

Making Inferences

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Read the short story and answer the questions in full sentences.

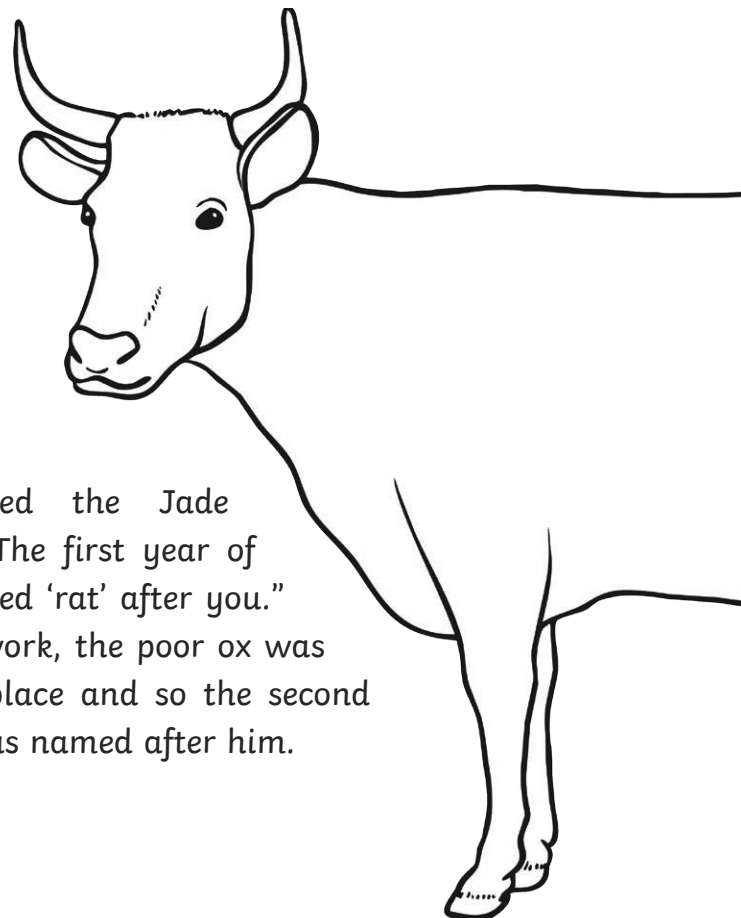
Chinese New Year

In a time long ago and almost forgotten, the Jade Emperor of China decided that there should be a way that all of his people could measure the passing of time. He told the animals that he wanted them to take part in a competition: they were to compete in a race. The first twelve animals to finish would be rewarded by having a year named after them.

As the day of the race arrived, all of the animals that the Emperor had invited lined up beside the river bank. Two of the animals, friends rat and cat, were nervous as they had never particularly enjoyed swimming. As they were beside the ox, they asked him if he would help them across on his back.

The ox agreed and they quickly and nimbly jumped up on to his back. As the race began, the rat and the cat were thrilled that the ox set off in first place. Swimming strongly and steadily, he continued his lead all of the way. The three animals had almost reached the bank at the other side when the rat rudely pushed the cat into the water and jumped over the head of the ox to land on the bank to finish first!

"Well done!" exclaimed the Jade Emperor to the rat. "The first year of the zodiac will be named 'rat' after you." After all of his hard work, the poor ox was cheated into second place and so the second year of the zodiac was named after him.



Questions

1. Before the day of the race, how do you think the animals felt when they were asked by the Emperor to take part?

2. What sort of race would the rat and the cat have preferred? Why?

3. Why did the rat and cat jump on the back of the ox, rather than his head?

4. Why do you think the ox offered to help the animals before the race started?

5. Do you think the ox regretted helping the animals after the race had finished?

Answers

1. Before the day of the race, how do you think the animals felt when they were asked by the Emperor to take part?
The animals must have felt pleased and proud that the Emperor asked them to take part in the race and excited that they could win a prize.
2. What sort of race would the rat and the cat have preferred? Why?
The rat and the cat may have preferred a running race because they are not as good at swimming as some of the other animals. They are also much smaller than some of the other animals and are less strong.
3. Why did the rat and cat jump on the back of the ox, rather than his head?
The rat and the cat jumped onto the back of the ox because it may have been easier to hang on there rather than his head. It might have been easier to fall off his head and they did not want to risk being swept into the water.
4. Why do you think the ox offered to help the animals before the race started?
I think the ox felt happy to help the animals before the race started because he was kind. He realised how challenging the swimming would be for the cat and the rat and wanted to help them.
5. Do you think the ox regretted helping the animals after the race had finished?
The ox may have felt a bit cheated of a higher place in the zodiac after the race because the rat pushed into first place. He did not show the same kindness that the ox showed him when he offered to help.

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The race was long and hard, but eventually the weary tiger pulled himself up out of the water and on to the river bank. The water was deep, the currents were strong and the swim had been very challenging. The next animal to reach the winning side was the rabbit. Like the rat and the cat, the rabbit didn't much like swimming, so he hopped across on some stepping stones, and then onto a floating log which carried him to the river bank.

