

# The story of the zodiac

## LINKS TO:

Stage 3, Module 6

Learning Object 4: *What a year!*

## Exercise 1

Sample answers:

### 1.1 What animal sign is a person born in 1929?

Someone born in 1929 would be a snake.

### 1.2 According to the chart, what is your animal sign?

According to the Chinese zodiac, I am a dragon because I was born in 2000.

### 1.3 Use the information from the chart to write a paragraph, in Indonesian, describing the personality traits of a person born in the year of your animal sign.

Menurut Zodiak Cina, orang yang dilahirkan di bawah shio naga mempunyai banyak sifat yang positif. Mereka sangat cerdas, biasanya sangat tanggap, dan bekerja keras untuk mempelajari hal-hal baru. Naga penuh motivasi, dan suka mempelajari hal-hal baru. Naga juga hangat dan murah hati. Naga seringkali mengalami kesulitan, tapi teman-teman mereka selalu siap membantu mereka. Mereka mudah mencari uang, tapi tidak suka menabung. Mereka cenderung menghabiskan uang yang mereka dapatkan itu. Orang dengan shio naga juga kurang sabar dan mudah cemas.

### 1.4 Do you agree or disagree with this description of your personality? Give reasons to support your answer. Write your answer in Indonesian.

Saya cenderung untuk setuju dengan gambaran mengenai kepribadian saya ini. Saya cukup cerdas. Di sekolah, saya selalu bekerja keras dan suka mempelajari hal-hal baru. Saya juga suka menolong teman sekelas dan teman-teman lainnya. Kalau teman sekelas bertanya sesuatu, saya selalu berusaha

menjawab. Namun demikian, saya kurang sabar. Jadi, kalau mereka tidak langsung mengerti jawaban saya, saya mungkin akan sedikit sebal kepada mereka. Saya tidak tahu seberapa jauh saya mempunyai motivasi. Kadang-kadang saya sangat penuh motivasi, kadang-kadang saya cepat puas. Mengenai cara saya menangani uang: setiap hari Rabu sesudah sekolah selesai saya bekerja di sebuah restoran. Penghasilan saya tidak banyak, tapi saya cepat sekali menghabiskan semua yang saya dapatkan itu, dan saya tidak pernah menabung.

## Exercise 2

### 2.1 What can you infer from this story about the personality of the rat? What character traits does the rat have?

I can infer that the rat was cunning, tenacious, ruthless, calculating, manipulative and smart.

### 2.2 What is the moral (or morals) of this story?

I think that there are several possible moral lessons to be learnt from this story, including the importance of fair play, and of being honourable and honest. The story shows that you should not be complacent, like the cat, or you will lose the advantages that you have in life. It demonstrates that good friends are hard to find, and that betraying a friend may have lifelong consequences. It suggests that helping others is important, and that winning isn't everything, because although the rat wins the race, he loses his oldest and best friend.

**2.3 The cat is a significant character in this story, although he does not make it into the zodiac. If he had, what character traits might have been attributed to people born in the year of the cat?**

I think that 'the year of the cat' might be the birth year of people who are friendly and trusting — maybe too trusting! Perhaps those people would be clumsy at times, but able to 'land on their feet' after things have gone wrong. My cat is affectionate, but independent, so people born in the year of the cat may have those character traits as well. My cat sometimes bristles up when she senses that something is wrong, and she doesn't like strangers, so perhaps a person born in the year of the cat would be suspicious of strangers, but loyal to family and friends. Finally, my cat is sleek, agile and beautiful, so perhaps people born in the year of the cat would be elegant and attractive.

**Exercise 3**

**3.1 This legend has been passed down for many generations as a literary explanation and memory aid for the 12-year calendar. What does this tradition suggest about Chinese attitudes, values and beliefs?**

The fact that this story, and many others like it, have been passed down many generations suggests that legends and folktales are an important part of Chinese culture, and are valued as a form of entertainment and moral education.

In this particular example, the animals reflect some of the characteristics of different types of people. The story highlights the best and worst human traits. In doing so, it is teaching people to be honest, flexible, and determined, and not to be greedy, lazy or selfish.

One moral of the story which reflects a central belief in Chinese society is that the group, and friendship, are of more value than the individual, and that it is important to strive for harmonious relationships. If the rat had stuck to the original plan of working with the ox and the cat, then all three would have been successful. However, although the rat won the competition, the shame of how he won would always

overshadow his success, and he lost his treasured friendship with the cat.

