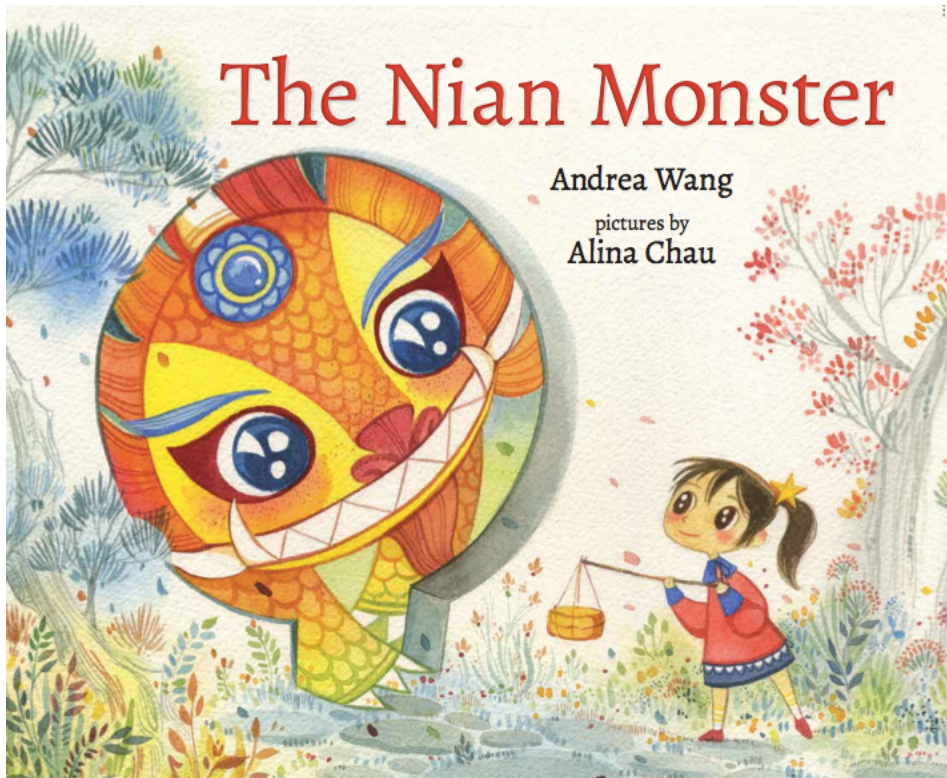


Teacher's Guide for

# The Nian Monster

Written by Andrea Wang  
Pictures by Alina Chau



*“Wang’s story thrills but doesn’t threaten: Chau’s wonderfully vivid watercolors give the monster doe eyes and a round body that make him seem like a cranky, overgrown teddy bear, and Wang shares cultural information about the Chinese New Year with the lightest of touches.”*

*- A starred review by Publisher’s Weekly*

### About the Author Andrea Wang

Andrea Wang's publishing career began when she was in second grade! Her hometown newspaper published her poem and she has wanted to be a writer ever since!



Since elementary school, she has studied science and was an environmental consultant, but being a writer was always her dream.

She now lives in Denver, Colorado with her husband and two kids. *The Nian Monster* is her first picture book. She has written seven non-fiction titles about Georgia, Maine, gorillas, Malala Yousafzai, Asia, oil spills and fossil fuel pollution. Please go to <http://andreaywang.com> for more information about her work.

### About the Illustrator Alina Chau

Alina Chau received her MFA from the University of California, Los Angeles. She worked for more than a decade in the animation industry. Her most notable credit is on LucasFilm's Emmy Award winning program *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*. She is known for her lyrical watercolors. She lives in San Francisco and is currently developing her own illustration projects. For more information about her work, please go to <http://alinachau.com>.

## **Pre-Reading:**

Every culture and every country around the world celebrates the New Year.

- How do you celebrate the new year?
- What do you say?
- What do you wear?
- What do you eat?
- Who do you spend the holiday with?
- What traditions do you have?

## **Take A Book Walk Through *The Nian Monster*:**

- Who is the author and what does she do?
- Who is the illustrator and what does she do?
- What do you see on the cover?
- If I told you that “nian” or 年 means “year” in Chinese, what do you think the “nian monster” is? How often do you think he will appear?
- What is the setting? (Explain *setting*.) How do you know? What are the clues that give you ideas about the setting?
- **Based on all of your ideas, what do you predict will happen in this book?**

## Chinese New Year Decorations

What do you notice on the title page?