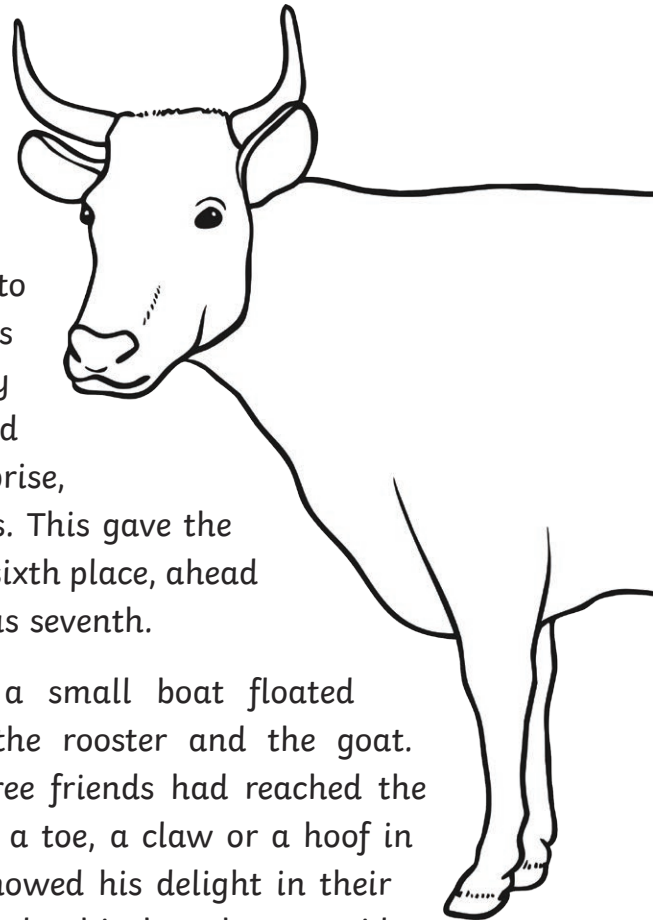
The surprised Jade Emperor declared, "I shall call the fourth year 'rabbit' after you."

The dragon finished in fifth place. The Emperor wondered how it was that he didn't fly across and win the race. The dragon explained to him that he had stopped to help some of the animals which delayed his start.

The river was still full of activity.

Animals were splashing and thrashing their way to the winning bank, but heading confidently towards the line was the horse. Unbeknown to him, as he thought he was next across, the slippery snake writhed from around one of his hooves. In his surprise, the horse bounded backwards. This gave the snake a chance to slither into sixth place, ahead of the flustered horse, who was seventh.

A little while afterwards, a small boat floated by carrying the monkey, the rooster and the goat. Working in a team, the three friends had reached the other side without putting a toe, a claw or a hoof in the water! The Emperor showed his delight in their ingenuity by chuckling under his breath. He said the goat would be the eighth year, the monkey the ninth and the rooster tenth.



Questions

1. If the currents were so strong for the tiger, how did the log that the rabbit was on make it across the river?

2. Do you think the dragon would have been more pleased to win the race, or to help the animals on their way across? Why?

3. Should the Emperor have made the snake go back to seventh place because he frightened the horse?

4. If the monkey, rooster and goat arrived together, does the order of the three animals matter when the Emperor gave them a month? Why do you think this?

5. Why do you think the Emperor was pleased with the animals who worked as a team but did not show displeasure to those who cheated?

Answers

These are the most probable answers, using evidence from the text. Other answers are acceptable if they are consistent with the text and are plausible.

- If the currents were so strong for the tiger, how did the log that the rabbit was on make it across the river?

The log may have floated into a gentler current in the river so the rabbit could cross more easily than the tiger.
- Do you think the dragon would have been more pleased to win the race, or to help the animals on their way across? Why?

I think that if the dragon stopped to help some animals on the way across, he would have been more pleased to do that than to win the race. His kind deed would have given him more of a sense of achievement than being first.
- Should the Emperor have made the snake go back to seventh place because he frightened the horse?

I don't think that the snake should have to go back to seventh place because I don't think that the Emperor really cared how the animals behaved towards each other in order to try and win the race, so he shouldn't change the order of the animals finishing.
- If the monkey, rooster and goat arrived together, does the order of the three animals matter when the Emperor gave them a month? Why do you think this?

As the monkey, rooster and goat arrived together, The Emperor might have asked the three animals which order they felt they should be in. They were all awarded a month so it might not have mattered to them, but they may have felt strongly that they wanted a particular place in the zodiac.
- Why do you think the Emperor was pleased with the animals who worked as a team but did not show displeasure to those who cheated?

The Emperor was pleased with the three animals because they showed cooperation and a good group spirit in order to complete the crossing. Maybe that was more important to the Emperor than finishing higher up the zodiac places but he didn't seem to mind how the snake behaved to the horse or how the rat behaved to the cat and ox. Maybe he thought they showed determination and drive rather than being cheats.