The legend reflects the Chinese attitude that you should make the right decision, based on what is ethically and morally correct, rather than taking the easy choice. It was easy, in the short term, for the rat to betray his friend and win the race, but it was not ethically or morally correct. True friends work together, trust each other, and are loyal.

The Chinese value of 'saving face' suggests that personal dignity and self-respect are key elements in harmonious relationships. After humiliating his former friend, the cat, one could say that the rat lost face in front of the Jade Emperor, the cat, the ox and all of the other animals in the competition. Thus, the actions of the rat on that day forever damaged his name, reputation, and character.

**3.2 Based on what you have learnt in this work sheet, how do the calendars used in Indonesia reflect Indonesian people's values, attitudes or beliefs?**

The main calendar that is used in Indonesia is Gregorian, however, *Kalender Hijriah* or the Islamic calendar also holds an important position in Indonesian society. This is understandable considering the majority of the population in Indonesia is Muslim. It is important that members of the Muslim community can refer to the calendar to see important dates for both worship and Islamic feasts.

Apart from *Kalender Hijriah*, the *Primbon* or Javanese calendar is also used by Indonesians, especially Javanese. The reasons for this might sound like superstitions for other people, but the Javanese believe that people should live harmoniously with nature and therefore, especially in relation to the *Pranata Mangsa* calendar, they take what nature is telling them seriously. Also, the fact that the Javanese believe that *Saptawara* represents the stages of the creation of the world suggests that Javanese are very religious even though their traditional beliefs known as *kejawen* is not considered a religion in Indonesia. From what is contained in the *Primbon* it is also suggested that the Javanese believe there are ways of living harmoniously among people with different characteristics.

### 3.3 Based on what you have learnt in this work sheet, and any prior knowledge you have, what differences and similarities are there between the calendars or other time measurement systems used in China and Indonesia?

There are several similarities between the calendar used in China and the Javanese calendar and they are as follow:

- Both are based on the movements of the sun and the moon.
- Both were used originally as a guide for agricultural and other seasonal activities.
- Both have components in each cycle and those components are named separately.
- Both were too complicated for the ordinary person to follow and therefore both have been simplified.
- The Chinese calendar and, to some extent, the Javanese calendar, link components of their calendar with people's characteristics or, in the case of the Javanese, their own identity.
- Both contain some description of different human characteristics.

The difference is that the Chinese calendar contains stories and is represented by animals, whereas the Javanese calendar does not.

### 3.4 What do the differences and similarities you identified in Exercise 3.3 suggest about cultural and historical differences between China and Indonesia?

The similarities that I have identified in Exercise 3.3 suggest that there are similarities between the Chinese and the Javanese ways of thinking and ways of looking at the natural world. Both cultures seem to attempt to explain what they see in people and the natural world in stories or rules. The ways of representing this knowledge are different, however, and I think it is because of the influence of Islam in Indonesia, which means that animals such as pigs and dogs are considered unclean and therefore do not feature in stories.

### 3.5 What differences and similarities are there between the calendars used in Australia and Indonesia?

From what I've learnt in this work sheet, the similarity between the calendar most commonly used in Indonesia and that used in Australia is that both use the Gregorian calendar or *Kalender Masehi*, which measure time in a continuous sequence and don't feature animals. However, in Indonesia, some people or groups of people also use other calendars such as *Kalender Hijriah* (or the Islamic calendar) and *Primbon* (or the Javanese calendar). These two calendars are quite different to the Gregorian system of measuring time used in Australia.

*Kalender Hijriah* is specifically used to determine important days relating to Islamic worship and is the one used in several Islamic countries around the world.

The *Primbon*, however, is one that I find most interesting and very different to the Gregorian calendar. According to the work sheet, *Primbon* is not only a calendar, but also has elements of palmistry, numerology and horoscope. It also contains a system called *Pranata Mangsa*, which is used for agriculture and fishing. When I compare the *Primbon* and the Australian calendar, I can conclude that perhaps many Australians value what they see as cold hard logic over myths and superstition, and as a way of making sense of the world, whereas Javanese people appreciate the systems in nature as well and believe that they should apply these systems to everyday life.

