



CHINESE ZODIAC



Year of the Rat

**A Dulwich College
International Writing
Competition**

Winners' Anthology

Key Stage 3 – Manav Jacob – DCB Year 7

Key Stage 4 – Emma Zhang – DCB Year 10

Key Stage 5 – Anita Tao – DHSZ Year 12





A note from Mr Lane, Head of English at Dulwich College Beijing



When the English Department at DCB had the idea for this writing competition (and the added ambition of inviting our friends across the Dulwich network to participate) we really didn't know what to expect. The genuine challenge of writing a one act play was something we hadn't seen our students face before and there was a fear that the chosen theme might lead to some familiar cliches and retelling of stories we had heard before. How unfounded and irrational those fears turned out to be!

The three winners are without a doubt deserving of their titles as you will see from their entries published here. I would, however, like to take this opportunity to thank and congratulate every student who engaged with this competition and submitted their writing for consideration. It is always a huge pleasure when judging the winners is made such a difficult and agonising process! To all of you, I say thank you and well done.

So what made our eventual winners stand out from the crowd? The first thing I hope you will notice is how effectively each student has made use of dramatic features in their writing. You will see they have both followed the conventions of play writing and used these conventions to their advantage. The second feature is how well controlled and complete their narratives are. There are clues subtly hidden at the beginning that only become apparent at the end; they take their audience on a journey and leave them with a satisfying conclusion; they make their characters genuine and believable and authentic. Finally, all three of our winners have done something meaningful with the theme of the competition. They have defied cliches and expectations; reversed them, manipulated them and created something truly original. In this challenging global time, they have given us a message to think about.

And so I proudly present three plays that I would love to see come to life on stage. I hope you feel the same!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Lane". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sam Lane

Head of English

Dulwich College Beijing

Key Stage 3 Winner

The Year of the Rat by Manav Jacob – DCB Year 7

Act One:

(A young boy sits in front of an imaginary TV. Loud cartoon noises. Mother runs in)

Mother: (screaming) Drew! Get it!

Drew: (annoyed) What did you say?

Mother: There's a freakin' rat in the Kitchen! Get it!

Drew: But Mum! Battlestar Galactica is finally on! I'll do it later!

(Actor comes on acting like they're a rat running across the floor)

Mother: (squealing) There it is! Go get it!

Drew: (grabs paper bag from next to him then jumps from couch to floor, and acts like he caught it in bag) I did it! Here!
(Sticks it out towards mum)

Mother: No way! Get that thing away from here!

(Drew sighs and sits back down with the bag next to him)

(A student pops up from inside cardboard TV and acts like an actor in an advert)

TV: Get ready for the huge Chinese New Year Sale! From cosmetics, to home living, we've got just the thing for you! Just come on down to Ikea, celebrating this wonderful Year of the Rat!

(Drew stares in shock, then replays)

TV: (a bit slower) this wonderful Year of the Rat!

(Replays)

TV: (REALLY slow) Year of the Rat!

(Drew looks from TV screen to audience to paper bag. Mission Impossible theme song starts playing. Drew grabs piece of red paper and scissors from table, then with a really concentrated look on his face, starts randomly cutting the paper)

(Music stops)

Mother: (off stage, and yelling) Drew! Quit that racket!

(Music plays again, but more quietly)

(Drew finally finishes, but, away from the audience, takes out a small red Chinese robe, and a red Chinese emperor hat. He then puts his hat on. Drew looks around, and finds a big jar, then acts like he's poking holes in the top, then opens it and puts the fake rat inside)

Drew: Mum! Mum! Check it out!

Mother: (walks on looking at the audience with an annoyed expression) What now? (Turning and seeing rat in the jar. Screams) What the hell is that!

Drew: Well, when you asked me to throw him away, (mother mouths 'him?' towards the audience with mad look on her face) I just couldn't, knowing that this year, is the year dedicated to him! (Drew stands up and points at the bowl)

Mother: Drew, quit this nonsense and just throw (quotation marks) 'him' away!

Drew: Never!

Play the 'The Show Must Go On' by Queen

(Drew puts two fingers from both hands on his temples and starts looking like he is really concentrating, then after 5 secs looks up)

Music stops

Drew: What?! How did that not work! You are supposed to be levitating towards the moon right now! I saw it on television!

Mother: You know what Drew? (Walking over and taking the jar) I will allow you to look after him.

