

COVER

The Great Race

How the twelve animals of the Chinese zodiac got their order. A story to fold, read, and keep. Long, long ago, the animals settled a great question with one wild race across a river. Turn the page and join them at the starting bank.

1

The Emperor's Call

Long ago, the Jade Emperor wanted a way to count the years. So he called every animal in the land to a great race. "The first twelve to cross the wide river," he said, "will each have a year named after them, forever." Word spread to every burrow, field, and tree, and the animals hurried to the riverbank at dawn.

2

A Clever Plan

The Rat was small and could not swim well, and neither could the Cat. The two friends had an idea: they would ride across on the back of the strong, kind Ox. The Ox did not mind. "Climb on," it said, and waded into the cold water with both of them perched on its broad back.

3

A Sneaky Jump

As the Ox neared the far shore, the Rat did something tricky. It gave the dozing Cat a push into the river, then leaped from the Ox's head and landed on dry land first. So the clever Rat became the very first animal of the zodiac. The patient Ox, who had carried it the whole way, came in second.

4

Strength and Speed

Next came the mighty Tiger, panting and dripping. It had fought the strong current the whole way and arrived third. Soon after, the Rabbit appeared in fourth place. It had crossed by hopping from stone to stone and onto a floating log, and a friendly puff of wind from the Dragon nudged the log safely to shore.

5

The Kind Dragon

Everyone was surprised the Dragon was not first, since it could fly. "I saw villages with dry fields," the Dragon explained, "so I stopped to make rain. Then I helped the little Rabbit across." For its kind heart the Dragon came fifth. Right behind, the Snake slid quietly out from around the Horse's hoof and startled it, taking sixth place.

6

Teamwork and Rest

The startled Horse recovered and galloped in seventh. Then the Goat, Monkey, and Rooster arrived together: they had found a raft, and by working as a team they poled it across, finishing eighth, ninth, and tenth. The playful Dog loved water and stopped to splash, so it came eleventh. Last of all came the Pig, who had paused for a snack and a nap, in twelfth place.

BACK

The Twelve Animals

In order: Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Goat, Monkey, Rooster, Dog, Pig. The Cat never finished, and that, the story says, is why cats still chase rats today. Each animal returns every twelve years, so this very year belongs to one of them. Which animal is yours?