

Momotaro the Peach Boy (part 1)

Once upon a time there was an old man who lived with his wife in the mountains. They had no children and were very lonely. Every day, the old man would go into the forest to collect firewood while his wife washed clothes in the stream.

One day, as the old woman was doing her washing, a giant peach came floating down the stream. It was the biggest peach the old woman had ever seen. "That will be perfect for supper," she said. She reached over and pulled the peach out of the water.

The old woman waited for her husband to come home. When he arrived she showed him the giant peach. Licking his lips greedily, the old man took a knife and started to cut the peach.

"Wait! Please don't hurt me" cried a little voice. Suddenly the peach split open and a small boy jumped out! At first the old couple were startled, but when the boy started singing and dancing in circles around them, they joined in – delighted that they had been blessed with a child. They called him Momotaro, which means 'Peach Boy'.

Momotaro grew up to be big and strong. He was also kind and liked to help the old couple as much as he could. But one day, Momotaro told the old man that he wanted to see more of the world. He wanted to travel to the village across the mountains and see what it was like. The old couple agreed to the boy's wish and gave him some millet dumplings to eat on his journey.

When Momotaro arrived in the village he was surprised to see that everyone was sad. There were no children in the village. They had all been taken away by the bad Ogres that lived on a distant island called Onigashima. The Ogres were always stealing things from the village, and the people lived in fear. Momotaro wanted to help. "I'm going to Ogre Island," he said. "I will fight them

and bring back what they have taken."

And so Momotaro began his journey to the sea. At the edge of the village he met a hungry dog. The dog was growling and barking. Momotaro gave him one of his millet dumplings. The dog gobbled down the dumpling. "I'm going to Onigashima to fight the Ogres," said Momotaro. "Do you want to come?" The dog nodded eagerly. Together they set off for the sea.

Further along the path they met a sleeping monkey. The dog barked at the monkey, startling him. The monkey started to throw sticks and stones at them – angry at being woken up. Momotaro offered the monkey one of his millet dumplings. "Don't be afraid. We are going to Ogre Island. Do you want to come?" The monkey nodded, greedily munching on the dumpling. Together they continued to the sea.

As they made their way onto a pebbled beach, a pheasant suddenly flew out from behind a rock. The dog started barking angrily and the monkey started to throw pebbles at the bird. "Stop!" said Momotaro. He offered the pheasant his last millet dumpling. "We can all be friends. Do you want to come to Ogre Island with us?" The pheasant happily agreed.

With the help of his three friends, Momotaro built a boat and set sail for Ogre Island. Soon there was no land in sight – just rolling ocean waves. Pulling out a map that the villagers had given him, Momotaro began to plan his journey...

Teachers' notes

See pages 6–7 for follow-up activities. The final chapter of the story can be found on the inside back cover of this issue.

Story retold by Mike Ward

