

Ma Liang and his Magic Brush



Once upon a time there was a boy named Ma Liang whose father and mother had died when he was a child. He lived in a village in China where he earned a living by gathering firewood and cutting weeds.

Now the one thing that Ma Liang longed to do was to paint, but he was so poor that he could not even afford to buy a brush. So he used twigs from firewood to draw birds on the sand. He practised hard every day. His pictures were so good they almost came to life!

One night when he was fast asleep after a busy day, an old man appeared holding a golden brush. "This is a magic brush," he said. "Use it carefully!" Then the old man vanished. Ma Liang woke with a start. There by the side of his bed was a golden brush.

He couldn't wait to try out his new brush. First he painted a bird. He watched in amazement as the bird came to life. It flapped its wings and sang. Then he painted a fish which plunged into the river outside and darted away. He painted every day for the poor folk in the village: a plough, a hoe, an oil lamp or a bucket for the families that needed them.

► The news of Ma Liang's magic brush began to spread. One day a rich landlord heard about it. The landlord captured the poor boy and tried to force him to paint gold coins. Ma Liang did not like the landlord. "You don't need any more gold," he said. "It's the poor people who need my help." The angry landlord ordered Ma Liang to be locked up without any food.

Ma Liang was with other prisoners. He remembered his magic brush. He painted a ladder to lean against the wall. All the prisoners followed Ma Liang up the ladder and over the wall, escaping into the darkness.

Very soon the sound of the landlord and his men could be heard. Ma Liang quickly painted a horse and galloped away. He rode on until he came to a small village. He decided it was safe to stay there. He painted for poor people. Ma Liang became known for his kindness. ►

Once again, news of the magic brush spread until it reached the ears of the emperor, a cruel man who hated people. Soldiers were sent to bring Ma Liang to court. The emperor ordered him to paint a dragon but Ma Liang would not. The emperor was furious. He took the magic brush and threw Ma Liang into prison.

Then he tried using the magic brush himself to paint a gold mountain, but it turned into a pile of rocks. The emperor realised that the magic brush would not work for him. He released Ma Liang and promised him riches and a princess in marriage if he would paint for him. Ma Liang had a plan. He pretended to agree.

The emperor ordered Ma Liang to paint the sea. Then he ordered fish and a boat to sail out to sea to watch the fish. The emperor, empress, princes, princesses and many ministers boarded the boat and it moved off. But the wind was not strong enough for the emperor. Ma Liang's magic brush brought a strong wind. The sea grew rough. A few more strokes and the sea roared and big waves rolled.

"Enough, enough wind!" shouted the emperor, but Ma Liang paid no attention. A hurricane blew up, the sky darkened and angry waves got higher and higher. At last the boat capsized and sank with the emperor and all on board to the bottom of the sea.

The story of the emperor spread far and wide. People say that Ma Liang roamed the earth painting for the poor wherever he went.



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Read the story 'Ma Liang and his Magic Brush'.

Now answer these questions.

1 What is the story about?

Underline **one answer** below.

Poor people should work hard.

Rich people are always happy.

It is better to be kind than rich.

2 Who is the main character in the story?

.....

3 The **landlord** is rich and angry.

Think of **one other word** to describe him and write it below.

.....

4 Did you like the **old man** in the story?

Why or why not?

.....

.....

.....

5 Do you think Ma Liang was right to make the boat sink with the emperor on board?

.....

Why or why not?

.....

 Read from ► to ◀ in the story again.

 Now it's your turn to write.

6 Imagine you were a prisoner with Ma Liang.
Write a letter to your friend telling her about what happened.

Remember to write about

- what sort of person Ma Liang was
- how Ma Liang helped you to escape
- how you felt about Ma Liang

Start your letter like this.

Dear

One day a boy called Ma Liang was brought to the prison

8. Write the sentence. Put in **capital letters** and the missing **speech marks**, **commas** and **full stops**.

i want you to paint the sea said the emperor to ma liang

.....

9. Draw a line to the word with a **similar** meaning.

furious	started
small	angry
began	little

10. Underline the **nouns** in the sentence.

He used a brush to paint his pictures.

11. Put in the missing **vowels** and write the words correctly.

h – lp

d – rkn – ss

v – n – sh - d