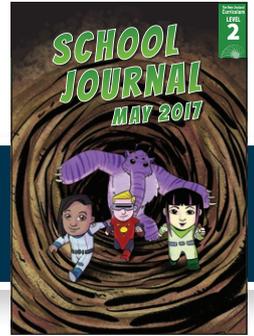


The Race

by Chris Tse

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Year 4



Overview

This TSM contains a wide range of information and suggestions for teachers to pick and choose from, depending on the needs of their students and their purpose for using the text. The materials provide multiple opportunities for revisiting the text several times.

In this play, Chris Tse retells a traditional Chinese story about how the twelve animals that make up the Chinese zodiac came to be chosen and how their order was decided. All twelve of the Zodiac animals are characters in the play, although only six of them have speaking parts. As in many fables, the animal characters show human virtues and frailties and the plot involves dispute and trickery.

This play:

- follows a conventional play format and structure
- includes many elements of a traditional fable
- lists all twelve animals that appear in the Chinese zodiac
- includes an extra animal who doesn't make the race – or the Zodiac list
- makes use of an anachronism (the inclusion of a television commentary team) for humorous effect
- has one scene, which is set at a swimming pool.

A PDF of the text and an audio version as an MP3 file are available at www.schooljournal.tki.org.nz

Texts related by theme

“The Ants and the Grasshopper: The Sequel” SJ L2 June 2014 | “Good as Gold” SJ L2 Aug 2016 | “Awarua: The Taniwha of Porirua” SJ L2 May 2016 | “Tui in a Tree” SJ L2 April 2013

Text characteristics from the year 4 reading standard

RAT pulls a length of rope from his swimming togs and lassoes **OX**'s tail.

SNAKE. Wait – what'sss Rat doing?

DRAGON. He's using Ox to pull him along!

THE COMMENTATOR. We have an interesting development. It looks like Rat is hitching a ride with Ox.

SNAKE. That'sss cheating!

THE COMMENTATOR. Your Majesty, is this allowed?

some abstract ideas that are clearly supported by concrete examples in the text or easily linked to the students' prior knowledge

SNAKE. Sssssomething golden? Sssssomething shiny?

RABBIT. A golden carrot!

OX. Whatever it is, I'm going to win it.

THE COMMENTATOR. You sound very confident, Ox.

How have you all been preparing for this race?

RABBIT. I've been practising blowing bubbles in the water.

RABBIT demonstrates by huffing and puffing. The other animals move away and cover their faces.

OX. Unlike some of you, I've been doing some **real** training – one hundred laps every day.

some places where information and ideas are implicit and where students need to make inferences based on information that is easy to find because it is nearby in the text and there is little or no competing information

honour. Thank you so much!

CAT snoots, looking very angry.

CAT. You – Rat! Why didn't you wake me up? I missed the race because of you!



RAT. I... I...

RAT darts off.

CAT. Come back here, you sneaky Rat!

CAT chases after **RAT**.

TIGER. I don't think Cat is going to forgive Rat in a hurry!

THE COMMENTATOR. Well, what an exciting way to end this broadcast. It's been a great day! Congratulations, racers, and to everyone at home – thanks for watching!

decided. Chris Tse has adapted one of these st



DRAGON. Rat is acting a little suspiciously.

TIGER. You're right. Something doesn't add up.

RABBIT. Why didn't he wake Cat?

TIGER. He knows how important this big race is.

DRAGON. I smell... a rat!

SNAKE. Sssssabotage!

OX. It doesn't matter. You snooze; you lose. Anyway, I don't think a teeny, tiny rat could ever win this race.

figurative language, such as metaphors, similes, or personification



Reading standard: by the end of year 4

VOCABULARY

Possible supporting strategies

- Possibly unfamiliar words and phrases, including “Commentator”, “Emperor”, “laps”, “sabotage”, “threat”, “tension”, “lassoes”, “dejected”, “zodiac”, “broadcast”
- Use of idiom and metaphor: “the upper hand”, “cutting things fine”, “doesn’t add up”, “smell a rat”, “hitching a ride”
- Remind students of strategies for working out unfamiliar vocabulary, such as looking at the context, using knowledge of word patterns and prefixes or suffixes, and making connections to prior knowledge.
- Prompt prior knowledge about sports and commentaries to clarify what a commentator is.
- Check that students are familiar with the role of an emperor. Refer to other well-known folk tales or fables, such as “The Emperor’s New Clothes”.
- Lead discussion about common sayings. Create a chart with common sayings and their meanings. *If someone has “the upper hand”, it means they are in a position of power and control. We’ll record that on the chart, and add to it as we meet other sayings.*
- *The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction*, pages 39–46, has useful information about learning vocabulary.
- See also [ESOL Online, Vocabulary](#), for examples of other strategies to support students with vocabulary.

