

READING

The origins of a modern day festival

Once upon a time, thousands of years ago and for many years, the people of China had lived in peace and harmony, until one New Year's Eve a monster named Nian (which in modern Chinese means 'year') came from the sea. It looked like a bull with the head of a lion and had a huge mouth that swallowed several people in one bite. People screamed in terror and tried to run away.

An old man, who was actually an immortal god in disguise, came to the rescue of the frightened people. He had seen their great fear and had taken pity on them. 'Nian is afraid of the colour red,' he told them 'so put red paper decorations on your windows and doors.' He also revealed that the monster was afraid of noise and so they should make as much noise as possible. And finally, he instructed them to light fires as the creature was terrified of fire. If they did this, they would scare Nian away. 'Do this every New Year, in case Nian returns,' he declared. After he had given them his words of advice he ran after the beast, jumped on its back and rode away.

To this day, the people of China put up red paper, light fireworks and hang lanterns on New Year's Eve. There is usually a parade with a large crowd of people making lots of noise and enjoying the carnival atmosphere. The Chinese New Year does not always fall on the same date each year, although it is always in January or February. It's an important celebration all over the world and there are similar celebrations in Japan, Korea and Vietnam.

11 Read the text. Correct the wrong information in the sentences.

1 In modern Chinese, Nian means 'monster'.

2 An old woman rescued the people.

3 The god told them Nian was afraid of water.

4 After he had warned the people, the old man killed the beast.

5 New Year in China is always on the same date.

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12 Read the text again. Answer the questions.

1 Describe the monster's appearance.

2 Why did the old man take pity on the people?

3 What did the old man tell the people?

4 After hearing his advice, what did the people do?

5 What do Chinese people do on New Year's Eve these days?

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13 Find words in text that mean the following.

1 a happy and cooperative existence

2 great fear

3 changes in appearance so that one is not recognised

4 a frightening or dangerous animal, a monster

5 almost the same, sharing some characteristics

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