Meet the zodiac

Teacher guide | Grades K-2 | 20-30 minutes

A little culture, a lot of curiosity.

This sample introduces the twelve animals of the Chinese zodiac with simplified Chinese characters, Mandarin pinyin, a short story and two classroom activities.

TEACHING PLAN

1 Explore

Show the animal cards. Say the English names, then try the Mandarin words.

2 Read

Read the story together. Invite children to retell it using the cards.

3 Practice

Complete the matching and sequence pages. Use the answer key to check.

CULTURE NOTE

The zodiac follows a repeating twelve-year cycle. Chinese New Year does not start on January 1, so a person born in January or February may belong to the previous zodiac year. Check the exact birth date and calendar.

Lunar New Year is celebrated by many communities, with different customs. This sample focuses on Chinese zodiac traditions; experiences and stories vary across families.

Animal cards

Cut along the outlines | Say the words together

01

鼠

Rat

shǔ

02

牛

Ox

niú

03

虎

Tiger

hǔ

04

兔

Rabbit

tù

Animal cards

Cut along the outlines | Say the words together

05

龙

Dragon

lóng

06

蛇

Snake

shé

07

马

Horse

mǎ

08

羊

Goat

yáng

Animal cards

Cut along the outlines | Say the words together

09

猴

Monkey

hóu

10

鸡

Rooster

jī

11

狗

Dog

gǒu

12

猪

Pig

zhū

The Great Race

A traditional story, retold for young learners

Listen, imagine and put the animals in order.

Long ago, a story says the animals took part in a great race. The order they finished became the order of the twelve zodiac animals.

First came Rat, then Ox, Tiger and Rabbit. Dragon and Snake followed. Horse and Goat were next, with Monkey, Rooster, Dog and Pig completing the race.

Today, each animal names a year in a repeating cycle. Families may share different versions of the story. Which animal would you like to learn more about?

TALK ABOUT IT

How could the animals help one another? Use your imagination to tell a new part of the story.

Teacher tip: Read the story aloud, then use the cards to act it out.

Match the animals

Draw a line from each English word to its Chinese character.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Rat	A. 虎
2. Ox	B. 龙
3. Tiger	C. 鼠
4. Rabbit	D. 蛇
5. Dragon	E. 牛
6. Snake	F. 兔

Challenge: Say one animal name in Mandarin.

Put them in order

Use the story and cards to finish the zodiac sequence.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Write the missing animal names.

1. Rat 2. Ox 3. _____ 4. Rabbit

5. Dragon 6. _____ 7. Horse 8. Goat

9. Monkey 10. Rooster 11. _____ 12. Pig

Draw your favorite animal in the box.

Make a zodiac lantern

An easy paper craft | Adult help with scissors recommended

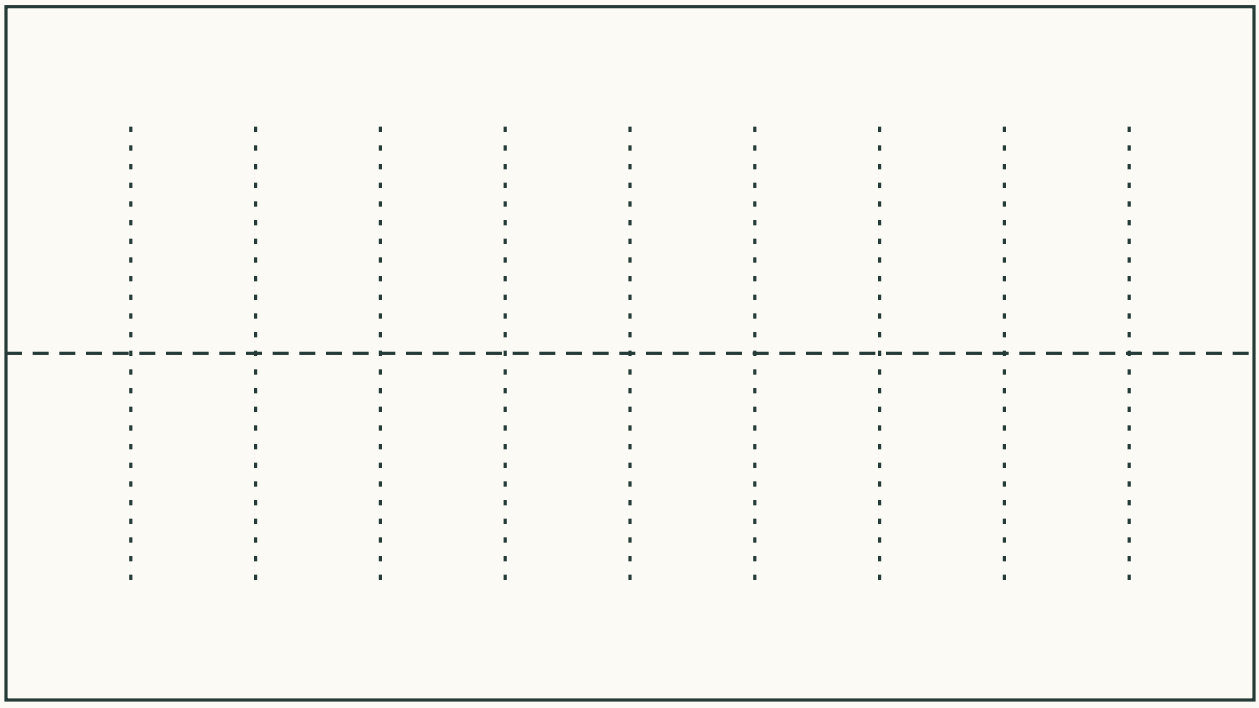
1. Decorate the rectangle. Add a zodiac animal or a Chinese character.

2. Cut out the rectangle. Fold it in half along the dashed line.

3. Cut along the short dotted lines from the folded edge, stopping at the dots.

4. Unfold. Join the short sides into a tube with tape. Ask an adult for help.

CUT OUTER BORDER



Dashed = fold | Dotted = cut, stopping before the edge

Answer key

Keep this page for the teacher.

MATCH THE ANIMALS

1-C (Rat) 2-E (Ox) 3-A (Tiger) 4-F (Rabbit) 5-B (Dragon) 6-D (Snake)

PUT THEM IN ORDER

3. Tiger | 6. Snake | 11. Dog

CLASSROOM NOTES

The names and pinyin in these cards are in Mandarin and use simplified Chinese characters. Goat may also be translated as sheep or ram. The animal sequence is based on the Chinese zodiac.

The craft is a simplified classroom lantern, not a representation of every lantern tradition. Check printing at 100% scale on US Letter paper.

Sample edition | Original text and layout | Not yet classroom-tested