



## NIAN, THE NEW YEAR MONSTER

*a Chinese tale, retold by Chris Tse*

It was spring. The snow was starting to melt, and as they did every year, the people in the small village of Peach Blossom were getting ready to leave their homes and go to the mountains. They knew that if they stayed, they would be in great danger.



All their lives, Yen and Jun had heard stories of the terrible monster Nian. They knew that every year, at the end of winter, Nian would appear, rampaging through the village and eating everything in sight. Yen and Jun had never seen Nian, but they could picture him very clearly. Their grandmother had told them about his teeth and claws that were as sharp as knives, the horn on his head that could tear through doors, and his fearsome roar that could be heard across all of China.



The children were helping their grandmother to pack when there was a knock on the door. Yen opened the door to see an old man. He had a thick blanket over his shoulders, and he was carrying a large bag. The man told Yen he was on his way to visit some relatives.

“I have travelled a long way, and I am tired and hungry,” he said. “Can you spare me some food?”

Yen looked at his grandmother. She smiled, invited the old man in, and gave him a bowl of rice and vegetables. As he ate, he asked, “Where are all the other people?”

“They have already left for the mountains,” Grandmother told him.

“We are leaving, too,” said Jun. “You should come with us before Nian arrives.”

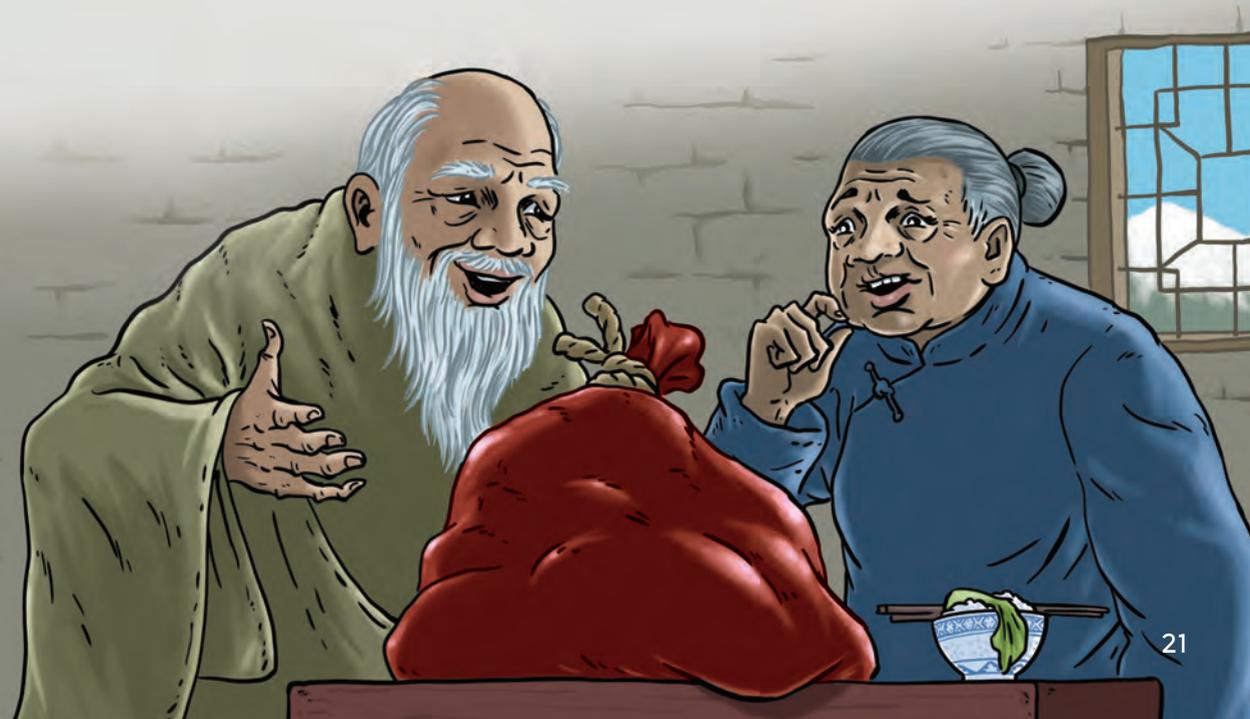
The old man sat up when he heard the name of the monster. His eyes shone. “I’ve heard of this Nian, the monster that comes looking for food once a year.”

