

The Chinese New Year Story

Many years ago, in Ancient China, the Jade Emperor ruled the land. He decided that there should be a way to measure the passing of the years. On his birthday, he **notified** all of the animals that there was soon to be a swimming race: the first twelve animals to swim across the fast flowing river would be the winners and they would each have a year of the zodiac named after them.

When the day of the race arrived, all of the animals lined up along the river bank **eager** to begin. Of all the animals about to dive in, the rat and the cat were the most worried because they were very poor swimmers. Together they came up with a clever plan and asked the strong ox if he would carry them across the river.

“Of course I will,” said the kind ox. “Just climb on my back and I will carry you across.”

The rat and the cat quickly jumped up and were thrilled when the ox soon took the lead in the race. They had almost reached the other bank when the rat put his own **mischievous** plan into action. He thrust the cat into the fast flowing river leaving him to struggle in the water. Just as the ox was about to win the race, the rat leapt over his head and on to the bank to finish in first place.

“Well done! You are not the strongest, but you certainly are the **shrewdest** of all the animals,” said the Jade Emperor to the **smug** rat. “The first year will be named after you.”

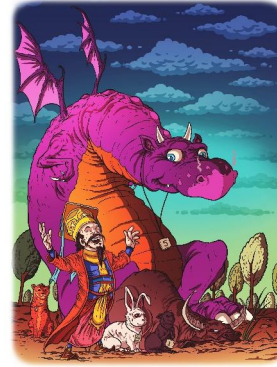
The **unfortunate** ox had been tricked into second place and the second year of the zodiac was named after him.

Shortly after, the **exhausted** tiger clawed his way to the river bank to claim third place. Swimming across the river against its strong **currents** had been an enormous struggle for him.

“Tiger, I am delighted with your efforts. The third year shall be named after you!”

Next to arrive was the rabbit: she hadn’t swum across the river at all. Instead, she had hopped across on some stepping stones and then found a floating log which carried her all the way to the water’s edge.

“I shall be very glad to call the fourth year after you,” the Jade Emperor explained.



Just then, the **generous** dragon swooped down to take fifth place.

“But why didn’t you win the race, as you can fly as well as swim?” the Jade Emperor asked.

“Well, I was held up because some people needed water to drink. I needed to make some rain for them,” the dragon explained. “Then when I was nearly here I saw a poor little rabbit on a log in the water and I blew a puff of wind so that the log would float to the river bank.”

“That was very **considerate** of you and now you are here you will have the fifth year of the zodiac named after you.”



The next thing the Jade Emperor heard was the sound of the horse’s hooves on the river bank. Just as he was thinking the horse would be the next animal to arrive, the **devious** snake slithered out from in between the horse’s hooves. The horse was so surprised that she quickly jumped backwards giving the snake a chance to take the sixth place in the race. The poor horse had to be **satisfied** with seventh place.



Shortly after that, a raft arrived carrying the goat, the monkey and the rooster. Together they explained to the Emperor how they had shared the raft that the rooster had found. The goat and monkey helped to clear the weeds and push the raft to the shore.

“I am very pleased that you used teamwork to help achieve success. Well done!”

He said the goat would be the eighth zodiac animal, the monkey the ninth and the rooster the tenth.



Before long, the dog passed the finish line. “Dog, why are you so late when you are one of the best swimmers?” asked the Jade Emperor with a **bewildered** look on his face.

“The water in the river was so fresh and clean that I just had to have a bath on the way,” explained the dog shaking the water from his fur. His reward was to have the eleventh year named after him.

Now there was only one place left in the zodiac and the Emperor was eager to see who would be next to cross the finish line. He waited and waited by the riverside for many long minutes.

The Chinese New Year Story – Follow-Up Work

He had nearly given up when he heard a grunt from the boar.

“You certainly took a long time to cross the river!” the Emperor exclaimed in surprise.

“I was hungry and stopped to eat,” explained the boar. “After the meal, I felt so tired that I fell fast asleep.”

“Despite your laziness, you have still done well,” said the Jade Emperor. “The last year of the zodiac will be named after you.”



Minutes later, the cat, who had been pushed into the water, finally crawled out of the water. But it was too late to have a year named after him. He was **infuriated** with the rat and this explains why since then, cats have never been friends with rats.

The Chinese Zodiac has followed this cycle of years named after these twelve animals from that day to this. Chinese **tradition** states that the year you were born in determines the type of person you will be. Do you think you are like the clever rat, the kind dragon or the lazy boar?



Why did the Jade Emperor decide to have a swimming race in the first place?

Why were the cat and the rat worried at the start of the race?

Why has the writer used the words ‘mischievous’ and ‘shrewd’ to describe rat?

The writer describes the rat as ‘smug’. Why is this a good word to describe rat after the race?

Why was the tiger ‘exhausted’ when he reached the other side of the river?

Rabbit was helped to cross the river by another animal. Which animal was it and how did they help?

Why did the horse have to settle for seventh place?

Why did the dog take longer to finish than the Jade Emperor expected?

The dragon should have been the real winner. Do you agree with this statement?

Explain your answer.

Do you think the rat was a worthy winner? Why?

Throughout the text there are many phrases which show the passing of time. Can you identify some examples of this from the text?

Why does the writer finish the story with a question?

Which of the animals would you like to be like and why?

This story could be described as a 'myth'. Do you agree? Explain your answer.