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The race was coming to an end but the last two months needed an animal to represent them to complete the Jade Emperor's grand plan. Bobbing casually down the river was the dog. "What took you such a long time dog, you are a much stronger swimmer than lots of the animals here?" questioned the Emperor.

"The river was so clear and cool that I decided to have a splash and a bath along the way," the dog explained. He had still finished so the Emperor rewarded the dog with the eleventh year.

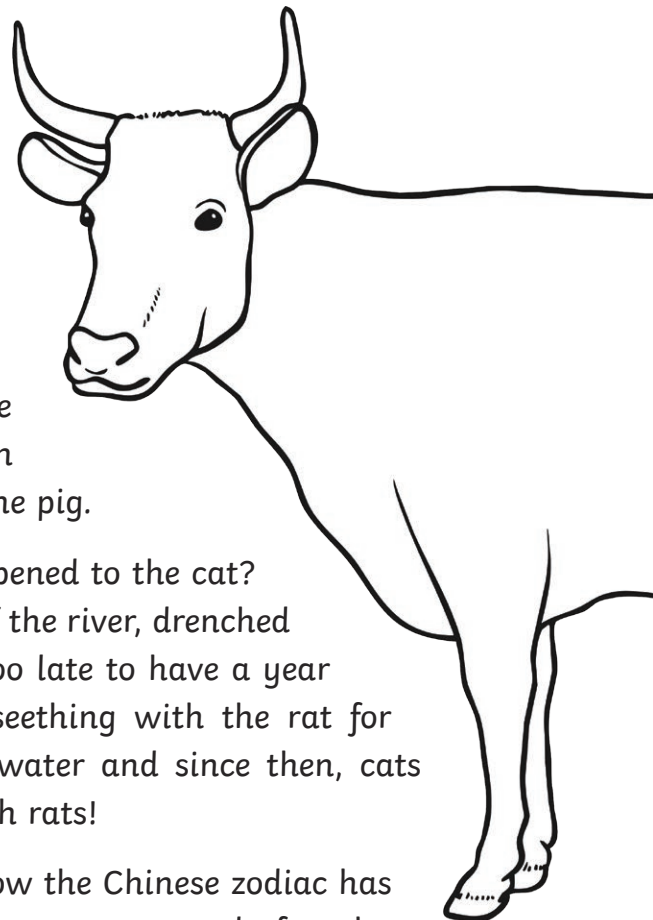
One final place was left in the zodiac and the Emperor pondered who the last winner would be. Wallowing across the now muddy finish line, the pig squelched into last place. The Emperor had his suspicions about the length of time that it had taken pig, but he asked anyway.

"You took a long time, what kept you?" the Emperor asked, with a twinkle in his eye.

"I was peckish and stopped for a snack then I had a little nap", said the pig. The twelfth and final year was given to the pig.

Are you wondering what happened to the cat? Well, he finally crawled out of the river, drenched and bedraggled, but it was too late to have a year named after him. He was seething with the rat for pushing him into the cold water and since then, cats have never been friends with rats!

So, that ends our tale of how the Chinese zodiac has followed this cycle of twelve years, named after the twelve animals who raced from one river bank to the other for the Jade Emperor.



Questions

1. Why did the dog enter the race if he preferred to stop for a bath rather than concentrate on the race?

2. Did the pig take the race seriously? How do you know?

3. How do you think the Emperor felt when the twelfth animal crossed the river?

4. Why did the Emperor stop at twelve years of the zodiac, rather than have ten or fifteen years to measure time?

5. Was the race fair for all of the animals? What makes you think that?

Answers

These are the most probable answers, using evidence from the text. Other answers are acceptable if they are consistent with the text and are plausible.

1. Why did the dog enter the race if he preferred to stop for a bath rather than concentrate on the race?

The dog stopped for a bath because he might not have thought it was that important to be part of, or to win, the race. He did not want to let the Emperor down by not taking part, but it didn't seem to matter to him very much.

2. Did the pig take the race seriously? How do you know?

The pig didn't seem to take the race seriously because he had a meal then a nap before completing the race. If he thought it was important, he would have made more effort in the competition.

3. How do you think the Emperor felt when the twelfth animal crossed the river?

The Emperor must have felt pleased that the race resulted in twelve winners for his zodiac. Once he had decided the order of animals to represent each year, he could begin to measure time.

4. Why did the Emperor stop at twelve years of the zodiac rather than have ten or fifteen years?

I think the Emperor stopped at twelve years because there are twelve months of the year, so it seems a good idea to have twelve years of the zodiac too. He could have chosen ten or fifteen but it wouldn't have matched the months of the year.

5. Was the race fair for all of the animals? What makes you think that?

I don't think the type of race was fair for everyone because some of the animals were better swimmers and physically stronger than others. I think that the way some of the animals treated each other wasn't fair either. The rat and the snake were unkind to the others in order to win. However, some of the other animals were kind and helpful to their friends and even though they were not so highly placed, they must have felt proud that they showed kindness.