

Momotaro

Once upon a time, a long long time ago, there lived a farmer and his wife in a remote corner of Japan. They had no children of their own, so were often a little lonely. However, they kept themselves busy as the man would gather firewood in the hills and his wife would wash clothes in a nearby stream.

One day when the woman was doing her washing, she noticed an enormous peach travelling downstream. She managed to grab it and carried it home very carefully. It was ever so heavy though!

As soon as her husband came back from the mountains, she brought out the tasty treat for the two of them to try. However, as she went to cut the peach in two, it suddenly split open and with a loud wail, out jumped a small boy! The old couple were ever so shocked, but equally delighted. They decided to keep the boy and named him Momotaro (Peach boy).

Momotaro grew up in a loving home and grew into a strong, powerful and kind young boy. Everyone in the village respected him. One day, Momotaro heard a rumour about a group of ogres who lived on Onigashima (ogre island) and who scared all the people in nearby towns. Momotaro asked his parents if this was true and when they said yes, Momotaro decided there and then that he had to go to Onigashima and scare the ogres away once and for all.

Momotaro's parents were incredibly worried about his journey, but they understood his reasons for wanting to do it. They prepared some millet dumplings for him to take on his way and waved him off.

Momotaro set off in high spirits. As he left the village, a dog approached Momotaro and said, "Momotaro, where are you going and what are you carrying?"

Momotaro answered, "I'm going to Onigashima to fight the ogres and these delicious dumplings are for me to eat along the way. They are the best dumplings in the whole of Japan and if you come and help me with my fight, I'll let you eat one!"

The dog was ever so hungry, so he agreed to Momotaro's request. As the pair of them walked along, they came across a pheasant.

"Where are you going Momotaro and what are you carrying?" the pheasant asked.

Once again Momotaro explained the situation: "I'm going to Onigashima to fight the ogres and these delicious dumplings are for me to eat along the way. They are the best dumplings in the whole of Japan and if you come and help me with my fight, I'll let you eat one!"

The pheasant agreed to join the party.

As the three of them made their way to Onigashima, a monkey appeared on the path in front of them.

"Where are you going Momotaro and what are you carrying?" the monkey asked curiously.

"I'm going to Onigashima to fight the ogres and these delicious dumplings are for me to eat along the way. They are the best dumplings in the whole of Japan and if you come and help me with my fight, I'll let you eat one!"

Upon hearing this, the monkey decided to help them on their way.

Finally, after several days, the group approached the island. The ogres soon spotted the boat and shouted down to them,

"Who are you and what are you doing here? If you come onto our island, we will kill you!"

However, Momotaro and his friends weren't scared and within minutes of landing, the pheasant had unlocked the large iron gate and they burst their way into the village.

"We've come to punish you for scaring all of the people in this land!" yelled Momotaro. With that, the pheasant started pecking the ogres, the monkey leapt about and scratched the demons and the dog bit arms and legs. Because they'd eaten the dumplings, they were incredibly strong and most of the demons went running to the hills. The leader begged Momotaro to spare their lives and in return for doing so he promised that they would never again bother the villagers. To prove he was serious, he also told Momotaro to take back all of the treasure that the ogres had stolen from the villages.

Momotaro and his gang were delighted and returned to a heroes' welcome!

