

CHRISTMAS STORIES
are coming to town!

Storytime™

*Jingle
all the
way!*

SANTA GETS KIDNAPPED

**The Nutcracker Soldier, New Year's Nonsense,
a Christmas Cuckoo PLUS A MUSICAL DONKEY!**

**OUR STORIES BRING
JOY TO THE WORLD!**

Colourful creatures and
magical beings add enchantment
to the Christmas season!

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**Festive tales from the Netherlands,
China and the Czech Republic!**

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Short stories, Big Dreams

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LET'S TALK ABOUT... EMPATHY



You look so happy today!

It's wonderful that you understand how I feel!



That's the magic of empathy – it's the ability to imagine what other people are going through!

FOR YOUR TOOLBOX

- ★ Empathy is a wonderful gift you can give to your loved ones this Christmas.
- ★ When someone tells you how they are feeling, *listen carefully* and try to put yourself in their shoes!
- ★ When we give and receive empathy, we feel *connection* and *belonging*. It really is a magical thing – just like the Christmas season!



MIND WORKOUT: WRITE A SPECIAL LETTER!

When you write your letter to Santa this year, you could **practise your empathy skills by thinking about someone else and how you can give them a much-needed gift.** For example, you could tell Santa that you'd like to help him by donating some old books and toys to charity to help others who aren't as lucky as you. You could also write that you will do extra chores around the house to help your family. The important thing is to think: what would make someone else happy?

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THE NUTCRACKER'S SWEETS

It was late on Christmas night. A delicious dinner had been eaten, presents had been opened, and carols had been sung. All the family had gone to bed – mother, father, and little Fritz and Maria.


When Maria woke up in her bed, it was still dark... but she felt thirsty. Rubbing her eyes, she padded across the landing to get a drink of water. As she peered over the banister, she saw the living room with its brightly decorated tree. The floor was strewn with colourful wrapping paper and the many gifts that the children had received.

Then, Maria saw something move by the wall. There were dozens of mice! They weren't scurrying, either, but marching in neat columns. In front was a mouse king in a crown...

"Follow me!" he squeaked loudly. "We will conquer the house tonight!"

There was a rattling sound, and a little red figure came out from behind the sideboard. It was a nutcracker in the shape of a soldier. Maria had been given him last year by her godfather!





Now, the little nutcracker was marching determinedly towards the mouse army.

“Crack-crack, we will drive the mice back!” he said in his metallic voice.

He was joined by a model dinosaur, Maria’s stuffed elephant and a whole regiment of Fritz’s toy soldiers. The two armies marched at each other – a great battle was about to begin in the living room!

But then a voice rang out, as high and clear as a bell.

“Stop! This special night is for love and joy, not fighting!”

From the landing, Maria saw that her new princess-ballerina doll had spoken. The armies of mice and toys suddenly halted, feeling sheepish.

The nutcracker smiled and bowed politely to the princess.

He clambered up the Christmas tree and began untying the many sweets that dangled from its branches.

The mice stared in wonder as lemon drops, bonbons, sugared almonds and other treats fell around them.

Both armies cheered and ran forward to share the sweet candies. They sang carols and celebrated their new-found friendship, while the princess-ballerina looked on, smiling serenely.

Maria went back to her little bed. “I wonder if that was a dream?” she asked herself. “It would be nice if it were true!”

The next day, she found the nutcracker on the floor. She played with him and her new toys for a while before finding him a special place on a shelf in her room... ☆



THE CAT AND THE CRADLE

On a frosty winter's night, a couple were walking through a little Dutch village when they heard a cry. It came from a cradle on the steps of the church!

In it, they found a little baby girl with golden hair.

“We have no children,” said the woman, “so let us take this child in and raise her as our own!”

Her husband gladly agreed, and they took the baby home with them. Because she was sweet-natured and had golden hair, they named her Honey.

They gave her cow's milk from a baby's bottle made of clay and put her in a wooden cradle in front of the fire.

