to listen to what people say. In Iran, they have cars and airplanes, like everywhere else. He was right.) It is so far from Tucson to Iran that it is almost half-way around the world, so we change airplanes in several different places. We flew 955 miles from Tucson, Arizona to Dallas, Texas. Then, we flew from Dallas to Frankfurt, Germany, which was another 5,127 miles. From there, we flew to Tehran, Iran – another 2,340 miles. Finally, it was another 440 miles from Tehran (Iran’s capital) to Shiraz. How many miles did we travel in all? **8,862 miles!!**

Now, see if you can figure out how long it took us to get there. We waited in the Tucson airport for 2 hours before getting on the plane. Then, we flew to Dallas, Texas, which took about 2 hours more. Then, we waited in the airport for 4 hours. It took another 11 hours to get to Frankfurt, Germany. We waited there for 3 hours before boarding the plane for Iran. It took another 5 hours until we landed in Tehran – and another 5 hours before we arrived in the city of Shiraz (after entering the country, waiting for another plane, and making the short flight south). So did you figure out how many hours it took us? **32 hours!!** How many days is that? **Yes, it’s almost 1 ½ days – or 1 day plus 8 more**

hours, to be exact !!!! Even though we slept on the airplane, we were very, very tired when we arrived.

Slide #9. Iran is so far away from my home that when it is day in Iran, it is night in Arizona. (Have your teacher show you using a globe.) So, of course the time zone is different. During the winter, it is 10 ½ hours earlier in Arizona. When we get to our hotel it is 7:00 in the morning. My mom wants to call my Grandma in Arizona to tell her that we have arrived safely, but she is not sure what time it is in Arizona. My dad helps me make a timeline so that I can see how it works – and help my mom. You can see the time line that we made. It is 7:00 am in Iran. Count back 10 hours and then another ½. You will see that it is 8:30 pm in Arizona. I call my grandmother and tell her that I am eating breakfast. She says that she has already eaten dinner and is now watching television and getting ready for bed!

Slide #10. It is Sunday, and my cousin, Mitra, who is 7 years old, is leaving for school. I am confused. “Why do you go to school on Sunday?” I ask. “Children go to school on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. Saturday and Sunday are weekend days when we don’t go to school.” My Aunt Roya says: “It’s different in Iran. Here children go to school 5 ½ days every week. They go for half a day on Saturday, and then the whole day on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Friday and part of Saturday is our weekend.” “Everything is confusing in Iran,” I tell her. My cousin wears a uniform – and covers her hair (though she never does that in the house). And she goes to a school that is only for girls. In the U.S., I do not have to wear a uniform. Both girls and boys go to my school. So things are different here – a different language (Persian), different way of dressing, different schools, different days and times for everything. But I also notice that children are children everywhere. We all like to play and be with our family and friends and celebrate holidays. I think that people are the same; just the way they live is different.

Slide #11 and 12. I spend the next few days getting used to being in a different country. Some things remind me of the U.S.; some things are very different. Shiraz is a nice city, but it doesn’t look exactly like Tucson. What things look the same, and what things look different?

Slide #13: Everyone is excited about the upcoming holiday. My aunt shows me how they have been growing “sabzi” (greenery) for the past few weeks. “My parents and I do this in the U.S. to get ready for No Ruz,” I tell her. “We put lentils on a plate and keep them covered with a wet paper towel until they grow too big. Then I spray them with a little squirt bottle, or drizzle water on them to keep them wet.” “I used wheat,” she said. “I have been growing them for about 3 weeks, and they have gotten so big that I had to tie a ribbon around them to keep them standing up. But you can grow some starting now. They’ll just be big enough for the last day of the new year celebration: two weeks after the first day of the year. Do you know that children have two weeks off from school?” “They get a vacation for the holidays, just like you get Christmas vacation back home,” my mother explains. “Yes,” my dad says, “And like Christmas, children get presents for

No Ruz.” I feel very lucky. I had Christmas in the U.S. a few months ago, and now I get No Ruz in Iran!!

Slide #14. On the morning before the new year, I wake up early, feeling excited. My aunt has promised to take Mitra and me shopping for No Ruz food and decorations while my parents take a tour of the city. I get up and eat breakfast quickly. My aunt hurries into the kitchen just as I finish. She is wearing her going-out clothes: a black coat and veil that covers her hair. “Do you know what time it is?” she asks me. I look at the clock and tell her the answer. It’s 8:07. My aunt says that we must be ready to take the bus at 8:25. “Do you know how many minutes that is?” she asks. (I know that too and tell her that it’s 18 minutes.

Slide #15. “We have to hurry,” she says. I quickly put on my shoes. “First, we will go to the big market,” she says as she, Mitra, and I hurry down to the bus stop.