Drew: Yeeeessss! (starts running across stage then after one round he jumps...)

Mother: Buuuuuut (Drew fails the landing from the jump and falls over) only if you spend this whole month studying after school for your big end of year test!

Drew: (Drew's face falls into a mix of shock and sadness. Stuttering) What! (motionless - same expression) Naaaa, forget it old lady! (walks off stage. Lights out)

Curtain.



Key Stage 4 Winner

The Year of the Rat by Emma Zhang – DCB Year 10

Inside a peasant family's home in a small village somewhere in Ancient China. It is 25th day of the first lunar month.

It is not yet midnight, but the sky has already darkened as the length of daylight is short in winter. Outside, the moon clutches at what's left of the thin straps of clouds in the night sky and attempts to cover her dark glare - she too, seems to know.

The walls of the house disappear into the edges of the stage. Without the illumination from the moon, it is pitch-black inside the house. However, the downstage is dimly lit with a soft cold glow.

From the darkness, there are sounds of multiple shuffling feet. Hands are going in and out of the light downstage. Scruffy, thick with calluses, farmer's hands. The rest of the body is hidden in the shadows. They hastily throw fistfuls of rice onto the ground, their swift movements and clunky hands forming an awkward flow. A muffled chewing sound comes from the left corner.

Voices, strained, comes from the dark.

WOMAN: Quit eating.....you! We're.....running.....out of time!

BOY: [the chewing sounds still continues in the darkness]

WOMAN: Oi. [pauses] OI!

BOY AND MAN: [faces pop into the light, fingers to mouth] SHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH. [retreats into the dark]

Ruffling sounds come from the left corner, followed by a suppressed yelp from the boy. The chewing sounds stop.

BOY: Alright, alright, coming..... [another hand starts throwing rice]

MAN: Kid, you know that our luck this year depends on this. Today is the day when the daughter of the rat king is getting married, and we must prepare a grand feast for such an event!

BOY: We didn't do this for the past couple of years, and everything was fine.....all this food is going to go to waste.....those rats better be grateful.....

WOMAN: [stiff laugh] Oh yeah? I had you and that was not fine.

MAN: [concerned] Hey kid, keep it down there, don't let the rats hear you say that.

WOMAN: And how nice of you to mention that we should be quiet when you're the one that keeps on talking.....

MAN: But he needs to know how important this is!

BOY: So much food I can eat with this.....pastries.....rice puddings.....

WOMAN: You two, shut up! Are you and your father performing a Xiang sheng? We must not upset the rats, do you hear-

While the family is busy quarreling, the rat king and his daughter enters from left wing.

BOY: [absentminded] Ohhhhh those rice pudd-

WOMAN: DO YOU HEAR M-

Two spotlights appear, one focusing on the rats and the other on the family. Beads of rice like opulent pearls from an angry woman's neck litter the floor everywhere.

The family's clothes, more like rags, are of dull colouring and blended in with three sallow faces of the man, woman and boy. Unlike his mother and father's wiry frame, the boy is quite plump in the right places. Anyone would assume he has rosy skin, but one would understand why no colour tipped his cheekbones given the current situation. Under the light, their appearance is like a chalk pastel painting of greys and blues.

Meanwhile, the rat king and his daughter are dressed – as one would suppose – with velvet robes and boastful jewels. Yet it was still not enough to hide their lowdown nature. Looking closely, the velvet worn by the rats are dotted with rotten spots, and the daughter's white collar is stained with brown.

RAT KING: [strong nasal sound] QUIT BICKERING. I keep on telling you people that there is NO time to waste on this day. Idiots, such idiots!

The man and woman hastily fall onto their knees, except for the boy, who is staring at the colossal creatures in front of him. His eyes betray fear, complemented with his mouth which is slightly agape. Realising that the boy is still standing, the woman claws at his round wrists and wrenches him down to the floor.

Thud.

MAN: The great rat king! We are almost prepared for the grand feast!

RAT DAUGHTER: [haughty] EVERYTIME you people say that. You are telling me that this rice on the ground is for me to eat?

WOMAN: But, but, isn't it, what we are su-su-supposed to d-do?

RAT DAUGHTER: [rolls eyes] Father, I still cannot believe that you tell these humans to do this every year, it's not like we can't take the thing we are actually coming here for without them planning this mess.

RAT KING: Sweetie, I still need to get to your 999 sisters after you pick your prey so please do it promptly.