At that time, people in the Netherlands often kept their animals in their homes over winter, as this helped them keep warm! While Honey slept, she was watched over by the cows in their pen at the other end of the room...

The family also had a fine furry cat. They called her Little Double, for she was twice as kind and loving as any other cat in the world!



She decided to adopt Honey. One by one, she carried her own kittens into the baby's cradle to keep her warm, and little Honey fell asleep to the sound of their purring.



It was only a few days later that a storm swept over the Netherlands.

The country is protected from the sea by earth banks called dikes, but this storm was so great that it caused the sea to break through the dikes and flood over the land.

The floodwaters swept right through the little village. The cows and the adults in the house managed to get to safety, but Honey's wooden crib floated away – with the baby, Little Double and her kittens in it!

Everywhere the cat looked, she saw trees and buckets and logs being carried along by the rushing waters. And what was that?

Little Double's ears swivelled as she heard a peeping sound coming from somewhere nearby.

A wooden shoe called a clog went past, and in it was a scared little chick! With a furry paw, Little Double snagged the clog and lifted the bird into the crib with her mouth.

That was how the baby, the kittens, Little Double and the chick found themselves together. The crib was being washed past a village on a hill above the rushing waters. Ahead, the cat could see that the current was about to take them out to sea! →

DRAW IT!

Scan the code to download a printable cradle picture. What creatures would be inside it in your own version of this story? Draw them in and don't forget to colour!





Just then, Little Double spied someone looking out of the high tower of the village church. She began to yowl loudly for help, and her kittens joined in with their little voices. The chick peeped, Honey the baby laughed... and the cacophony attracted the attention of the boy in the church tower.

The lad's name was Dirk, and he could hardly believe his eyes when he saw the floating cradle and its passengers! He rushed down the stairs, kicking off his clogs as he went, and swam out to it.

The people of the village left their warm houses to see what was going on. They quickly threw a rope to little Dirk and pulled him and the cradle to safety.

The villagers found the animals a warm place to sleep in front of a fire. Little Double purred as she licked her kittens clean, happy to have saved them, the chick and baby Honey from the flood.

When the floodwaters went down, Honey's parents were glad to receive some wonderful news – their beloved baby and Little Double were safe and sound!

The people of the village celebrated the reunion of Honey and her family with a great party, and the feasting went on until late at night! Everyone gave thanks for the miracle that had saved little Honey, while the cat and her kittens dined on roast goose... ★

GOOD KING WENCESLAS

It was the twenty-sixth of December, and the people of Prague were celebrating a holiday called the Feast of Stephen. They laughed and danced and sang songs in the streets of the old city!

But King Wenceslas did not join in the celebrations. Instead, he went for a walk on the battlements of his castle. The wind was bitterly cold that night, and he pulled his fur robe tightly around his shoulders.

Wenceslas stared out across the land. The moon shone brightly in the sky, and snow lay on the ground. In the distance, near the edge of a pine forest, he saw a figure struggling through the deep drifts. What were they doing out on such a chilly night? ➡



The king clapped his hands, and his young page came running. The boy's name was Vaclav, and he shivered in the cold.

"What do you need, Your Majesty?" the page asked.

"Who is that poor soul out there?"

Little Vaclav peered at the distant figure in the snow.

"Oh, that's Old Jan. He lives in a little hut at the edge of the forest. You know, up by St Agnes' fountain? He's gathering wood for his fire..."

The king stroked his beard wisely. "A good ruler should share his wealth and care for his subjects. Nobody should have to be out alone on the Feast of Stephen!"

The king snapped his fingers and smiled cheerfully.

"I know! We should pay Old Jan a visit – because joy becomes greater if it is shared!"

King Wenceslas told Vaclav to put together a hearty meal. The boy scurried into the kitchen, where he collected pots full of delicious food. He then ventured into the cobwebby cellar to fetch bottles of the king's finest wine. Finally, he went to the woodshed and carried out armfuls of pine logs.

The king smiled, pleased with what Vaclav had gathered.

