

The Year of the Rat



Charles Hope

illustrated by

Jess Racklyeft

THE YEAR OF THE RAT



Synopsis

The school play is tomorrow night and everyone is excited – especially Rat. But things are starting to go wrong. Really, truly, terribly wrong! Will the play be cancelled? Or can Rat save the day? A book for those born in the Chinese Zodiac Year of the Rat, and for those who love them.

Writing style

The Year of the Rat has been designed with the needs of early readers in mind. Simple and succinct language is used throughout the book, with no more than a few sentences on each page. The colourful images relate directly to the text, so young readers have multiple entry points to engage with the information. There are several pages of information about the Chinese Zodiac at the back of the book, including birth years and general characteristics for each animal, which will aid young readers in developing the tools of research and analysis.

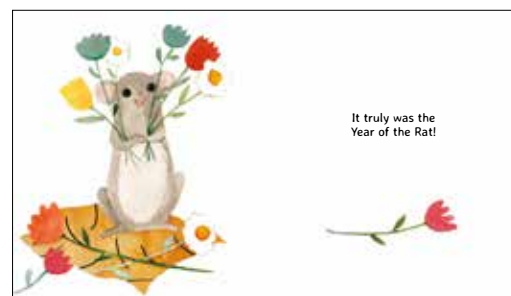
Photographic style

The Year of the Rat beautifully combines watercolour and digital illustrations, which are set against stark white backdrops to help capture the imagination of the reader. The combination of these soft yet distinctive images with sparse text and oodles of white space allows the reader to fully engage with the story and themes being discussed. The illustrations are strongly composed and clearly printed with bright strong colours to increase the appeal to visual readers, while also allowing readers to explore how images are used to convey messages.

Specifications

Author	Charles Hope
ISBN	9781742034249
Format	270mm x 235mm
Extent	32pp + cover
Binding	Hardback
Reading level	5+
Interest level	5+
Category	Junior Fiction

Example spreads taken from the book



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Study notes: Themes

- Descriptive words
- The Chinese Zodiac
- Being brave
- Stepping outside your comfort zone
- Personal values
- Leadership and teamwork
- Never giving up hope
- Positive qualities/traits
- Lunar calendar (vs Solar calendar)

Curriculum link: Literacy

Before reading The Year of the Rat:

- Brainstorm what students understand about the Chinese Zodiac.
- What is their first response when they look at the cover of the book?
- Can they think of any animals that belong to the Chinese Zodiac?

While reading The Year of the Rat:

- Ask the students to take turns reading a paragraph aloud to the rest of the class. Where appropriate, ask the students what they think certain words may mean.

After reading The Year of the Rat:

- Ask the students to reflect on the words they would use to describe the Chinese Zodiac, and the words that have been used in the book. Ask them to draw up a list of words that can be used to describe the Chinese Zodiac.

Curriculum Theme: Critical and Creative Thinking

After reading The Year of the Rat, ask the students the following questions:

- What year is it according to the Chinese Zodiac (hopefully an easy one!)?
- How many animals are there in the Zodiac?
- What are they?
- Which animal is it in 2020, 2021 etc?
- When does the Chinese Zodiac change from one animal to the next?
- Why do the dates change from year to year?
- What is a lunar calendar?
- How is a lunar calendar different from the solar calendar (one of which we use, the Gregorian calendar, which is seen as the international standard)?



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Curriculum link: ICT Capability

After reading *The Year of the Rat*:

ACTIVITY:

- Organise the class into small groups. Assign each group an animal from the Chinese Zodiac (<https://www.yourchineseastrology.com/zodiac/>). Ask each group to research their assigned animal to answer the following questions: what are the next 5 'birth' years for this animal? What are its lucky colours? Flowers? Numbers? Which Zodiac animal/s is it compatible with? What is its element? What are its personality traits? (Feel free to encourage the groups to include any other information they find interesting or unusual about their animal.)
- Ask the children to look for and print images relating to their Zodiac animal e.g. lucky colours/ flowers, examples of Chinese artwork of their animal, famous people born in past years of their animal, etc.
- Ask each group to create a poster collage. Ask them to attach the images they found online and to write a short sentence detailing what that image means in relation to their Zodiac animal. All members of the group then take turns presenting their findings to the rest of the class.

Curriculum Theme: Personal and Social Capability

After reading *The Year of the Rat*:

ACTIVITY:

- Organise the class into two groups. In one group, ask the students to work as a team to construct a word finder puzzle. Ask each student to suggest an appropriate word taken from the book. (e.g. timid, scenery, rummaged etc.). Once completed, print copies for the other group to complete

ACTIVITY:

- In the second group, students should work as a team to create a trivia bingo game. Ask each student to suggest a fact about the animals of the Zodiac e.g. I am born in 1975, I am immediately after Ox, etc. Combine these bingo clues into a game for the whole class.



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ACTIVITY:

- Potential homework for the whole class: ask the students to find out the birthdates of their family members (siblings, parents, aunts/uncles and grandparents). They can then check these dates at <http://www.chinesezodiac.com/calculator.php> to find out the Zodiac animals for their family.

Find out more

- <http://www.chinesezodiac.com/calculator.php>
- <https://www.yourchineseastrology.com/zodiac/>
- <https://www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/chinese-zodiac/>
- <http://www.chinesezodiac.com/signs.php>
- <https://chinesenewyear.net/zodiac/>

Marketing and promotion

The Year of the Rat is the third release in a series of connected yet one-off titles, with each iteration focusing on the animals of the Chinese Zodiac. Future titles are planned, with 2021 being the year of the Ox and 2022 being the year of the Tiger.

