

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.