

16 SPEAKING PARTS

READER'S THEATER "The Race for the Zodiac"

Characters

Narrator 1	Rat	Pig
Narrator 2	Tiger	Goat
Jade Emperor	Rooster	Cat
Horse	Dragon	Rooster
Snake	Dog	Ox
	Monkey	

NARRATOR 1: Long, long ago, before hutongs, or narrow alleys, connected neighborhoods across Beijing, before the Shanghai Bund was built, before the Yangtze River, before the world's longest sea bridge connected Zhuhai to Hong Kong, there were a Jade Emperor, a new zodiac, and some hopeful animals. The Jade Emperor decided to name each year in the Zodiac after a different animal. But how could he choose which animals should come first?

JADE EMPEROR: Animals of China, gather round! I, the great Jade Emperor and ruler of all the gods in China, decree that we should create a Zodiac calendar to start each new lunar year. To honor China's precious wildlife, we shall name each year in the Zodiac after a different animal. Tomorrow morning, we shall have a Great Race to determine which animals will be represented, and in what order.

RAT: But Jade Emperor, how is that fair to the smaller animals? We deserve a chance, too!

JADE EMPEROR: True, Clever Rat. But you are cunning, and I am certain the smaller animals will figure out a way. (Jade Emperor points to a wide river) Tomorrow morning, we will gather at the bank of the great Yangtze River, the longest river in all of Asia. The first twelve animals to cross the river will become part of our zodiac. Each animal will rule the zodiac for one year each.

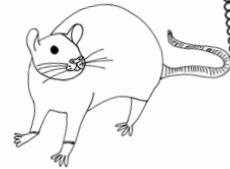
ALL ANIMALS: Hooray! Three cheers for the Jade Emperor!

NARRATOR 2: Early the next morning, the animals gathered on the banks of the Yangtze. The water looked swift and deep, and some of the animals looked worried.

RAT (to Cat): Cat, my dear neighbor and friend, you look terrified!

CAT (in an anxious tone): Rat, I don't mind the water so much, and I always love a good refreshing bath. But this water is deeper than I am tall. And it looks so cold! I don't think I will make it across.

RAT: Don't worry, my friend, for I am clever and already have a plan. (looks at Cat) He is tall. And I hear he is a great swimmer. We'll be safe and dry!



**More speaking parts =
More students involved**

TIPS AND INFO FOR TEACHERS



TIPS FOR TEACHERS

Reader's Theater is a short play performed in front of a small audience. This is most likely used in a single classroom environment, but it could also be performed in front of a larger audience as well.

If you have never used a reader's theater script before, or you just want to improve student engagement in reader's theater, here are some tips you might want to try:

- This play requires 16 character actors. To engage every student, I recommend dividing the class into two groups and having each group practice to perform in front of other classes. They especially love performing for peers or younger students!
- Do not make students memorize lines. Print the script for every student, whether they are performing or in the audience.
- Props and costumes are not required, but it might be fun to add hats, puppets, or stuffed animals representing the animals of the zodiac.
- Allow students to practice their lines in small groups before performing in front of the whole class. This can help reduce performance anxiety.
- Another way to reduce anxiety is by allowing students to select their character by the number of lines they will have. In this script, the Narrators (1 and 2), Jade Emperor, Rat, and Dragon have the most lines. Students looking for only one or two lines should try Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Snake, or Horse.
- Encourage students to vary their voices to make their lines more interesting. I have included some stage directions (such as "in a loud voice" or "whispers to Cat"), but students certainly are not limited to those simple directions.



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Chinese New Year Reader's Theater Script

ABOUT CHINESE NEW YEAR



This is a reader's theater script for Chinese New Year. It describes an old Chinese story about how the twelve animals of the Chinese zodiac came to be selected and why they are in the order that they are.

I was in Suzhou and Shanghai, China from 2014-2020. This story is taught to elementary students in Chinese schools, including the international schools that my boys attended. The animals of the zodiac is serious business. If you were to visit Shanghai in January or February, you would see lots of Chinese New Year advertisements, store signs, and decorations all over the city.

If you are interested in this story, please familiarize your students with the Chinese New Year. If your class performs the Reader's Theater script, a few tips would be helpful to know:

Chinese New Year is also called Lunar New Year or Spring Festival. It is the biggest holiday of the year in China, similar in scope to Christmas in the USA, Canada, UK, Australia, and Europe.

Chinese New Year is really important! Children and adults here know the zodiac year they were born in and how that affects their lives. Some young adults even plan their future children's names based on the animals. My Chinese friends tell me that the Year of the Tiger and Year of the Dragon have statistically higher birth rates, and the Year of the Rooster, Year of the Goat, and Year of the Snake are statistically lower.

The Year of the Goat is interchangeable with the Year of the Sheep. This was confusing when I first moved to the USA. I had heard people calling it the Year of the Ruminant, but I realized it can be either goat or sheep.

The Year of the Goat would be lucky, but it isn't! It is said that if you are born in the Year of the Goat, it is said to offend Tai Sui (the God of Wealth). If you are born in the Year of the Goat, you should wear lots of red for good luck. Red is the most important color in your zodiac year to help you

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