

When they reached the top of the mountain, they saw the first sunrise of the New Year on the horizon. In front of the God and Goddess' gate, the mouse jumped off the cow's back and ran into the house first.

"I am here first!" shouted the mouse.

"I guess I am second," said the cow.

Soon, the tiger and the rabbit came. The rabbit hadn't slept a wink. His eyes are red even to this day. Later, there came the dragon, snake, horse, sheep, and the monkey. Finally, the rooster, dog and wild pig arrived.

When they were all assembled, the God and Goddess greeted them.

"Each year," they explained, "One of you will take a turn to become the leader of the animals for the whole year. You must promise not to fight each other and to take good care of the other animals. Now it is time for us to go home."

With that, the God and Goddess departed. Ever since that time, the twelve animals have taken turns being the leader each year. 1996 is the Year of the Mouse.

As for the cat, he went there the next day, but it was too late. No one was there. He realized that the mouse had tricked him. That is why the cat always chases the mouse.

Discussion:

1. Do you and your family celebrate New Year? How? Are there any special foods and drinks?
2. What is the most important holiday for your family? How do you celebrate it?
3. In what animal year were you born? What character traits do you think you might have inherited from that animal? (For example, strength, wisdom, cleverness, shyness, stubbornness, gentleness, etc.)
4. Research folktales from other cultures that explain why the cat and mouse are enemies.