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED

Possible supporting strategies

- Some awareness of the signs of the zodiac and of the Chinese zodiac
- Some experience of viewing sports or movies in slow motion
- Some knowledge of the characteristics and the purpose of fables
- Some knowledge of the role of a commentator at a sports event
- Discuss the astrological signs of the zodiac (which will be familiar to many students from horoscopes).
- Direct students to the notes on the last page, which list the animal signs. *This play has a lot of animal characters; they are the twelve animals of the Chinese zodiac, plus one other.* Working in pairs, have them check the list of characters against the zodiac signs to discover the “one other”.
- Discuss the cultural significance of the Chinese zodiac and its twelve-year cycle. Use a “think, pair, share” approach. First, have the students think about the zodiac and develop their ideas. Then have them share their ideas with a partner or a small group. English language learners could pair up with students who speak the same first language so they can share their ideas in that language. Then ask the students to share with the whole class.
- Discuss the reasons for using slow motion in film. Have the students move their arms as if running or swimming in slow motion.
-  Using a mobile phone, take a short video of the students running, then use an app to slow it down (for example, [Fast & Slow Motion Video Tool](#), [Slow Motion Camera Free](#)).
- Discuss other fables the students may know, such as “The Tortoise and the Hare” or “The Ant and the Grasshopper”.
- Discuss the role of a sports commentator or a commentator at some other popular event. Draw out the idea that they speak in slightly exaggerated ways to make the event more dramatic for the viewer or listener.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE

Possible supporting strategies

- Conventional play format: list of characters at the beginning; character names in bold capitals; stage directions in brackets and italics
- Much of the action told through stage directions and the words of the commentator
- An incident that is important to the story occurs offstage (Rat tricking Cat)
- Prompt students’ prior knowledge of plays. *What do we expect to find in a play?*
- Explain the use of capitals for characters’ names and brackets and italics for stage directions.
- Model the reading of dialogue, using expression.
- Read Rat’s remarks about Cat sleeping and the other animals’ comments on his behaviour (pages 4 and 5) and discuss what really might have happened. The students could act out the scene of Rat sneaking away.



Sounds and Words

Possible curriculum contexts

ENGLISH (Reading)

Level 2 – Purposes and audiences: Show some understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.

– Ideas: Show some understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.

ENGLISH (Writing)

Level 2 – Ideas: Select, form, and express ideas on a range of topics.

– Language features: Use language features appropriately, showing some understanding of their effects.

THE ARTS (Communicating and interpreting)

Level 2 – Drama: Share drama through informal presentation and respond to elements of drama in their own and others' work.

SOCIAL SCIENCES

Level 2 – Understand how cultural practices reflect and express people's customs, traditions, and values.

Possible first reading purpose

- To enjoy reading a play about a birthday, a competition, and the Chinese zodiac

Possible subsequent reading purposes

- To respond to the idea of being rewarded for “cheating”
- To perform the play to peers and invite responses

Possible writing purposes

- To write a dialogue between two or more characters to reveal aspects of their personalities
- To write a character description of Rat
- To write a personal narrative about a time I was in a race
- To write a story using the elements of a fable to explain why something is as it is



Instructional focus – Reading

English Level 2 – Purposes and audiences: Show some understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences; Ideas: Show some understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.

First reading

- Set the purpose for reading.
- Introduce the text to the students.
- Prompt prior knowledge about plays. *We are going to read through a play. Talk to the person next to you about what you know about plays.*
- Direct students to the notes about the Chinese zodiac on page 9. Provide some background. *This play involves a swimming race – but there is a reason why the animals are competing.*
- Explain that the play tells the story of how the order of the animals of the Chinese zodiac was decided.
- Direct students to read the cast list and to look at the illustrations. Explain that there are some non-speaking parts in the play.
- Have the students read the play silently to themselves.

If the students struggle with this text

- Have the students skim through the play, noticing which of the animals speak.
- Lead discussion and enjoy the comical, fictional nature of the story – talking animals in a swimming race.
- Prompt prior knowledge of the way races are filmed: the finish being shown in slow motion, for dramatic purpose or to find the winner.
- As they read the play, check that the students are following what is going on.
- Lead discussion about the actions needed for the speaking as well as the non-speaking parts.
- Assist students to notice that the speaking parts are all written as direct speech but without the use of speech marks and that actions are indicated by italics.

