

Classroom Resources — Free on This Site

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PRINTABLE

The Great Race Mini-Book

A foldable retelling of the Great Race — your picture-book version of the story.

chinesezodiac.com/printables/great-race-mini-book

PRINTABLE

Animal Flashcard Set

Print these as the twelve animal picture cards for Story Time and the parade.

chinesezodiac.com/printables/flashcards

PRINTABLE

12 Animal Coloring Pages

Line-art animals for the mask craft or early finishers.

chinesezodiac.com/printables/coloring-pages

PRINTABLE

Chinese New Year Decorations

Lantern and banner templates to show — or make — in place of photos of decorations.

chinesezodiac.com/printables/decorations

ACTIVITY

Readers' Theater: The Great Race

A performable script of the same story for a follow-up session.

chinesezodiac.com/teachers/readers-theater/great-race

Learning Objectives

- Students will name several of the twelve zodiac animals and recall their order in the Great Race story.
- Students will retell the beginning, middle, and end of the Great Race folktale using picture cues.
- Students will act out animal movements to show story events in the correct sequence.
- Students will identify Lunar New Year as a holiday that some families celebrate.
- Students will ask one respectful question about how another family celebrates a holiday.
- Students will speak in a complete sentence to share which animal they chose and why.

Standards Alignment

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.K.2 — With prompting and support, retell familiar stories, including key details.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.2 — Retell stories, including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.5 — Describe the overall structure of a story, including how the beginning introduces the story and the ending concludes the action.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1.1 — Participate in collaborative conversations with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

C3 D2.His.2.K-2 — Compare life in the past to life in the present.

Recognize and respect that families and communities celebrate different holidays and traditions (social studies).

Materials

- A picture-book or teacher-told version of the Great Race story
- Twelve animal picture cards (rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat, monkey, rooster, dog, pig)
- A long strip of blue paper or a length of yarn to represent the river
- Paper plates, crayons, and craft scraps for animal masks
- Craft sticks or yarn to make mask handles or ties
- Chart paper and a marker for a class sequencing line
- Open floor space for movement
- Optional: a few photos of Lunar New Year decorations (red lanterns, red envelopes, paper cuttings)

Key Vocabulary

zodiac: A set of twelve animals, one for each year. The animal for the year you were born is your zodiac animal.

folktale: An old story that people have told and retold for a very long time to explain or teach something.

order: The way things go, one after another. First, next, then, last.

Lunar New Year: A special holiday that begins a new year on the moon calendar. Many families celebrate it with food, family, and the color red.

tradition: Something special a family or group does again and again, often passed down from grandparents and parents.

sequence: The order events happen in a story: what came first, what came next, and what came last.

Activities

Story Time: The Great Race (30 minutes)

Grouping: Whole class on the rug

1. Gather students on the rug. Hold up the twelve animal cards one at a time and name each animal together. Say: "Today we will hear a story about how these twelve animals got their special order."
2. Set the scene: "Long ago, a great ruler wanted to name the years after animals. He invited the animals to a race across a wide river. The first twelve to finish would each get a year." Read or tell the story slowly.
3. Pause at the river crossing and ask: "How do you think the little rat will get across the cold water? Turn and tell your neighbor your idea." Take two or three ideas, then continue the story (the rat rides on the kind ox and jumps ahead at the finish).
4. After the ending, ask: "Who finished first? Who came right after? Who came last?" Use the picture cards so children can point.
5. Build a class sequencing line: tape the animal cards in race order along the chart paper as students help you say "first, next, then, last."
6. Close by inviting a few students up to point to and name their favorite animal in one sentence: "My favorite is the ____."

Materials for this activity: Story book or notes; Twelve animal cards; Chart paper and tape

Differentiation & scaffolding:

- Support: Give picture cards to children who find it hard to wait; let them hold "their" animal during the story.
- Support: Offer a sentence frame on a card ("My favorite is the ____") for emerging speakers.
- Stretch: Ask confident students to explain why the rat won even though it is small (it was clever and got help).

Animal Movement Parade (20 minutes)

Grouping: Whole class, then small animal groups

1. Clear a space and lay the blue paper or yarn across the floor as the river and finish line.
2. Assign or let each child choose one of the twelve animals. Group children with the same animal together.
3. Teach a movement and a sound for each animal: the ox stomps slowly, the tiger pounces, the rabbit hops, the snake slides low, the horse gallops, the rooster flaps and crows. Practice all together first.
4. Call the animals in race order. As you name each one, that group moves across the river to the finish, doing its movement and sound.
5. When all twelve have crossed, line them up in order and ask: "Does our parade match the order in the story?" Check against the chart-paper line from Story Time.
6. Cool down by walking back across the river "the slow way," naming the animals in reverse.