- *Red packets or hong bao*— filled with money and given to children for good luck
- *Tangerines or oranges* – people eat and display these fruits for good luck. The Chinese for orange is 橙 (cheng/chng), which sounds like the Chinese word for success or wealth.
- *Chinese New Year candy box* - a traditional red box used for storing candies, nuts and dried fruits that are chosen as symbols of good wishes.
- *yuanbao* - This was a type of silver or gold currency used in Imperial China. Nowadays, these gold *yuanbao* are used to represent wealth and prosperity during the Chinese New Year holiday.
- *Potted flowers* – Potted plants are used as indoor decorations and represent the lucky tree bearing fruit.
- *Paper lanterns* – Every Chinese New Year ends with gorgeous and abundant displays of lanterns at the Lantern Festival. Traditionally, families hung red and gold colored paper lanterns around their homes. It is also meant to light the way for the family's Kitchen God.



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- “Fu” – The character on the flower pot is the Chinese character for “fortune” or “good luck.” Sometimes, you will see this character hung upside down to represent “good luck arriving.”



## Dragon and Lion Dances at Chinese New Year



*Lion dances* – Watch this video about Liondance New York. It is a short video about how New York's Chinese Freemasons pass on the secrets of the lion dance ritual to younger generations. Click

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ogAEKEIC1I>.

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Reading skills:	Questions to ask:
<b>Predicting</b> (using clues to infer what might happen next)	When Xingling gets to each stop, ask students to predict what will happen: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What will she ask the noodle maker to do?</li><li>• What will she ask the fishermen to do?</li><li>• What will she ask her Po Po to make?</li><li>• Why does she take Nian Monster to see the fireworks?</li></ul>
<b>Summarizing</b> (determining the important ideas)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How does Xingling keep the Nian monster away?</li><li>• What is the purpose of all of her “tricks”?</li><li>• Why does Xingling need to keep the monster away?</li></ul>
<b>Questioning</b> (asking questions as I read)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What questions do you have as you read the book? (These ideas can be used as springboards for research projects, inspiration for more reading, or even an international celebration of New Year's traditions.)</li></ul>
<b>Visualizing</b> (making a mind movie or imagining a picture in my head)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What does the Nian Monster look like?</li><li>• Can you act out what the noodle maker, the fishermen and Po Po are doing?</li><li>• How does Xingling look compared to the Nian Monster?</li></ul>
<b>Comparing and contrasting</b> (identifying similarities and differences between the book's characters or the book's events and the outside world)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do you have similar customs?</li><li>• What do you eat for your New Year's holiday?</li><li>• Are your holiday clothes different?</li></ul>
<b>Envisioning and understanding</b> (knowing the characters' traits and feelings)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How would you describe Xingling? What clues or evidence do you have to prove it?</li><li>• What do you know about Nian Monster's traits?</li><li>• Describe Po Po. How do you know that?</li></ul>

## Geography-related Activities for *The Nian Monster*



### Read a map:

What geography terms can you identify from the map?

- Continent
- City
- Country
- Capital
- Mountain range
- River
- Border
- Ocean
- Sea
- Desert
- Tropic of Cancer

### Create a travel guide of Shanghai:

Create a travel guide for a visitor to Shanghai, based on the sites that are mentioned in *The Nian Monster*.

Here are the sites that Xingling visited:

- People's Square
- Jin Mao Tower
- Oriental Pearl Tower
- Huangpu River
- Huxinting Teahouse at Yu Gardens
- The Bund

Students can pick any combination of places to research and present in a poster, brochure, or digital format, for example. Why are these sites important? What is special about them?



- Photos by Anna Chan Rekate



## Food-related Activities for *The Nian Monster*

Food is an integral part of how Xingling defeats Nian Monster. Xingling fights him off with noodles, bony fish, glutinous rice cakes, dumplings and tea.

People throughout China eat noodles, usually called *mian*, boiled, fried, in soups, or stir fried with meats and vegetables. During the Chinese New Year time, “longevity noodles” symbolize a long life.

Here is a recipe for cold sesame noodles, a popular dish found in many Chinese restaurants in the U.S. The recipe is a great way to work with fractions and it is very kid friendly! I know because my daughter has been making this recipe by herself since she was 7 years old!



### COLD SESAME NOODLES

#### Ingredients:

8 cups water  
8 ounces of thin spaghetti noodles  
1½ tablespoons sesame oil  
3 tablespoons peanut butter  
2 teaspoons white vinegar  
2 tablespoons soy sauce  
1 tablespoon sugar  
Pinch of white pepper  
1¼ teaspoons red pepper (optional)  
2 sprigs coriander, broken into pieces  
Large pot for cooking spaghetti

#### Directions:

1. Boil water in a large pot. Cook until al dente.
2. Place the drained noodles in a bowl and toss with a little dash of sesame oil to keep it from sticking.
3. In a small bowl, combine the sesame oil, peanut butter, vinegar, soy sauce, sugar, white pepper, and red pepper. Mix well.
4. Toss the noodles with the sesame mixture until all the noodles are covered. Place in a serving dish and garnish with coriander.
5. Enjoy the noodles with 4 to 6 friends!



