

The Legend of the Chinese Zodiac

(Note: this is just one variation of this popular folk tale.)

A long, long time ago the Jade Emperor wanted to find a way to measure time. So he organized a race and invited all the animals of the Earth to take part. The Emperor explained to them that to win the big prize - a permanent place in the Zodiac – they would have to be one of the first twelve to cross the swiftly flowing stream and reach their spot at his mansion on the other side. And so the race began...

The cat wondered how she would get across because she was afraid of water. At the same time, the ox wondered how he would cross with his poor eyesight. The rat suggested that he and the cat jump onto the ox's back and guide him across. But as they were crossing the stream, the rat snuck up behind the unsuspecting cat and pushed her into the water. Just as the ox came closer to the finish line, the rat jumped off and raced over the line first, closely followed by the ox. The cat, not being a very good swimmer, began to tread water and could only watch how the race continued...

After the ox came the tiger. She fought the currents and because she was such a good swimmer she made it to shore and so was named the third animal in the cycle

Then came the dragon, flapping his great wings above the stream. As the dragon approached the finish line, he saw a poor helpless rabbit clinging to a log and being washed downstream. He stopped and gave a mighty puff of breath to blow the log to the shore. Thus the rabbit came next followed by the dragon.

No sooner did the dragon reach the finish line than the sound of galloping hooves was heard and the horse appeared in the stream. And hidden in the horse's mane was the snake. The snake slithered off her back and crossed the line in sixth place, beating the horse into seventh.

Not long after that, the sheep, monkey and rooster were spotted in the stream together, helping each other out. The rooster found some logs tied together, and invited the other two creatures to go with it. The sheep and the monkey worked together to clear the weeds, pulled and pushed and eventually managed to get to the other side. This cooperation greatly pleased the Emperor and he promptly declared that the sheep was eighth, the monkey ninth, and the rooster tenth.

Some time later the dog arrived in eleventh place. It was her love of the water that delayed her – it had been so refreshing that she simply couldn't resist playing around for a while.

And just when the Emperor thought that was it, no one else would reach the finish, an oink, oink, oink was heard and of the pig came waddling into view. And so the pig became the twelfth and last animal of the zodiac cycle.

And finally, the cat eventually huffed and puffed her way onto shore. However, the Emperor already had his 12 animals for the zodiac...there was no room for the cat! Because the rat had tricked her and pushed her into the stream, the cat promised that she would be the enemy of the rat forever.