



Lesson Extensions and Activities for
The Great Race: The Story of the Chinese Zodiac

Age Range: 6 - 9 years

Reading Is Fundamental

Google Voyager Folktales Unit

Book Description

Thirteen creatures come to the river to participate in the Chinese Emperor's race. Who will win the honor of having the first year of the new Chinese calendar named after them?

Folktale Background

The Chinese calendar is based on the movements of the moon, which makes it a bit different from the Western calendar. There are still twelve months in the Chinese calendar, but there are also twelve years in the calendar's cycle. Each year is named after a different animal: rat, hare, horse, cockerel, ox, dragon, sheep, dog, tiger, snake, monkey, and pig. There are many different stories that tell how the twelve animals were chosen for the calendar, and this story focuses on how their order was decided by a great race.

Vocabulary

- Deafening – A noise so loud as to make it impossible to hear anything else.
- Coil – To wind in a joined sequence of concentric circles or rings.
- Wallow – To roll about or lie relaxed in mud or water.
- Preen – When a bird straightens and cleans its feathers with its beak.
- Gleam – To shine brightly, especially with reflected light.
- Sidele – To walk in a furtive, obtrusive or timid manner, especially sideways.
- Bleating – The characteristic wavering cry of a sheep, goat or calf.

Prior to Reading

- Ask students if they have heard of China. On chart paper, create a table with three sections:
 - What I Know Now
 - What I Want to Know
 - What I Learned

Have students call out sentences to put in each of the first two sections.

- Walk students through the China [Google Voyager Experience](#). Fill in the third section of the chart while you walk through the experience.
- Share with students that *The Great Race* is a Chinese tale. Ask if they've heard any other stories set in China and call on volunteers to share.

While Reading

- Have students keep track of the order that the animals are in throughout the story. Provide them with paper cutouts of each animal so that they can move them forward and backwards as their movements change. Once you've read half of the story, have students guess the order in which the creatures will finish the race.

Post Reading Activities

- Assign each student (or each pair or group of students depending on how many students you have) an animal and have them share in what order the creatures finish the race and why they think they finished in that order.
- Have students complete the Criss Cross, Memory Matching, and Word Search puzzles about *The Great Race* on RIF's Literacy Central (<https://www.rif.org/literacy-central>).

Lesson Extensions and Activities

Here are some ways to further explore the story:

Primary Standard for all activities: RL.K.10 (Actively engage in group reading activities with purpose and understanding.)

- **Math** – Provide students with worksheets that have visual representations of analog and digital clocks related to the race.
 - Example problem: What time did Rat, Cat, and Ox start the race?

Objective: Students will practice telling time.

Standards: CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.1.MD.B.3 (Tell and write time in hours and half-hours using analog and digital clocks.)

Materials:

- Paper clocks with moveable hands
- Pencils
- Paper

- **Arts** – Have students illustrate the great race based on what they heard during the reading of the story. Have each student present his or her work, sharing which scene they chose to cover.

Objective: Students will translate written descriptions into artistic works.

Standards: National Core Arts Standards, Anchor Standard #3 (Refine and complete artistic work.)

Materials:

- Markers
- Backboards
- Poster boards
- Colored pencils
- Construction paper

- Pencils
 - Magazines that can be cut
 - Scissors
- **Science** – Have students explore scientific concepts with another water race: a density marble race described by steampoweredfamily.com!

Objective: Students will learn about density.

Standards: NSES Science as Inquiry Standards Levels K-4 (Abilities necessary to do scientific inquiry; Understanding about scientific inquiry.); NSES Science as Inquiry Standards Level 5-8 (Properties and changes of properties in matter.)

Materials:

- Matching clear containers
- At least two different liquids
- Marbles
- Stop watch (optional)
- Scale (optional)

- **Writing** – Have each student choose a creature. Then, have them write a letter from the perspective of that creature to their families telling them about their experience during the race.

Objective: Students will practice creative writing.

Standards: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.1.3 (Write narratives in which they recount two or more appropriately sequenced events, include some details regarding what happened, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide some sense of closure.)

Materials:

- Journals
- Pens