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### Q&A Time with Author Andrea Wang

**Q: What inspired you to write about Chinese New Year and Shanghai?**

A: When my children were in elementary school, I would go into their classrooms around Chinese New Year and talk to the students about the holiday, read books to them, and do some crafts. It was my way of sharing a little bit of my cultural heritage with them. One year, a student asked what kinds of clothes kids in China wore. It was then that I noticed most of the Chinese New Year picture books showed China as a place with small villages, thatched-roof huts, and people in old-fashioned clothing. I wanted to show that China has big, modern cities, too, and that the kids there wear the same things as kids in the United States – T-shirts and jeans. My husband's parents live in Shanghai and we had visited them several times. Talk about a big, modern city! I knew Shanghai would be the perfect setting for a different kind of Chinese New Year book.



Photo by Anna Chan Rekate

**Q: When you have your ideas for a book, what do you do? Do you tell your story to someone or do you start writing notes and ideas?**

A: I don't usually tell anyone about my book ideas until I've written down a lot of notes and maybe even a rough draft. I have a notebook for all the picture book ideas that I think will actually make a good story, and that's where I write down possible characters' names, plot ideas, and any research notes. I have a bunch of separate notebooks with ideas for picture books that are probably too weird or silly to ever become real books, but it's fun to brainstorm!



Here is author Andrea Wang, her husband Tim and her son Evan in January 2007. They are on The Bund and the background is Lujiazui on the Pudong side of Shanghai. (Photo courtesy of Andrea Wang)

**Q: How and why are the dishes or the places in *The Nian Monster* special to you?**

A: Both the dishes and the places in *THE NIAN MONSTER* are special to me because they remind me of happy times with my family. I grew up eating noodles, fish, and sweet sticky rice cake for Chinese New Year, and now I make them for my own children. Although I'm not superstitious, I like what these traditional holiday foods symbolize: long life, good fortune, and a sweet future. The landmarks where the Nian Monster appears in the book are all places that I've visited with my husband and sons. Some of these places are very old, like the Yu Garden, and some of them are very new, like the Oriental Pearl Tower. One of the things I love about China is how the ancient and the modern exist side by side. It's a reminder to me that China is one of the oldest continuous civilizations.

## Q&A Time with Author Andrea Wang continued



**Q: Do you have a Po Po and what is she like?**

A: My Po Po was actually my Wai Po, my mother's mother. She was a smart, stubborn woman who was not afraid of anything. I was told that she was the first female principal of a girls' school, and that she was a wizard at making money in the stock market. She was also a talented cook and seamstress. She could look at a picture of a dress and be able to make it without using a pattern. She taught me how to sew, crochet, and use an abacus. Most important, she showed me that girls could be clever and independent, just like Xingling.

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**Andrea and her Wai Po** - This is the author's favorite photo of her and her Wai Po. "She let my brother and me sit on the kitchen counter while she cut up a steamed chicken. ... I'm looking sideways at her because I was a little awed by her skill with the cleaver. She could cut through the bones with just one quick chop!" (Photo courtesy of Andrea Wang)

**Q: What is the weirdest Chinese New Year superstition that you had to deal with when you were growing up?**

A: I always thought not being allowed to take a bath and wash my hair on Chinese New Year was weird. The word for "hair" in Chinese also sounds like one of the words in the phrase "to get rich," and washing your hair supposedly washes away your good fortune. My mother put orange peels in my bathwater the night before to make me smell good for the holiday and hopefully keep me smelling nice until I was allowed to bathe again!

**Q: What is your favorite thing about Chinese New Year?**

A: Everything! Seriously, I love so much about the holiday – the delicious food, the noisy firecrackers, the lion and dragon dances, giving out red envelopes with money inside, being with my family, wearing new clothes – I could go on and on!



Photos by Anna Chan Rekate

**Q: Who are your favorite authors? What is your favorite picture book (besides your own) and your favorite chapter book?**

A: This is such a tough question, because there are so many books I love! When I was little, I read all the books by L. M. Montgomery and E. B. White, as well as the fairy tale collections by Andrew Lang. I still love those authors today, but I would add J. K. Rowling, Jane Austen, and Ursula Le Guin to the list. There's no way I could pick just one favorite picture book, but I'll tell you one that I think is the funniest – *DIARY OF A WOMBAT* by Jackie French. One of my favorite chapter books is *FROM THE MIXED-UP FILES OF MRS. BASIL E. FRANKWEILER* by E.L. Konigsburg.