"What a good job you have done, my boy! Now, let us load all of this into bags and take it to Old Jan!"



Vaclav didn't really want to go out on such a chilly night, but he did as he was told. The king and his page lifted the heavy bags onto their backs and trudged out through the castle gates.

The cold wind blew right through Vaclav's clothes as he followed his master through the fields. His feet sank deep into the snow with each step, and his toes were soon frozen!

The big bag on Vaclav's back felt heavier and heavier as he got more and more tired. The young page was soon exhausted, but Wenceslas kept striding on ahead of him. The king was tall and very strong, for he was used to wearing thick armour in battle.

Vaclav was worried about being left behind. "Your Majesty!" he said, "I don't think I can go on! The snow is so deep, and I am freezing!"

The king stopped and said, "Don't fret, my young page! Just walk in my footsteps!"

Vaclav began walking in the huge prints Wenceslas's boots left in the snow. To his surprise, he discovered that the ground in them felt warm! His toes thawed out, and the wind seemed less bitter. He found the strength to keep going!

At last, the king and his page reached Old Jan, who was still picking up twigs at the edge of the forest. 🐉



“Hello, good fellow!” boomed Wenceslas. “I wish you a very happy Feast of Stephen!”

The old man was surprised to be greeted by the king, but he bowed respectfully.

“Thank you, Your Majesty! I would invite you into my humble home, but I have little firewood and no food or drink at all!”

The king waved his hands and exclaimed “Do not worry! I have everything we need!”

So Old Jan led them to his little hut near St Agnes’ fountain. The hovel was small and roughly made, but the king did not mind.

“Thank you for inviting us in!” he said cheerfully.

Vaclav removed some heavy pine logs from his bag and put them in the fireplace. They were soon blazing brightly, and the little hut filled with warmth.

King Wenceslas took some pots out of his bag and put them by the fire to warm up. He then pulled a bottle from his robe.

“Here, have something nice to drink while we wait for our dinner!”

The three of them had a fine time chatting in front of the fire. When the meal was hot, the king dished up heaping plates of delicious food.



There were beef medallions simmered in cream sauce, roast vegetables and piles of plump dumplings besides. Old Jan had never eaten such a fine dinner! He drank many a toast to King Wenceslas's health.

When they had finished every morsel, it was time for the king and his page to go. They bade Old Jan goodbye and set off back to the city.

As he followed his master through the winter night, little Vaclav felt warm inside. The king had taught him how wonderful it was to share joy with others – especially in the Christmas season.

Tales of what good King Wenceslas did that night soon spread. People admired him for being a ruler who truly cared about his subjects. His kindly deeds are still celebrated today in a beloved Christmas carol! ★

KING OR DUKE?

This story is inspired by the Christmas carol 'Good King Wenceslas'. The king in that song is based on a real person – but he was a duke, not a king! Wenceslaus the First was the duke of Bohemia, in what is now the Czech Republic, and he lived about a thousand years ago. He was a good and kind ruler – that is why he was made into a saint and declared to be a king after his death!



THE CHRISTMAS CUCKOO

At the edge of a wide moor stood a little village, and
at the edge of that village stood a humble cottage.
It had holes in its roof and no glass in the windows!

In that cottage lived two brothers named Scrape and Spare. They were cobblers, and every day they worked from dawn to dusk, fixing the villagers' shoes for a few pennies.

When Christmas came, all the brothers could afford for their dinner was a loaf of barley bread and bit of old bacon. They didn't even have wood for the fire...

"Let's cut up that old tree stump!" said Scrape. "We can use it for firewood!"



“But it’s wrong to chop firewood at Christmas!” argued Spare. “And that old stump is far too tough to cut with our hatchet!”

“Then let’s pull the whole stump inside and put it on the fire!” Scrape said, trying to be positive.

The two brothers hauled the stump inside their cottage and into the fireplace. It soon began burning, and they warmed their chilly hands over the flames.