The family looks at each other, all very confused.

RAT DAUGHTER: Ugh, but honestly, it hurts my eyes just looking at this.....

BOY: [gets angry] Hey, what do you mean by mess? I could have saved this rice to eat for myself, but I was nice enough to give it to you, yet now you are saying that you're not eating it? Stupid rats, how can you –

RAT DAUGHTER: [giggles, strolling closer to the boy while pointing at him] Father, I pick this one.

The spotlight on the rats grows and covers half of the stage; the spotlight on the family is squeezed into the down-right corner of the stage.

BOY: S-stop, don't come any closer, you filthy rat!

RAT KING: There couldn't be a better choice made. I do have to say – after all these years, this boy is the largest I have seen yet! Well come one then, go take him.

MAN: Don't take my boy!

Daughter starts closing in onto the boy.

BOY: AHHHHHHHHHHHHH-

Blackout.

The stage is lit again with a single spotlight focused on the boy. The rats and his parents have disappeared. He is sat upright on a bed that was on the stage from the very beginning of the act. His eyes are wide, and hair is plastered onto his sweaty face.

BOY: A dream, a nightmare, that's all, that's all.....

He looks around, as if trying to find something.

BOY: Say, what day is it today? [mutters] Well, the full moon happened just a couple of days before New Year's Eve..... [fiddles fingers] 25...26...27...28...29...so today...22...23...24.....is the 25th?

Red light floods the stage. Rats roam the floor everywhere. They are coming for the boy. He starts to open his mouth...

Blackout.



Key Stage 5 Winner

The Year Of Rat By Anita Tao – DHSZ Year 12

Scene One

[Today is New Year Eve. The whole alley is decked in welcoming red lanterns with cheerful music floating in the air. Different from this harmonious and graceful sight, around a corner of a shop, Mr. Rat, a man in his mid-thirties or forties, is sunk deep in sleep with his body curled up to keep warm. In front, there is an old mug half-filled with pennies firmly grasped in his hand. His hair is all disheveled and he is wearing an ill-fitting dull mustard t-shirt, probably the product of a hand-me-down, yet it is already stained by grime. Another man, Bob Bradley, comes from the end of the alley, dressing in a charcoal corduroy suit that matches vintage-looking leather loafers.]

Bob Bradley [kicking with hand pinching the nose]: Get away from my shop! You sleazy waster!

Mr. Rat [shouting]: Ow! [He instantly jumps up and grips that old mug.]

Bob Bradley: If you don't get out of my sight within one second, I'll call the police. Because of you, no one wants to come near my shop!

Mr. Rat [bowing]: I am sorry sir! I am sorry, but I beg you to pardon me. I haven't eaten for days and all I want is just one penny. [He tries to tug at Bradley's trousers.]

Bob Bradley [glaring]: Don't touch me, filthy rat! Are you trying to make me pity you? Look at you. All you need to think about is how to fill your stomach with that little mug, but for me, I need to deal with business and raise my family twenty-four hours a day! Do you know how many minutes there are in a month?

[Mr. Rat shakes his head.]

Bob Bradley: Over forty-four thousand minutes! If I am lucky, I can earn six thousand pounds at best. For every six minutes, do you know how much I can get?

[Mr. Rat shakes his head again.]

Bob Bradley: About 100 pennies. But within only a few seconds, you were asking me to give you one! Do you know how long I could earn it back? Don't you feel shame?

Mr. Rat [confused]: Eh... Ah... I am sorry sir. I will not ask you for money again then.

Bob Bradley [raising his eyebrows]: That's all? You can get so much money speaking just one sentence, but I need to rack my brain for even single penny. Is there anything worse than that?

Mr. Rat [awkward and hesitant]: Well... What can I do for you then?

Bob Bradley [snickering]: Oh, I will not make this hard for you.

[Mr. Rat sighs with relief, but soon he hears a metallic sound. He looks down and sees Bob Bradley taking out one penny from the mug.]

Bob Bradley [grinning]: I will not take more than that. Only one penny! It is dirty, but I don't mind.
[He walks away with his leather wallet in hand and his head up.]

Mr. Rat: Sir...!

[Spotlight on Mr. Rat]

Mr. Rat [soliloquy]: Well, today is really not my day... [sighing] But it seems like he is truly busy, and maybe there is something wrong with his business or even his family. Never mind. I wish him a good day!