Slide #16. First, we go to a big shopping place, called a ‘bazaar.’ “There are so many shops!” I exclaim. Some sell clothes, and some sell jewelry, and some sell spices. There are many small alleys going off of the main “street” of the bazaar. On one of them, there are 10 shops – one of them sells soccer shirts and sports clothes. I know how to make a fraction of the number of stores that sell sports clothes: $\frac{1}{10}$ - or .1. Aunt Roya says that she thinks there are about 100 stores in the whole bazaar. If that is true, how many of them might sell sports clothing? I answer: 10!

Slide #17. In one of the shops, my aunt is looking for scarves to buy for some of her female relatives. “I’m not finding anything,” she sighs. While I wait – and wait! – I talk to the shopkeeper, who speaks English very well. She has been counting the scarves in the store, which is “taking inventory.” How many do you have?” I ask. “Well, in each section of the display, there are 60 scarves.” I notice that there are 3 sections. “And I also have 75 scarves in the back, which I will put out when I sell some of these. Do you know how many scarves I have?” I figure it out on a piece of paper that I borrow from the show owner. “Yes, I know. There are 180 scarves on display plus 75 in back, so that makes 255 in all.” “Great job!” she says.

Slide #18. When we leave the shopping area, we stop at a fast food place for lunch. I order a “kebab kubideh” (which is kind of like an Iranian hamburger – but with rice instead of buns). The food (and drink) cost 58,550 rials. There are three of us, so the cost comes to....175.650 rials. My aunt says that is a good price in Iranian money, but it sounds like a lot to me!

Slide 19. My aunt gives me money and tells me that I should pay for the food so that I can learn how to count money in Iran. I am staring at the bills and looking confused. “Don’t worry that you can’t read the numbers in Persian; the numbers on the back of each bill are in English.” I turn over the bills and see that she is right. “Wow! I’m rich!!” I say. “No, you’re not,” she laughs, “you only have a little more than you need to pay for three lunches.” I look at the money more carefully. “I could give the waiter two 100,000 rial

notes,” I say. Then, he could give me change.” “How much change?” my aunt asks. “24,350 rials,” I answer after a minute.

Slides #20 - 22. “Too much change,” she says. “Think of a different way.” Look at some of the different kinds of bills and coins. How many different ways can you come up with? After lunch, as we are waiting for the bus, my aunt tells me that the ride will cost 4,000 rials. “Can you pay for all 3 of us?” she asks. “Of course,” I say. What do you think I gave the bus driver? (12,000 rials – maybe 2 5,000 rial notes and 2 1,000s. Or try out some different combinations of bills and coins.)

Slide #23. From the window of the bus, I see people everywhere who are getting ready for No Ruz. They are buying flowers and presents.

Slide #24. We come to a park where there were many tents. “Why are people sleeping in the park?” I ask. My aunt says: “It’s because they have come to the city to visit their relatives for the holiday, and it is cheaper to camp out than to stay in a hotel.” “It’s a good thing No Ruz is in March and not in winter like in the U.S.” I say. “And that they are in Shiraz and not in the colder parts of Iran,” my aunt answers. I ask how big the park is. “I think about 500 meters long on one side.” I try to remember metric measurements. “That’s .5 or ½ of a kilometer,” I say to myself. I notice that the park is a square. What is the perimeter? I wonder. “The perimeter is 2,000 meters,” I say. It sounds like plenty of room for a lot of tents.

Slide #25. We see more people shopping for No Ruz. Some are buying toys.

Slide #26. And some people are buying chicks. The chicks are alive and healthy, but someone has dyed them different colors. “Please can we buy some? Can we buy some?” my cousin begs her mother. “No, we don’t have room to take care of a chicken,” my aunt says. “But I’ll let you buy another living thing later...” “I know what!” Mitra says. I don’t know what they are talking about, but my aunt tells Mitra not to tell me since it will be a surprise.

Slide #27. “Why don’t you kids write down how many of each color chicks there are, and you can draw a graph of that when you get home?” she says to distract me. Mitra and I decide to divide up the chicks. She counts 8 pink chicks, 9 purple ones, and 6 yellow ones. I count 10 orange chicks, 5 white ones, and 8 green ones. See if you can make a graph like my cousin and I do when we get home. The girls can make Mitra’s graph, and the boys can make mine. Let’s compare: Who has the most? Also, see how many questions you can make and answer about your graph, like which color is the most common and which is the least? And if Mitra gives me all her pink chicks, how many do I have, and how many does she have left? See how many ideas – and problems – you can come up with.

Slide #28. We stop at a shop that is selling goldfish. “This is the living thing we will buy,” my aunt says. “Each of you can choose one.” “Get one that looks healthy,” Mitra tells me. “It’s good luck if your goldfish stays alive throughout the whole year.”

Slide #29. When we get home, my aunt says, “I can’t believe how late it is! It’s 4:30.” I look at the clock. “Actually, it’s later than that,” I say. “It’s 4:33.” “Don’t be so technical,” my mother warns me.