Subsequent readings How you approach subsequent readings will depend on your reading purpose.

The teacher

Direct the students to reread pages 6 and 7.

- *Let's have another look at the actions of the cunning Rat ...*

Invite responses to the sequence of events: Rat hitching a ride with Ox, winning the race, and getting first prize.

- *What do you think? Was it fair that Rat was awarded first prize?*
- *Why do you think the Emperor allowed the cheating?*

You could encourage bilingual students to discuss this in their first language before having a wider class discussion.

The students:

- engage in discussion with a partner after rereading the pages concerning Rat's trickery
- identify earlier clues about Rat's plan
- differentiate between the words spoken and the actions, which gives us clues about the characters
- in pairs or groups, create a visual mind map showing Rat and his characteristics
-  The students could create word maps using an online mind-mapping tool, such as [Mindmap Chrome app](#).

Subsequent readings (cont.)

The teacher

Have the students perform the play. Offer suggestions for the performance and encourage them to make decisions. For example, they can find a way of allocating roles, having a suitable setting, and making costumes to identify the characters. These may be simple paper masks with names on.

Explain that they can use their copy of the text but they should rehearse before performing.

Lead discussion about the purpose of performing and viewing. *What will we want our audience to see and hear? How will we make sure they understand why the animals are racing?*

Scaffold student understanding of purpose and audience. For the audience, provide a purpose for viewing. *While we are watching, think about what we find out about each character.*

 You could video-record the play and share it with whānau on a class wiki or blog. (Ensure that you have permission to do so first.)

METACOGNITION

- *What helped you, when working in a small group, to reach decisions about how your character should speak and act? Is it always easy to make up your mind?*

The students:

- participate in decision making and create props and masks for the play
- read through the play in character, self-evaluating and inviting feedback from peers
- rehearse once or twice
- use appropriate expression, pacing, and tone for their part
- perform the play and invite a response.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- *I see you have a clearly labelled mind map of Rat's character. That will be useful when we write a character description.*
- *I listened to your group discussions. You were thinking critically as you debated the fairness of the first place award. You all made inferences about Rat's character from evidence you found in the text. It was great to see you looking back to the text for evidence.*
- *I was happy to see that you mastered the slow-motion action. The audience appreciated that effect.*



Reading standard: by the end of year 4

The Literacy Learning Progressions

Assessment Resource Banks

Instructional focus – Writing

English Level 2 – Ideas: Select, form, and express ideas on a range of topics; Language features: Use language features appropriately, showing some understanding of their effects.

Text excerpts from “The Race”

Page 3

THE COMMENTATOR. Welcome, everybody, to this great swimming race to mark His Majesty the Emperor’s birthday! And what a marvellous day for it, too. We have some great racers competing for a magnificent prize.

RABBIT. What’s the prize?

SNAKE. Maybe it’s sssssomething we can eat.

RABBIT. I hope it’s carrots.

OX. Carrots? Don’t be ridiculous! It will be something valuable.

SNAKE. Sssssomething golden? Sssssomething shiny?

RABBIT. A golden carrot!

OX. Whatever it is, I’m going to win it.

THE COMMENTATOR. You sound very confident, Ox. How have you all been preparing for this race?

Examples of text characteristics

USING DIALOGUE TO REVEAL CHARACTER

Writers can reveal things about the setting and their characters through the use of dialogue.

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Direct students to the conversation between Rabbit, Snake, and Ox (and also the Commentator’s comments) and invite their response.

- *What do we find out about Rabbit?*
- *Do we get a clue about the sort of character he is, with his focus on carrots?*
- *What about Snake and Ox?*

Lead discussion about the various ways to record direct speech: in a play, in prose, in speech bubbles.

Have the students choose one of these methods and record an imagined conversation revealing something about the character of the person or people speaking. The conversation could be between the characters in “The Race” or the students could invent their own characters.

 You could have the students use an online comic application to create and share their conversation, such as [Pixton](#), [Toondoo](#), [Storyboard](#).

Pages 4 and 5

TIGER. You’re cutting things fine, Rat.

RAT. I tried to get here as fast as possible. Have I missed the race?

DRAGON. No, we’re still waiting for the Emperor to arrive.

RABBIT. Where’s Cat?

RAT. I haven’t seen Cat since last night.

TIGER. But weren’t the two of you travelling here together?

