

**Lesson Title:** Celebrating the Chinese New Year

**Country:** China

**Class:** Geography; art

**Grade level(s):** 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade

**Goals and Objectives**

**The student will be able to:**

- Locate China on a map and on a globe.
- Learn respect and appreciation of another culture.
- Compare how the New Year is celebrated in United States and China.
- Name the 12 animals of the Chinese Zodiac.
- Create a paper wall chart featuring the animals of the Chinese Zodiac.
- Tell the story of the order of the animal years in the Chinese Zodiac.

**Time required/class periods needed:** 5 30+ minute classes

**Primary source bibliography:**

Maps, globes

General Information Site: <http://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/chinese-zodiac/>

**Other resources used:**

<http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/kids/places/find/china/>

<http://www.dltk-holidays.com/china/pquilt.asp>

[http://www.dltk-holidays.com/t\\_template.asp?t=http://www.dltk-holidays.com/china/imag...](http://www.dltk-holidays.com/t_template.asp?t=http://www.dltk-holidays.com/china/imag...)

[http://www.dltk-holidays.com/china/chinese\\_zodiac.htm](http://www.dltk-holidays.com/china/chinese_zodiac.htm)

Coloring pages of animals of Chinese Zodiac <http://www.nickjr.com/printables/chinese-zodiac-coloring-pages.jhtml>

The Story of the Chinese Zodiac retold by Monica Chang (in English and Chinese) (Yuan-Liou Publishing Co. Ltd)

Chinese New Year by David F. Marx

Chinese Zodiac Birthday Calculator and Animal Trait Guide

[http://www.travelchinaguide.com/intro/social\\_customs/zodiac/](http://www.travelchinaguide.com/intro/social_customs/zodiac/)

**Required materials/supplies:**

Venn diagram, maps, globes, markers, crayons, scissors, glue, pictures of Zodiac animals, folk tale about zodiac animals, paper, printer

**Vocabulary:**

China: A large country located on the continent of Asia.

Continent: A large landmass.

Chinese New Year: A holiday whose date is determined by the Lunar calendar. It is usually celebrated between January 21<sup>st</sup> and February 20<sup>th</sup>.

Chinese Zodiac: A time-keeping system that runs on a 12-year cycle. Each year is “governed” by an animal and those born during a particular animal’s year, have the attributes of that animal. All animals in the zodiac have positive attributes and some animals get along better with other animals. This can be used in matchmaking! (see website: [http://www.travelchinaguide.com/intro/social\\_customs/zodiac/](http://www.travelchinaguide.com/intro/social_customs/zodiac/))

Lunar Calendar: A calendar based on the cycles of the moon.

Solar Calendar: Based on the cycles of the sun. The western zodiac is composed of twelve signs (Aquarius, Pisces, Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn) distributed across the 12 months of the year and divided into four basic elements; fire, earth, air, and water.

**Procedure:**

Day 1: Introduce China through maps, globes, reading selected materials (teacher’s choice) and watch a video from Discovery Education about China.  
(<http://school.discoveryeducation.com/teachers/china/>)

Day 2: Review China’s location on a map and globe. Discuss what New Year Celebrations look like in the United States. Discuss what happens during the Chinese New Year. Tell students that the Chinese Zodiac is also used in Japan, Korea and Mongolia. Complete Venn Diagrams together.

Day 3: Read folk tale about how the order of the animals of the zodiac was chosen either from the book or the retelling attached below. Show PowerPoint with authentic Chinese paper cuts depicting the 12 animals of the Chinese Zodiac (saved on lesson plan website as Celebrating the Chinese New Year PowerPoint). Discuss how, according to legend, those born in a particular year of an animal are said to possess particular character traits associated with that animal. Print out coloring pages. Have students practice arranging animal in order. Color animal pictures.

Day 4: Assemble wall chart that shows the animals in their correct order and tells about their characteristics.

Day 5: Finish assembly of wall chart. Display wall chart in hallway.

**Assessment/evaluation:**

- Teacher observation
- Participation in class group discussions
- Completion of his/her section of the paper wall chart
- Completion of the Venn diagram
- Be able to name the 12 animals in the Chinese Zodiac

threw a quick glance  
et. Porter was no-  
was getting dark, the  
d rays across the tall  
town. Still, just to be  
n the West raced back  
on.



## THE STORY OF THE CHINESE ZODIAC

This is the story of how the years got named and why Cat 貓 and Rat hate each other. In this story, the animals' names are written in Chinese. Use the list on page 12 and 13 to figure out which animal is doing what when.

*Long ago in Ancient China there was no way to mark the passage of time. So one day, the Tiān Zhǔ, the god of heaven, said, "We need a way to keep track of the years. Here's my idea: Let's hold a race. The first 12 animals to cross the river and cross the finish line will become the signs of the zodiac."*

*The animals were all very excited about the race. All except 貓 and 牛, that is. They were worried. 貓 was worried about the river. "I don't even like the water. What will I do?"*



牛 was worried about the finish line.  
“My eyesight is so poor,” he said, “how will I know where to swim?”

Now in those days, 鼠 and 猫 were the best of friends. Not like today. So when clever 鼠 heard 牛 complain, he said, “Don’t worry, Uncle 牛. 猫 and I will ride on your back and guide you.”

So 鼠 and 猫 jumped on 牛 and 牛 plunged into the water and started swimming. And what a strong swimmer 牛 was! Soon they had left all the other animals behind. When they got to the middle of the river, 猫 stood up and started laughing. “The others will never catch up,” he said. “I am sure to win a spot in the zodiac!”

At that very moment, 鼠 pushed 猫 into the river.

“Sorry!” said 鼠 when 猫 surfaced spluttering and coughing. “I will win. After all, riding Uncle 牛 was my idea in the first place!”

Then, when they were just a few yards from the shore, 鼠 jumped into the water him-

self. 鼠 are excellent swimmers so, in no time at all, 鼠 had reached the finish line and was the winner.

The rest of the animals straggled in one by one. 牛 came second followed by 虎, 兔 then 龍 then 蛇 then 馬 then 羊 then 猴 then 雞 then 狗 and, finally, 猪. All the animals stood in line to receive congratulations from Tiān Zhǔ when, suddenly, 猫 came running up dripping wet.

“So what number am I?” he panted. “I’d like to be 11th but if it’s 12th, so be it. I won’t complain.”

“It is regrettable,” said the Tiān Zhǔ, “but you’re too late. All the places have been taken.”

“What?!!?” shouted 猫. He turned to 鼠.  
“You betrayed me!” he hissed. “You’re no friend of mine!”

And that is why there is no 猫 among the animals of the Chinese zodiac and also why 鼠 and 猫 are mortal enemies.

What animal is YOUR Chinese zodiac sign?  
Find out after Chapter 3.