Materials for this activity: Blue paper strip or yarn; The sequencing chart from Story Time; Open floor space

Differentiation & scaffolding:

- Support: Pair a child who needs movement help with a buddy who can model the action.
- Support: Allow seated movements (arm motions and sounds) for children who cannot move across the floor.
- Stretch: Let a student be the "caller" who names each animal in order.

Make-a-Mask Craft and Share (25 minutes)

Grouping: Independent work, then whole-class share

1. Show two or three simple finished animal-face examples so children see what is possible without copying one model.
2. Give each child a paper plate and have them draw and decorate the zodiac animal they chose in the parade.
3. Circulate and help attach a craft-stick handle or a yarn tie so the mask can be held up or worn.
4. Gather everyone and line up the masks in race order for a class photo.
5. Go down the line and have each child say two sentences: "I am the _____. I finished ____ (first, second, near the end)." Coach with the sentence frame as needed.
6. Display the masks on a bulletin board next to the sequencing line so the order stays visible all week.

Materials for this activity: Paper plates; Crayons and craft scraps; Craft sticks or yarn; Two or three sample masks

Differentiation & scaffolding:

- Support: Offer pre-cut ears or shapes for children who tire of cutting.
- Support: Provide a labeled animal card at each table so children can check spelling and features.
- Stretch: Invite a child to add the animal's sound or one fact ("The dragon can fly!") to the share.

Discussion Questions

The rat is the smallest animal in the race. How did such a small animal finish first?

Sample answer: The rat was clever. It got a ride across the river on the strong, kind ox, and then it jumped ahead right at the end. Being small did not stop it. Being smart and asking for help made the difference.

Is there a "best" animal in the zodiac?

Sample answer: No. Every animal has its own place in the story, and none is better than the others. Each one gets a year, and people born in any year can be kind, brave, or smart.

What is one way a family might celebrate Lunar New Year?

Sample answer: Families might share a big meal together, give children red envelopes, decorate with the color red, or watch a parade with lions or dragons. Answers will vary, and that is fine.

Student Handout / Worksheet Prompts

Copy these prompts onto a worksheet or project them for students.

1. Color the twelve animals and cut them out. Glue them in race order from first to last.
2. Circle the animal that finished first. Draw a star next to your favorite animal.

3. Draw a picture of the rat riding across the river. Who is helping the rat?
4. Finish the sentence: "My zodiac animal is the ____." (Ask a grown-up at home which animal goes with the year you were born.)
5. Draw one thing a family might do to celebrate Lunar New Year.

Extension & Homework

- Send home a short note inviting families to share, if they wish, whether they celebrate Lunar New Year and one tradition they enjoy. Make sharing optional and warm.
- Read a second Lunar New Year picture book during the week and compare it with the Great Race story.
- Set up a dramatic-play corner with the masks so children can re-enact the race during free choice.
- Practice counting to twelve using the animal cards, then count backward from the last finisher to the first.

Assessment

Use quick, low-pressure checks during the activities rather than a formal test. Watch and listen as children retell, sequence, and speak.

- Retelling: The child names at least three events from the story in the right order (beginning, middle, end).
- Sequencing: The child helps place or correct at least two animal cards in race order.
- Speaking: The child shares in a complete sentence using a frame ("I am the ____").
- Respect: The child listens while others share and asks or answers a question kindly.

Teacher's Guide

The Great Race is a folktale that explains the order of the zodiac animals. Tell it as a story rather than as a factual account of how the calendar truly formed. Use the names "Lunar New Year" or "Chinese New Year," since the holiday is celebrated across many cultures in Asia and around the world. At this age, pronounce the animal names in English and keep the focus on listening, sequencing, and warm curiosity. Frame the zodiac as a tradition families enjoy, not a way to predict the future or judge personalities. Avoid telling a child they "are" a certain way because of their birth year; instead, treat the animal as a fun marker of the year someone was born. Some students may celebrate Lunar New Year at home, while others will be hearing about it for the first time. Invite sharing without ever putting a child on the spot, and treat every family's customs as

equally welcome. If a student asks which animal is "best," explain that every animal has a place in the story and none is better than another. If asked why the rat won, point to its cleverness and the help it received, which is a kind message about teamwork and using your wits. Keep the language simple, the pace gentle, and the tone curious.

Answer Key

Which animal finished the race first?

The rat finished first. It rode across the river on the ox and then jumped ahead right at the end.

How many animals are in the Chinese zodiac?

Twelve.

Name one thing families do to celebrate Lunar New Year.

Sample answers: gather for a special meal, give red envelopes, decorate with the color red, or watch a parade with lion or dragon dancers.

How did the small rat beat the bigger, stronger animals?

It was clever and asked for help. It rode on the ox to cross the river, then jumped ahead at the finish.

What does "in order" mean when we talk about the story?

It means putting the events in the right sequence: what happened first, what happened next, and what happened last.