

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

2022 Year of the Tiger



## The Legend of the Chinese Zodiac



*The Chinese calendar follows a 12-year cycle, called the Zodiac, with each year named after an animal. Here is the story of how the animals were chosen, and how the lowly rat came to have the first year of the Zodiac named for him:*

A very long time ago, the Jade Emperor, who ruled the heavens of China, decided that it would be easier for the people to keep track of time if the years were given names. So, he sent a message to all the animals, inviting them to take part in a swimming race. The first 12 animals to finish would each have a year named after them.

At that time, the Cat and the Rat were very good friends and planned to go to the race together. When the day of the race came, the Cat wanted to take a quick nap before setting out so that he would be rested and at his best for the contest. He asked his friend: "Could you please wake me when it's time to leave for the race?"

"Of course," said the Rat. "Have a good nap; I'll get you up." But when it was time to leave, the Rat wanted to win so badly that he left the Cat sleeping and went to the race alone.

In the race, the animals had to swim across a fast flowing river. The little rat realized that he would have to be very clever if he ever hoped to make it across. So, as soon as the race started, he jumped on the back of the largest and strongest animal he could find—the ox.

The ox turned out to be an excellent swimmer, and the rat travelled safely across the river on its back. Then, just before they reached the other side, the sly rat climbed up over the ox's head and jumped to shore to finish first.

The Jade Emperor was amused by the rat's cunning. He named the first year of the Zodiac after the rat and the second year after the ox. The other animals to make it into the zodiac are the tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat, monkey, rooster, dog and pig—in that order.

What about the cat? Well, he never forgave the rat for causing him to miss the race. And cats have been chasing rats ever since.

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1. What two tricks did the rat use to help him win the race?
2. Why did the Jade emperor name the first year of the zodiac after the rat?
3. What do you think of the rat? Was he clever or was he a cheat? Explain.
4. According to the legend, why do cats chase rats?
5. Do you blame the cat for never forgiving the rat? Explain.
6. Legends are often an attempt to explain why something is the way it is. What *two* things does this legend try to explain?