Just then, Scrape and Spare heard a cry of “Cuckoo! Cuckoo!” echo inside the great stump.

As they watched in amazement, a large bird fluttered out of it and perched on the table.

“What day is it, kind gentlemen?” he squawked.

“Why, it’s Christmas!” replied Spare.

“In that case, I wish you a merry Christmas!” the cuckoo said politely. “I went to sleep in a hole in that stump last August, and the heat of your fire made me think it was still summer!”

The bird blinked as he peered around the humble cottage. “If you let me stay here this winter, next year, I will bring you a leaf from a tree at the world’s end!”

Scrape and Spare had never heard of such a place, so the cuckoo told them about it.

“It is a wondrous island!” said the bird. “There, you will find a tree with leaves of pure gold!”

“That sounds amazing!” said Scrape. →

“Next to it is a green tree whose leaves never fall!” continued the bird. “Anyone who owns a leaf from that tree will always be happy, no matter what misfortunes befall them...”

“How wonderful!” exclaimed Spare. “Master Cuckoo, please bring me a leaf from *that* tree!”

“You are a fool!” his brother retorted. “I want a golden leaf instead!”

The cuckoo agreed! He made a nest in a kettle and stayed with them all winter. When the first day of April came, he told the brothers, “Thank you for your kindness! Now, I must go and tell the world that it is spring!”

With that, he flew away, crying “Cuckoo! Cuckoo!” all the while.

For the next few months, all that Scrape and Spare had to eat was cabbage from their garden... and they soon forgot about their visitor.



When the first of April came around, the brothers were surprised to hear a voice outside.

“Cuckoo! Cuckoo!” it cried. “Let me in – I have your gifts!”

They opened the door, and in came the great green cuckoo.

“Here are your presents, as promised!” the bird said as he placed a golden leaf in the hand of Scrape and a bright green one in the hand of his brother Spare.





Scrape was proud of his heavy golden leaf. “How silly of Spare to settle for a green one!” he scoffed. “I’m not going to live *here* anymore!”

He left the humble cottage and traded the golden leaf for a pile of coins, which he used to buy a fine house in the middle of the village. He started his own shoe shop and made a lot of money!

Scrape threw big parties and married the prettiest maiden in the village. He became an important person and never visited his brother.

Spare kept living in the draughty old cottage, where he ate cabbage soup for every meal.

He stayed cheerful, even when his coat grew ragged and rain came through the holes in the roof.

When Spare walked down the street in his much-mended shoes, he whistled merry tunes that made people smile!



One day, as Spare was walking over a bridge, he saw a morose-looking man peering sadly into the water.

“What is wrong, sir?” asked Spare.

“Oh,” sighed the man, “I had an argument with my daughter, and she said she didn’t want to see me again...” ➔

Spare listened patiently to the man's woes and gave him advice about how to mend things with his daughter. The fellow's mood brightened, and he thanked Spare kindly before going on his way.

Though Spare did not know it, the man was the baron of that province. He told everyone he met about the fellow in the ragged coat who had cheered him up.

Before long, all sorts of people were knocking on the door of Spare's cottage, asking for his advice. Rich men who had lost money, poor men who had lost friends, nobles who were worried about their heirs – all of them felt better after chatting to the cobbler and hearing his humble wisdom.

They gave him gifts... a side of ham here, a gold coin there... and bit by bit, Spare's life became better. The more he helped others, the happier he was.



One windy afternoon, the cobbler heard a knock at the door. Outside was a messenger carrying an important-looking scroll.

"I have a letter from the king of this land!" the herald declared. "He has heard of a cheery fellow who makes life better for all who talk to him. Would you like to live in a nice house in the grounds of the king's palace and offer your advice to any of his subjects who need it?"



“He feels that your wisdom could make his kingdom a happier place for everybody!”

Spare agreed! He went to the palace and spent all day listening kindly to people’s troubles. The cobbler ate dinner at the king’s table, but refused to wear the nice clothes he was offered.

“I think this comfy old coat suits me better!” laughed Spare.