## Exercise 4

---

Write your skit in Indonesian. Your skit should be at least 300 words in length, and should include an example of onomatopoeia for each of the animals in the race!

### Menyeberangi sungai

#### Pemain:

Raja Dewa	ular
kucing	kuda
tikus	kambing
kerbau	monyet
macan	ayam
kelinci	anjing
naga	babi

#### Scene 1:

- Raja Dewa:** Hai para binatang, saya mau mengadakan perlombaan menyeberangi sungai. Keduabelas binatang pertama yang mencapai garis akhir akan menjadi bagian dari zodiak untuk membantu orang menghitung tahun. Apa kalian mau ikut perlombaan ini?
- Binatang:** Grok-grok ... mungkin! Guk-guk ... aku mau! Ssss ... aku mau! Ciap-ciap ... mungkin ...

#### Scene 2:

- Kucing:** Meong-meong. Tikus kecil, kamu sedang makan apa?
- Tikus:** Cap-kecap! Aku sedang makan kue, ayo kita makan bersama.
- Kucing:** Terima kasih! Setelah itu kita bisa ikut perlombaan bersama!
- Tikus:** Baiklah!

#### Scene 3:

- Kucing:** Aku takut air, aku nggak bisa berenang, bagaimana aku bisa ikut dalam perlombaan ini?
- Kerbau:** Muu. Penglihatanku kurang baik. Bagaimana aku bisa melihat jalan untuk menyeberangi sungai?
- Tikus:** Cit-cit-cit. Hei kerbau, aku akan menunjukkan jalan kalau kamu menggendongku dan si kucing ke seberang sungai.
- Kerbau:** Oh, nggak masalah!
- Kucing:** Meong! Asik! Aku bisa memenangkan perlombaan zodiak ini!

(continued on following page)

#### Scene 4:

- Kucing:** Lihat! Binatang lainnya belum mulai menyeberangi sungai! Kita akan menang!
- Tikus:** Ha ha ha ha. Ma'af, temanku tersayang! Aku yang harus meraih tempat pertama!
- Kucing:** [didorong oleh Tikus ke air] Meong!!! Tikus, tolong! Aku jatuh ke sungai!
- Tikus:** [Tikus meloncat dari punggung kerbau dan sampai di tepian sungai terlebih dulu] Cit-cit-cit! Aku sampai duluan! Hore!
- Kerbau:** [sampai ke tepian sebagai pemenang kedua] Aku capek sekali. Muu-muu.
- Macan:** Aum, aum! Aku berhasil menyeberangi sungai! Menyebalkan sekali! Buluku yang cantik ini sekarang basah kuyup!
- Kelinci:** Ck-ck-ck, aku berhasil menyeberangi sungai. Tikus, kebau, selamat!
- Naga:** Akhirnya sampai juga! Aku hampir menang, tapi aku harus berhenti di tengah jalan untuk membuat hujan bagi orang-orang.
- Kuda:** Aku pemenang berikutnya!? Hihik-hihik.
- Ular:** Sssss. Bukan, bukan kamu, kuda! [melata di depan kuda dan mengalahkannya sampai ke tepian]
- Kuda:** Aduh! Kamu membuatku kaget!
- Kambing:** Mbeeeek! Dasar si ular! Dia juga membuatku kaget!
- Monyet:** Uuk-aak! Aku menang juga! Aku menang juga! Halo, semuanya!
- Ayam:** Kukuruyuk! Aku lari cepat sekali dan sekarang sudah sampai – aku termasuk di dalam zodiak!
- Anjing:** Guk-guk! Aku mandi dulu sambil menyeberang sungai, jadi aku sedikit terlambat. Tapi sekarang aku sudah sampai.
- Babi:** Aduh ... aku capek sekali! Dan KELAPARAN! Siapa yang punya makanan? Grok-grok ...

#### Scene 5:

- Raja Dewa:** Pemenang pertama adalah –
- Dewa:**
- Kucing:** Aku sampai, aku sampai! Apakah aku termasuk dalam keduabelas ekor pemenang?
- Raja Dewa:** Ma'af, kamu terlambat. Kamu tidak bisa ikut serta di dalam zodiak.
- Dewa:**
- Kucing:** Si tikus mendorongku ke sungai dan berenang pergi! Kalau bukan karena si tikus, aku bisa menjadi salah seekor pemenang! Aku nggak akan pernah memaafkan si tikus!