

The Story of Momotaro the Peach Boy

Once upon a time there was an old man and his old wife living in a village in Japan. The old man, called **Ojiisan** was a woodcutter and his wife, **Obaasan**, a washerwoman. They lived alone as they had no children.

One day the old woman went to the river and had just begun washing the clothes when, to her surprise, a giant peach came floating down the river. It was the biggest peach she had ever seen and she coaxed it out of the river and took it home for supper.

As she was getting ready to cut the peach in half, the sound of a human voice came from inside the peach. "Wait! Don't cut me!" said the voice. Suddenly the peach split open and a beautiful baby boy jumped out of the peach.

The old people were astounded. But the baby said, "Don't be afraid. Heaven saw how lonely you were without any children and sent me to you."

So the old people happily took the baby to be their son. Since he was born from a peach, they named him **Momotaro**, which means Peach Boy. They loved him very much and raised him to be a fine boy.

Years went by and Momotaro grew into a fine young man, making his parents even happier. But times were changing and people were having a very hard time because more and more **oni** (ogres) were ravaging their coasts and nobody knew what to do.

When Momotaro was about 15 years old, he went to his parents and said, "In a distant part of the sea there is an island named **Onigashima** (ogre island.) The oni often come to our land and do bad things like carrying people away and stealing their things. So I'm going to go to Onigashima and fight the oni and free the prisoners there and bring back the stolen treasure."

The old people were surprised, but proud of Momotaro for wanting to help other people. Obaasan fixed him his favourite food of millet dumplings called **kibidango** which she wrapped up in a **furoshiki** cloth and he went on his journey.

On the way, Momotaro met a spotted dog (**inu**), a monkey (**saru**) and a pheasant (**kiji**) and gave them each a kibidango which encouraged them to join him. Being a good leader, Momotaro relied on the special talents of each animal and encouraged them to work together and become friends.

When they reached the sea Momotaro had to find a boat in order to sail to the Onigashima where the oni had built a fortified castle. The companions had to find a way into the castle in secret to surprise the oni. The pheasant flew over the walls, the monkey climbed up and opened the gate and Momotaro and the dog rushed in and overpowered the gatekeeper. Finally, Momotaro forced the oni leader to surrender and to promise never to do wicked things again. Then Momotaro and his friends took home all the prisoners and the treasure they'd found locked up in the Onigashima. Ojiisan and Obaasan rejoiced to see Momotaro return home safely.