RAT (*nervously*). She was still fast asleep when I left this morning. I’m sure she’ll be here any second. I’d better go and change into my swimming togs.

RAT runs off to change.

DRAGON. Rat is acting a little suspiciously.

TIGER. You’re right. Something doesn’t add up.

RABBIT. Why didn’t he wake Cat?

TIGER. He knows how important this big race is.

DRAGON. I smell ... a rat!

PROVIDING CLUES IN THE ACTION TO REVEAL CHARACTER

Writers provide clues for their audience in the ways the characters act, which reveal things about those characters.

Ask students to look at the stage directions (in italics).

- *Is it important to the story that Rat has to sound nervous when he speaks?*
- *How does the writer describe the way Rat exits?*
- *Does that help you to build a picture of what he’s like?*

Prompt prior knowledge of character description in narrative. Direct students to their mind maps, showing the characteristics of Rat.

Have the students talk with a buddy and then create a short character description of Rat, including one or two sentences about his appearance and a few sentences about the way he speaks and behaves.

You could use a Say-It activity to help students focus their thoughts about Rat’s character. A Say-It enables students to speak from another viewpoint, recall information, and identify main points in preparation for writing.

Prepare a table (usually 3 by 3 or 3 by 4 with labelled coordinates for each cell) and write one topic-related prompt in each cell. Each prompt should start with “You are (name of character) ... Say ...”

Put the students into groups of about six. Allocate coordinates to one student in each group (say B3). The student reads the text in B3 aloud and then carries out a short role play. That student then chooses someone from the group to go next and allocates them a new set of coordinates. The students continue to play until all the cells have been role-played. Encourage them to use an appropriate voice suited to their character. (The activity will need to be modelled first.) Below is an example Say-It with some suggested prompts. You can change the prompts to suit your students and your selected purpose.

	A	B	C
1	You are Rat: Say how you thought up such a cunning plan.	You are Rat: Say what training you did to prepare for the race.	You are Rat: Say what you really thought about the Emperor’s prize.
2	You are Rat: Say why you didn’t wake up cat.	You are Rat: Say why you decided to cheat in the race and if it was effective.	You are Rat: Say how the race affected you for the rest of your life.
3	You are Rat: Say what you thought when the commentator called you the underdog – or the under-rat – of the race.	You are Rat: Say how you felt during each stage of the race.	You are Rat: Say what you really think about cats.

Text excerpts from “The Race”

Examples of text characteristics

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

Pages 6 and 7

RABBIT. This is harder than I thought!

OX. Give up, now, Rabbit – this is my race to win!

TIGER. Don’t be so sure, Ox!

...

OX is out in the lead with RAT trailing behind, holding on to the rope. RAT uses the rope to pull himself closer to OX. As OX nears the finish line, RAT leapfrogs over OX to take the lead.

THE COMMENTATOR. What’s this? Unbelievable – Rat has just leapt over Ox to take the lead!

OX. Nooooo!

RAT crosses the finish line, winning the race, followed by a dejected OX and then TIGER.

SUPPORTING DETAIL

Writers include detail to provide the reader with a clearer image of what’s happening. In a play, the extra detail will often be in the form of stage directions.

Ask students to read the description of the race. Discuss how the writer adds detail through the stage directions and the things the characters say.

- Look at the first line. Rabbit is obviously finding the race tougher than he expected.
- What does Ox’s line tell you about how he’s feeling? What about Tiger?
- Read the rest of the passage with a buddy. How does the writer add drama and excitement?

Prompt students to recall a time when they were in a race. Allow them to talk with a buddy as they recall a personal experience. Check in to ensure that they all have something to say.

Prepare students to draft a piece of writing where they describe the experience – what happened and how they felt before, during, and after the race. Encourage the use of adjectives to extend their descriptions.

Encourage the students to include details, including some dialogue, to help the reader “see” and “feel” what happened. Help English language learners to notice the differences between dialogue and stage directions. For example, draw attention to the shorter sentences, less formal language, fewer verbs and how it includes only the actual spoken words.

After a first draft, support the students to revise, making links between the play and their own writing.

- In the play, the stage directions tell us what is happening and we hear what the characters are saying.
- Check to see where you included direct speech – before the race? During it? After? Do you need to add some dialogue?

GIVE FEEDBACK

- You’ve included some dialogue at the beginning of your personal narrative. The short exchanges are effective – we can understand how you were all feeling.

METACOGNITION

- Tell me how you decided which way to record the speech. Is one way easier than the other?

Writing standard: by the end of year 4

The Literacy Learning Progressions