

How the Lion Dance Started

A long time ago in China, there was a scary beast named Nian. Nian means "year" in Chinese. He lived deep in the ocean and only came out once a year. This day was on New Year's Eve. Nian would go to the village and terrorise its people. He was a fierce monster and loved eating humans, especially young children.

One year, a lion came down from the mountains and chased Nian away. The villagers were saved and wanted to thank the lion, but the mysterious lion disappeared back into the mountains before anyone could speak to him.

In the following year, the villagers were once again feeling scared and anxious. They wished they had the lion to protect them again. A wise old man came up with a plan to scare away Nian. Using bamboo and shiny cloth, the villagers created a lion costume. Two villagers would wear the costume to frighten Nian.

Night fell and the villagers were ready for Nian. Some villagers lit fire crackers and banged cymbals, gongs and drums which frightened Nian. Other villagers stuck red paper on their houses and wore red clothes, which further terrified Nian. He was afraid of the colour red.

Lastly, Nian came face to face with the costume lion. With all the noise coming from the drums, cymbals and firecrackers, Nian became confused and mistook the costume as the real lion! He turned around and ran for his life, back into the deep ocean. Nian was never seen again!

Every year on New Year's Eve, the villagers continued the tradition of the lion dance, accompanied with fire crackers, drums, cymbals and wearing of red clothes. They believed the lion dance brought good luck, ensuring all the villagers a safe and happy new year.

Comprehension Questions

1. Where does Nian live?
2. What does the word nian mean in Chinese?
3. What does Nian like to eat?
4. What did the villagers use to make the lion costume?
5. Why do you think Nian was scared of the colour red?
6. Why is the Lion dance performed during the Chinese New Year?