One day, a familiar person came to the palace, looking for advice. It was Scrape, his brother! He was wearing fancy clothes but looked nervous and sad. Imagine how surprised he was to learn that the king’s advisor was his brother Spare!

“Sit down!” Spare said kindly. “Why did you come here?”

Scrape sighed. “I thought that having lots of gold and a pretty wife would make me happy, but it hasn’t!

“I worry about money all the time because my wife spends it on new dresses and robbers want to steal it from me!”

Spare took his hand and said, “My brother, I missed you when you left, but I have found joy by listening to others and helping them feel better. Perhaps you will find happiness by sharing what you have as well?”

The brothers embraced and celebrated their reunion with a nice dinner in the king’s hall. They were sure that they could hear a distant cuckoo’s cry on the wind, and it made them smile! ★

CHRISTMAS WISHES!

What would you ask the Christmas cuckoo for? Try to think of something that isn’t a physical object... What about courage, kindness, or even wisdom?



SANTA GETS KIDNAPPED!

Adapted from the story by L. Frank Baum

If you travel north as far as you can go, you will reach the North Pole, which is in a place called the Happy Valley. Though it lies in the Arctic, it is warm and sunny, and everybody who lives there is full of joy.

In the Happy Valley, you will find the workshop of Santa Claus. He spends all year making toys for the children of the world, and the fairies who live in the valley help him. His workshop is always filled with the sounds of music and laughter!

Beyond the Happy Valley are the Mountains of Misery. In them dwell five wicked imps – the Imp of Selfishness, the Imp of Envy, the Imp of Hatred, the Imp of Malice and the Imp of Repentance. They don't like having Santa as a neighbour!

"All that jolly singing gets on my nerves!" complained the Imp of Selfishness.



“He also inspires children to be generous, so none of them want to act selfishly!”

“I have the same problem!” agreed the Imp of Envy. “Children are happy with their own gifts, so they don’t get jealous about someone else’s!”

“Santa makes kids joyful and content, so they feel no hatred in their hearts, either!” said the Imp of Hatred peevishly. The others agreed!

“If children do not feel selfishness, envy or hatred,” said the Imp of Repentance, “they don’t have anything to regret. We must trick Santa into giving up his kindly ways!”

The next day, a stranger knocked on the door of Santa’s workshop.

He was dressed as a fairy, but Santa thought he didn’t look quite right...

“What beautiful toys you make!” the disguised Imp of Selfishness told him.

“Why do you give them to ungrateful children? You should keep them all!”

Santa laughed. “No, it makes me happy to give my toys away!”

The next visitor was the Imp of Envy. “There are companies that create plastic toys in factories and make lots of money!” he whispered. “You should charge people for *your* toys!” But Santa just laughed.

Then the Imp of Hatred popped by. “Did you know that people say you are foolish for giving away things?” he said slyly. “You should hate them for being so disrespectful!”

The jolly man shrugged. “If they hate me, why should I hate them back? I’m too busy making toys!”

After this, the imps gave up trying to influence Santa. “We need to stop him from spreading joy in another way!” declared the Imp of Malice. “I have a plan!” ➔



On Christmas Eve, Santa Claus harnessed his



SPOT IT!

Tick off the five
Imps when you
find them!



Answer: There are 8 bells!

reindeer to his sleigh and filled it with presents.



How many bells are there in this scene? Write your answer here!





It was a magical sight when it soared off into the night sky! In the sleigh were Santa and his fairy helpers: Nuter, Peter, Kilter and Wisk.

“We have a long list of presents to deliver!” Santa boomed in a cheerful voice. “Luckily, it is a beautiful night – look at that gorgeous full moon!”

But as Santa’s sleigh flew over the Mountains of Misery, a noose came out of the darkness and looped around his body.

Before he could do anything, he was yanked out of the sleigh!

“It worked!” crowed the Imp of Hatred. The wicked creatures had kidnapped Santa!

Santa’s four fairy friends were shocked and frightened by his sudden disappearance.

