

# Rabbit

Moulded in China using clay more than 2000 years ago.



Rabbit | China, Han dynasty (206 BC to AD 220), Ceramic

## Background information

In various cultures, the rabbit represents fertility and longevity. It is one of the twelve animals of the Chinese Zodiac. A popular Chinese legend features a rabbit that lives on the moon, and uses a jade pestle and mortar to pound and mix the elixir of immortality. Different versions of the story appear in other cultures, in India, for example. The rabbit also features in popular interpretations of the Christian Easter celebrations.

Han-dynasty tombs created miniature worlds to accompany the deceased into the afterlife. This ranged from copying architectural elements and houses in detail, to providing a retinue of servants and soldiers. Domesticated animals such as cattle, horses, pigs, chickens, and dogs were also included.

On this rabbit, the detailed scoring of the eyes, nose, and paws are characteristic of the miniature animals excavated from Han-dynasty tombs. It is not clear what the significance of this rabbit. It is probably from a tomb, but there is no direct evidence. The rabbit might have been domesticated for food.

Many Daoist legends tell us about the immortality of the rabbit, and the story of how the rabbit lives with the Goddess of the Moon, Chang E, is especially popular. But not all rabbits found on Chinese art are linked to Daoist legends or the moon.

This object was moulded using terracotta. The clay is earth mined from a river bed. Objects made from this type of clay are usually left unglazed, and the fired body is porous. The firing temperature is around 600 to 1000 degrees Celsius.

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## Proposed Activities

### STUDENTS WILL LEARN ABOUT

- The materials used to make objects in the past
- Use of animals as symbols in China and across cultures

### GLOSSARY

**The Chinese Zodiac** is a twelve-year cycle that is marked by twelve different animals.

**Daoism** refers to the Chinese philosophy based on the writings of Lao-Tzu.

### REFERENCES

*Devotion & Desire: Cross-Cultural Art in Asia*. Exhb. Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore, 2013. By Alan Chong, et al.

Welch, P B. *Chinese Art: A Guide to Motifs and Visual Imagery*. North Clarendon, 2008.



### LOOKING ACTIVITIES

1. Notice the details on this object. What animal is this? What kind of creature/ animal is this? How do you know? Let's break the object down! What features do you see?
2. Imagine you are crouched like this animal. What do you think it will do next?
3. How big is it? Is it larger or smaller than your hand?
4. What is it made of?  
What do you think it feels like? Hard? Soft? Smooth? Rough?  
How much do you think it weighs? Would it be heavy or light?
5. Why do people keep animals nowadays? WHY did people keep animals in ancient China? What was their importance, and how were they used?



### MAKING ACTIVITIES

Make your own favourite animal.

1. Design your animal by sketching the basic shapes.
2. Plan the space and materials you need (e.g., amount of plasticine for the parts, space allocated on a paper sheet).
3. Start making your animal!



### CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

#### English

Research folktales about rabbits.

#### Science

What do herbivores like rabbits eat?

#### Chemistry

Research on the Internet materials used in ceramics.