Slide #30. My aunt brings out some beautiful colored eggs that her sister-in-law made. “Baby chicks and now colored eggs! It reminds me of Easter back home,” I say. “Well, it’s the same idea,” my mom says, “and the same time of year. No Ruz is celebrating the new year – beginning with the first day of spring. So baby chicks and eggs remind us of new life and new beginnings. That’s what Easter is about too.” “Except that we go to church on Easter, but Iranians don’t go to the mosque on that day. Right?” “Right,” my dad says. “Because Easter has a religious meaning, but No Ruz doesn’t.”

Slide #31. My aunt tells Mitra and me that we should dye some more eggs – just some single-color ones, not the painted ones that her sister-in-law made. “The painted ones will go on the No Ruz table – on display – but I need some other ones to decorate the house,” she tells us. “I need to cook dinner, but your dad can help you, while your mom helps me with dinner.” I counted 36 eggs. “How many does each person get?” Mitra asked. “There are 3 of us – you, me, and my dad,” I say. “That means that each of us should get 12 eggs.”

“No, that’s OK,” my dad says. “You and Mitra can do all of them.” “Wow!” I said, “we can each have half the eggs. That’s 18 eggs apiece!”

Then I notice that Aunt Roya has made 4 different colors to dye the eggs: green, yellow, pink, and blue. “We should make the same number of eggs for each color,” I suggest. “Since there are 36 eggs, we should make $\frac{1}{4}$ of them each color. That’s 9 each color.” That is what we did!

Slide #32. Later that night, before we go to bed, Aunt Roya has us help her set up the table for the No Ruz celebration tomorrow. She asks us to measure the table for her. “It is about 29 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches long,” I say. (Can you mark off that measurement on the floor of the classroom?) “How many centimeters is that?” my aunt says, looking confused, “We use the metric system here?” (Can you do that measurement too? 75 centimeters) “What is the area of the table?” she asks, searching in the drawer for the right size table cloth. I measure 50 centimeters. That means the area is....3,750 centimeters or 37.5 meters.

Slide #33. She covers the table with the cloth. In the middle, we put the greenery that we have been growing. Around it, we put “haft sin”: seven things that begin with the Persian letter “s.” My aunt arranges flowers and candles. “Some people also put a mirror and the goldfish on the table,” my cousin says.

Slide #34. “Oh, there’s one more thing,” Aunt Roya suddenly remembers. “I bought some sohan, a kind of candy, for when guests arrive. I have bought 4 containers, and each one has 22 pieces in it.” My cousin figures out the answer by adding $22+22+22+22=88$. I figure it out by multiplication: $22 \times 4 = 88$. We both get the same answer. “I want to make a little packet of 5 candies each to give to our guests as we leave. We calculate that we will have enough for 17 packets of 5. “But there are some left over?” I point out. (Can

you tell me how many are left over?) “There are three left over. What will we do with those?” “I guess you two will just have to eat them!” my aunt replies smiling. “How many do we each get?” Mitra asks. “1 ½.”

Slide #35. The next days and weeks go by very fast. We celebrate No Ruz starting at the very moment of the first day of spring – when the earth and the sun are together at the exact point in the year where day and night are the same length. That means that the daylight hours are exactly ½ of the 24 hours in one full day. That makes 12 hours.

Slide #36. On No Ruz and some days afterwards, we go to people’s homes to celebrate. There are huge dinners with so many guests that they spread a cloth on the floor (a ‘sofre’), and everyone sits around and eats. It’s like a picnic but inside! Everyone is together: men and women, old people and children. We play and dance and have fun. People give little gifts to us children. Many of the grown-ups go back to work after a few days, but the children have a vacation from school for 2 weeks. (That and the gift-giving reminds me of Christmas.)

Slide #37. The end of March, one week after the beginning of the new year, my parents and I sadly say goodbye to our relatives and friends in Iran and return to Arizona. I miss everyone and feel sad thinking that Mitra is still celebrating the No Ruz holiday but without me.

Slide #38. A few days after we arrive home is the end of the Persian new year. Sizdah bedar, the 13th day, is always celebrated outdoors with a big picnic. My cousin emails me this picture. She says they threw in the river the greenery that they had been growing and that was on the table along with the 7 things beginning in ‘s.’ (But they didn’t throw those things in, only the *sabzi* – greenery – of course!) “That will bring us good luck for the coming year,” she says.

Slide 39. We didn’t have any *sabzi* to throw in a river – and not any rivers in Tucson anyway – but we DO have a picnic and celebrate Sizdah bedar with other Iranian-Americans. I miss my relatives who live half-way around the world, but it makes me feel closer to them that we are sharing the same holiday. “Can we go to Iran for No Ruz next year?” I ask my parents, hopefully. “We’ll see” is all they say....