“What should we do?” cried Nuter.

“We must turn around!” yelled Peter.


“Let’s get help!” shouted Kilter.

But little Wisk shook her head.

“Santa would want us to deliver his presents and bring joy to the world. That’s the most important thing!”

She grabbed the reins of the sleigh and flew on. The other three fairies cheered... they would accomplish their mission, with or without Santa!

The four of them went all over the world, delivering presents to millions of children.



They had never done this without Santa before, so they made a few mistakes along the way...

Maddie Clarke had wanted a doll, but she got a duckling instead. Charlie Smith loved to stomp in puddles and had asked for rubber boots, but he discovered a sewing kit beneath his Christmas tree!

The four helpers did their best, though, and most children were very happy with the gifts they found on Christmas morning – even if they *were* a bit mixed up!

Santa spent a chilly night in the imps' cave in the Mountains of Misery. He was tied up with ropes, and the Imp of Malice was mocking him.

"All the children will be waking up and finding nothing under their trees!" he jeered at the old man.

"Imagine how bitter and resentful they must feel!"

Santa tried to stay positive. "Oh, I'm sure my fairy friends will have delivered the gifts!" he said cheerily.

After a while, the Imp of Malice gave up and the Imp of Repentance came in to guard their prisoner. He was the littlest imp of all, and he had a troubled look on his face. He gave a big sigh.

"You know, I regret taking you prisoner!" the imp confessed. Guilt was his weakness!

Santa smiled. "Then why not let me go? You *know* that would be the right thing to do, don't you?" ➔





The imp nodded and quickly freed the old man. He even showed Santa a secret tunnel out of the mountains!

Santa emerged on a mountainside – and saw a great army of fairies led by Nuter, Peter, Kilter and Wisk marching towards him.

“What are you doing?” he asked in amazement.

“We delivered your gifts to all the children of the world last night!” said Wisk in her high voice.

“Now we have come to rescue you from the imps!”

Santa laughed. “Thank you so much!” he told them. “But as you can see, I am already free. Let’s go back to my workshop and celebrate Christmas with carols and hot mince pies!”

That evening, the Happy Valley echoed with the sound of laughter and revelry... while the imps sulked in their cave and covered their ears with their pillows! ★

YOU NEED TO
KNOW ABOUT...

CHRISTMAS GIFT-GIVERS

Saint Nicholas!

Unlike the other beings on this list, he actually existed! He lived during the late Roman Empire and was the bishop of Myra, in Turkey. He is said to have given his wealth to the poor – by throwing gold coins through their windows! His generosity was legendary. Santa Claus and many other Christmas characters were inspired by him.

Krampus! He is a furry horned monster that prowls through the Alps of Europe on the night before the Feast of Saint Nicholas (6th of December). Krampus scares naughty children by rattling chains, and leaves coal in their stockings!

You almost certainly know about Santa Claus – but have you heard of these *other* Christmas characters?

The Yule Goat! This invisible farm animal is supposed to bring presents at Christmastime – though he sometimes makes mischief, too. Giant straw versions of him are still made in Sweden to celebrate the Christmas season!

Jólasveinar! In Iceland, thirteen mischievous elves take turns visiting people on the thirteen days leading up to Christmas. Some of them leave gifts, while others cause trouble!

Tió de Nadal! It is traditional for people in Catalonia to ‘feed’ sweets to this log before Christmas. On Christmas Eve, people sing songs and hit the log to make it ‘poop’ out the treats, which are shared among the family!

La Befana! This witch flies around on her broom each Christmastime, bringing baked delights to good children and coal and ashes to naughty ones! Stories say that you might see her soaring through the skies above Italy...

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THE MUSICAL DONKEY

Umed the washerman was the busiest man in the whole village! Every day, he would collect clothes from people and load them onto his donkey's back.