Scene Two

[It is New Year and despite the gusts of cold air sending running chills along the alley, the air has been filled with excitement and energy; the liveliness was like a steaming kettle ready to blow. Everyone has walked outside their home and you can almost smell the flavor of renascence. Later when night falls, it will be the highlight of the whole day where fiery red and golden yellow dispersed into freckles of azure. Around the corner, Mr. Rat is still asleep while the freezing air constantly makes him shiver. Bob Bradley, along with his little daughter Tessa, is heading to the shop.]

Bob Bradley [taking a broom from the corner and whipping Mr. Rat across his face]: I've told you that I don't want to see you again! Get out of my sight! Now!

Mr. Rat: Stop! Please stop! I'll go, I promise.

Tessa Bradley: Daddy, what's the matter?

Bob Bradley [mildly]: Oh, nothing honey. Your friend is waiting for you. Leave your bag with me and have fun! But remember to come back before dinner! [taking her bag and patting her affectionately on the head]

[Tessa gives her father a suspicious gaze and skips away along the alley.]

Bob Bradley [frowning]: Are you here to get that penny back?

Mr. Rat: No. No!

Bob Bradley [snorting]: Well, let me tell you. You'll never get the money back once it is in my pocket.

Mr. Rat [waving]: I never thought about it!

Bob Bradley [strolling around Mr. Rat with hands behind his back]: I admit that you have the gift to be a spy - following me and waiting at the spot. So professional! Or let's call it "cunning". Do you really need to be this importunate? For only one penny?

Mr. Rat [murmuring]: Who is indeed the importunate one?

Bob Bradley: What are you saying?

Mr. Rat: Nothing sir! I don't want you to give that penny back, but could you allow me to stay here for a while? I will only take the place under the roof, and I swear that I will not come closer!

Bob Bradley [furious]: How dare you! Why would I ever want you to stay close to my shop! It's ridiculous and people like you deserve homes like the sewer! That'll be nice.

[Mr. Rat is about to say something, but Tessa runs to Bob Bradley.]

Tessa [yelling]: Daddy!

Bob Bradley: Yes, honey. What's wrong? Are you thirsty?

Tessa: I'm fine, but why is it so noisy here daddy? Are you still cursing him? [pointing towards Mr. Rat]

Bob Bradley: No, no my dear. I'm not cursing him. I'm... I'm reasoning with him. See? He's a beggar, a vagrant, and if you don't study hard, you'll be like him.

Tessa [stamping her feet]: Dad...! That's so cruel! You have been arguing with him for "years", and you still don't want to tell me what happened?

Bob Bradley [sighing]: Well, Tessa, listen. This is not something that you need to worry about, but this impudent guy wants us to lend him a space near our shop!

Mr. Rat [cautiously]: Rent, sir.

Tessa: Rent?

Mr. Rat: Oh miss, I've given your dad one penny for it.

Tessa [confused]: One penny?

Bob Bradley: Honey, this is why I refused him! It's totally unreasonable!

Tessa [disgruntled]: Daddy, but why did you accept it then? Ms. Brown told us that once we accept money from others, it means that we accept their requests.

Bob Bradley [scratching his head]: Er...

Tessa: why not just rent him the space then. He looks so poor!

Mr. Rat [hastily]: Thank you miss! Thank you! I'll only stay for a few days! It won't be long.

Bob Bradley [keeping a straight face]: Alright, alright. Satisfied? Honey, daddy is a bit busy right now. Go and play with your friends, and I'll come and collect you later.

Tessa: OK!

[Tessa walks away.]

[Bob Bradley glowers at Mr. Rat and walks away.]

Scene Three

[It's a random day after Mr. Rat settles down near Bob Bradley's shop. He sits on the stairs in front of the shop and watches the waning day spread itself out into pre-dusk light. Sunset glow, alley, pedestrian - everything looks so harmonious. Suddenly, appearing with a soft, crackling sound, a beer can rolls to his feet.]

Mr. Rat [pointing at the can]: Sir, you dropped something!

Stranger [impatient]: Yuck! Get out of the way!
[He kicks the can aside and strikes away.]

[Mr. Rat rapidly runs towards the muddy can and gingerly picks it up with both hands.]

Mr. Rat [soliloquy]: Twenty seven...! It's late now. Time to go.

[Mr. Rat gently put the can into a large sack behind him which is already half-full. Laboriously hoisting the sack onto his shoulder, Mr. Rat slowly went away.]

