

## The Story of 'The Great Race'

Many years ago there was a Chinese ruler known as the Jade Emperor who decided that, for his birthday, he wanted to make it easier for himself and the people of China to keep track of time. But he wasn't sure how. So, he decided to hold a swimming race for all of the animals in the Kingdom. However, only twelve animals decided to take part in the race. The Jade Emperor was so grateful to the twelve animals that he decided to reward them all by naming a year after each of them. The race determined the order each animal would be placed. This was a great honour and each animal wanted to be the first to cross the river and win the race.

Surprisingly, it was the rat- the smallest creature to take part in the race- that won the dangerous swim across the huge river! The rat was meant to attend the swimming race with his friend, the cat. But the cat was a sleepy animal who loved to nap. Instead of waking his friend up, the cunning rat left the cat behind and made his way to the race alone. This is why there is no year named after the cat and also why cats have hated rats ever since!

When the rat reached the river and the race was just about to start, he cleverly asked the ox if he could ride on his back to cross the river safely. The ox was a strong giant who kindly said yes to the rat. Instead of letting the ox win and say thank-you at the other side, the rat leaped from the ox's back and over his head so that he crossed the finish line first and won the race! This is why the first year of the Chinese calendar is the 'Year of the Rat' and the second year is the 'Year of the Ox'.

One by one, the remaining animals crossed the river to the finish line and received their prize from the Jade Emperor. After the rat and the ox, the first animal to cross the finish line was the tiger followed by the rabbit, dragon, horse, snake, sheep, monkey, rooster, dog and finally the pig. The pig was a slow and lazy animal who got hungry during the race and stopped to eat some grass at the side of the river. After eating, the pig got sleepy and dozed off, making him the last animal to safely cross the river and over the finish line. This is why the final year of the Chinese calendar is known as 'The Year of the pig'.

Many people think the dragon should have won the race instead of coming in fifth place. The dragon, after all, could fly and was probably the strongest creature in the race. The dragon was a noble creature though and instead of focusing on crossing the river, he was distracted by the screams of villagers nearby who were fighting a huge fire in their village. The brave dragon quickly rushed to the village to stop the fire by using his icy breath. Once the village was safe, the dragon returned to the race to see the rabbit struggling to swim against the strong current in the river. Once again the dragon used his powerful breath to blow the rabbit safely across the river and over the finish line and this is how the meek and gentle rabbit beat the strong and courageous dragon.

**THE END**



### Follow-Up Questions

- Which animal won the race?

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- How did this animal win the race?

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- Which animal came second in the race?

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- Which animal came last in the race?

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- Why did this animal come last?

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- Which animal did the rat leave behind before the race and why?

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- How many animals took part in the race?

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- Which animal helped a nearby village?

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