

Nian, the Chinese monster

Tell your children this traditional story associated with Chinese New Year celebrations.

Long, long ago, there was a terrifying monster called Nian living on his own inside a lonely mountain. At the end of every year, he would come down from the mountain to the nearby villages to hunt for food.

The villagers were so scared of Nian as he rampaged through their streets killing and eating people and animals. He would devour whole villages and for years the people would run away to escape the monster. Many brave warriors tried to kill the monster with spears and bows and arrows but with no success.



One year, a wise man who had travelled far and wide, came to the village and told the people Nian's secret. 'The monster has a weakness,' he said, "He is scared of the colour red. If you paint your village red, he will keep away. Light fires and the red and orange flames will scare him off. Set off noisy firecrackers and he will run away!'

Everyone in the village got busy painting the outsides of their houses with red paint, hanging up red curtains and sheets until that New Year's Eve the village glowed with the colour red. They lit bonfires in gardens and on street corners, set off deafening fire crackers, and marched up and down the streets banging together saucepans and lids and making as much loud noise as possible.

It worked. When Nian came down from the mountain that night, stomping hungrily towards the village, he came to an abrupt halt outside the walls. His red eyes saw the bright red walls and red fabric moving in the wind, the glowing flames and flickering fires and then he heard the most ear-splitting noise. Firecrackers erupted into the sky all around him.

The villagers danced up and down the streets banging lids together and hitting saucepans with spoons. He roared in fear, turned round and ran back to the mountain and was never seen again.

Nowadays, at Chinese New Year, everyone celebrates by decorating their houses with red decorations, paper chains, lanterns and drapes. Fireworks and music are also a major part of the celebrations. And the monster Nian never returns.