Scene Four

[As the dark curtain falls over the land, Mr. Rat returns to the shop. He lays down painfully and watches the waning gibbous moon hovers tenuously in the twilight firmament with myriad stars dotted around. The sack has been neatly folded, and besides, there is a clean plastic bag and a couple of pennies. Bob Bradley finally finishes the work today and walks out of the shop.]

Bob Bradley [yawning]: Gosh, it's been a long day! I need to be quick. Tessa is waiting me at home.
[Suddenly he hears a slight sound.]

Bob Bradley [shuddering and taking a step back]: Who's there?

[No one answers. Bob Bradley takes a deep breath and moves towards the corner.]

Bob Bradley: Pooh - I was worried about thieves sneaking in. It was indeed you again! Don't think that you can be arrogant even if I have lent my roof to you.

[Mr. Rat does not answer him and sits still with his back to Bob Bradley.]

Bob Bradley: Hey! [He stops as he notices Mr. Rat taking something out from the plastic bag.]

Mr. Rat [whistling]: Time for dinner!

[There is a movement in the trees ahead of the shop, and soon a tortoise-shell cat softly comes out. Though its fur is covered with grass clippings and leaves, it is not hard to see that it has been delicately brushed. Behind, Bob Bradley can vaguely see several little heads - probably its kids. They deftly skim over the lawn, bound up the steps and sit besides Mr. Rat.]

Mr. Rat [stroking its fur]: Good girl! You must be hungry - it's been a long day. Look what I brought for you!

[Mr. Rat opens the plastic bag and pours out all the food inside. Then from somewhere, he takes out a large piece of cardboard, carefully laying it out on the ground under the roof.]

Mr. Rat [giggling]: Take it easy! I'm not gonna take that food -it's for you. It rains a lot these days, so I brought this cupboard for you. It's just under the roof and you can come whenever you want. Don't worry! Nobody is gonna hurt you - I have rented this space from a generous man. Well, at least so far...

[Mr. Rat's voice gradually faints in the air, leaving Bob Bradley alone standing stiffly in the shadow. He clenches his fists so hard as if an apology can be poured out through his fingers.]

[Spotlight on Bob Bradley]

Bob Bradley [soliloquy] [voice cracking]: Jeez, what did I do to that man! I... I didn't know he rented it for this! I thought... I thought...

[Bob Bradley hesitates for a moment, yet still walks away without disturbing Mr. Rat and his cats.]

Scene Five

[Returning to home, Bob Bradley gets caught in the endless cycle of regret and blame.]

Bob Bradley [cradling his head in his arms]: How could I compensate him? Giving him lots of money and allowing him to stay as long as he wishes? [hesitating for a moment and soon shaking his head] Oh no, sympathy could only make him feel worse! Respect is what he really needs.

[Bob Bradley takes out that one penny from his wallet and muses.]

Tessa Bradley: Daddy, what's in your hand? Is this one penny? It's so dirty!

Bob Bradley: Yeah, it doesn't look nice, but it is still worth one penny. [smiling] Yes, one penny...

[Surprisingly, Tessa Bradley finds that instead of sneering and throwing it away, her father, without saying a word, rummages out a handkerchief and cleans the surface of the coin meticulously as if it is the most precious gift.]

Bob Bradley [gazing at the coin]: Honey...

Tessa Bradley: Uh huh?

Bob Bradley: I might come back a bit late tomorrow.

Tessa Bradley: Why?

Bob Bradley: I need to go to the pet shop.

Tessa Bradley: Pet shop?

Bob Bradley [nodding]: Well, I need to reciprocate one of my friends with some little gifts.

Scene Six

[The next morning, Mr. Rat is still crouching under the roof. Turning over while the warm breeze smooths his frown, Mr. Rat slowly opens his eyes. Clumsily dragging himself into a sitting position, he soon finds something unusual - a beautiful white woollen quilt has been carefully pulled over his wizened body. He bites at his lips, looking thoughtful. As he turns his head, a well-polished coin is lying quietly beside with a note attached.]

Mr. Rat [taking off the note and muttering]: Every penny has the same value.

[He grins and clutches that penny tightly in hand. Then he slowly stands up, and gravely, bows to the shop.]

Mr. Rat: Thank you sir! And wish you a belated Happy New Year!

[A beam of warm yellow light shines on his profile, filling the air with coziness and harmony.]