He picked up his bag and placed it on the table, smiling. “There is no reason to be scared of Nian,” he said. “In this bag, I have three secret weapons. They will keep Nian away for good. If you wish, you can use them. I will help you.”

Yen and Jun looked at their grandmother. They could see that she was deep in thought. Could this stranger really help them? At last, she turned to the old man. “Yes, please. We’d like you to help us get rid of Nian.”

“Wonderful!” the man exclaimed. “Then let’s get to work – we have a lot to do before the night comes.”

The day passed quickly as the children and their grandmother followed the old man’s instructions. They finished just as night fell. Then they sat and waited for Nian’s arrival.



After a while, they heard a sound. At first, they thought it was the wind, but then the sound changed to a low rumbling. As it got closer, they realised it was the sound of breathing – deep, heavy breathing that could only come from a very large creature ...

“Wait here,” said the old man. He slipped quietly out through the back door and hid in the shadows beside the house. The children and their grandmother waited nervously.

Nian walked slowly through the village streets. There was no one in sight. The monster sniffed the night air. He could smell people. He could smell *children* in one of the houses very close by. He let out an angry roar.

As Nian approached the house, he saw that it was covered in red banners. Candles were burning in the windows and bright red lanterns were hanging from the roof. Nian began to tremble. He was scared of fire and the colour red.

Then, suddenly, he heard loud screams and thunderous bangs. There was noise and smoke all around. Nian was terrified. He turned and fled, whimpering.

Yen, Jun, and their grandmother ran outside just as the old man lit the last fireworks and tossed them into the air. They saw Nian disappearing into the dark night.

“He won’t be back,” said the old man.



When the villagers returned the next day, the old man had gone, too. The children and their grandmother told the people how the strange old man had helped them scare Nian away. The villagers were very happy. Now they knew that fire, the colour red, and loud noises would keep the village safe from the monster.

Today, at New Year, when winter is over, the people of China still light lanterns and set off fireworks. They wear red clothes and hang up red banners to bring good fortune into their homes and keep bad luck away. Chinese New Year is a wonderful time to celebrate with family and eat lots of delicious food, especially when there are no monsters around to steal it!

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The Ministry of Education and Lif Education would like to thank Amy Zeng for reviewing “Nian, the New Year Monster”.

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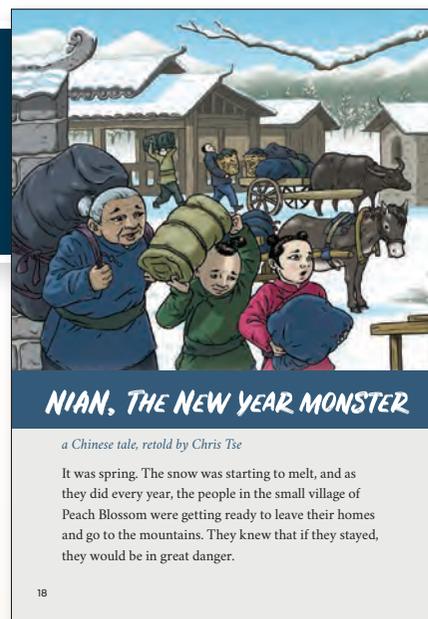
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Published 2019 by the Ministry of Education,  
PO Box 1666, Wellington 6140, New Zealand.  
[www.education.govt.nz](http://www.education.govt.nz)

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ISBN 978 1 77669 802 8 (online)  
ISSN 2463 4174 (online)

Publishing Services: Lif Education E Tū  
Editor: David Chadwick  
Designer: Jodi Wicksteed  
Literacy Consultant: Dr Kay Hancock  
Consulting Editors: Hōne Apanui and Emeli Sione



## JUNIOR JOURNAL 59

### Curriculum learning areas

English  
Social Sciences

### Reading year level

Year 3

### Keywords

celebration, China, Chinese New Year, cooperation, courage, culture, fireworks, helping others, monster, Nian, New Year, problem solving, tradition, traditional tale