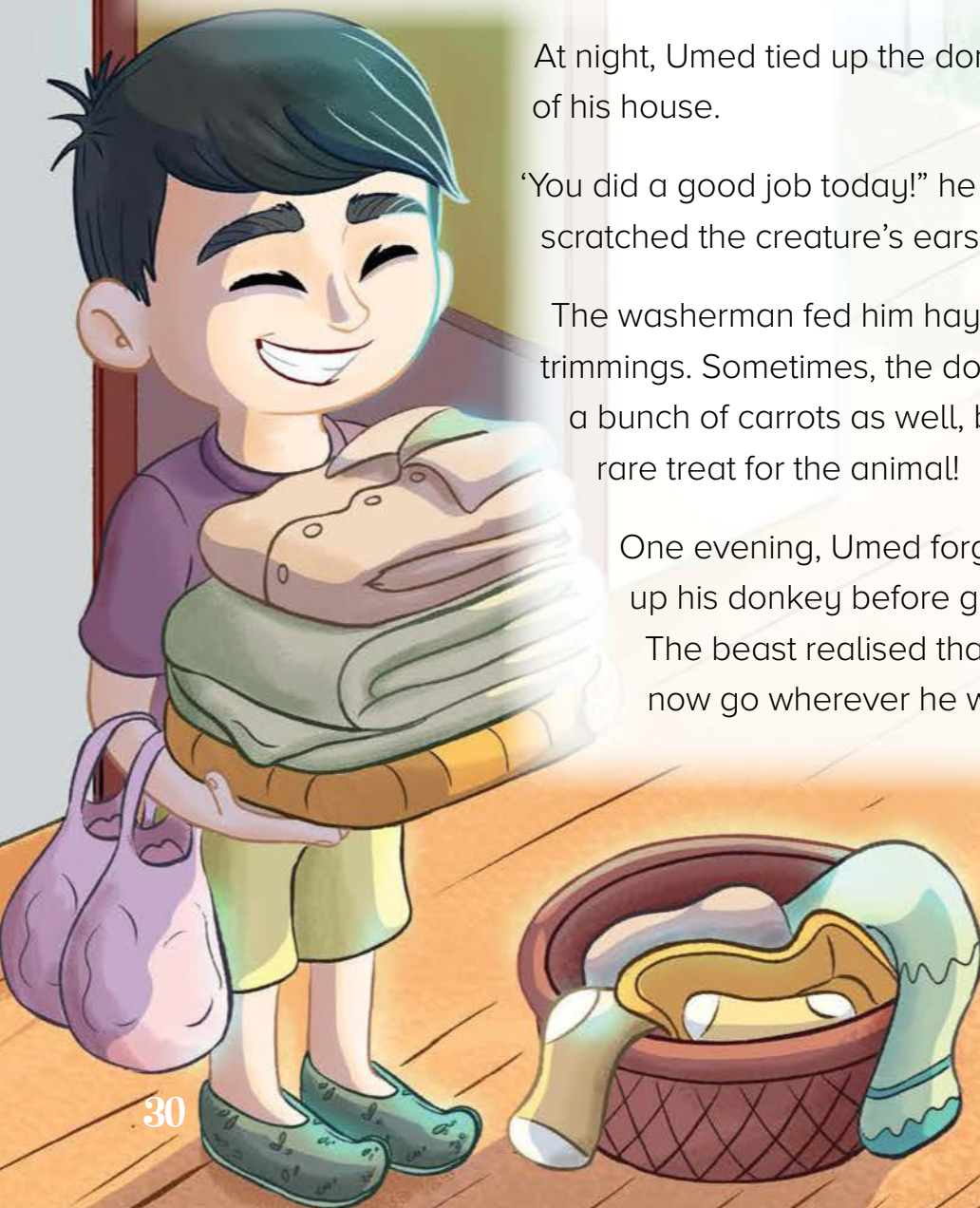
They went down to the river, where Umed would clean the garments by rinsing them and beating them on a rock. He then hung them up to dry in the hot sun. When evening came, he would load the clothes onto his donkey again and deliver them back to his customers.

At night, Umed tied up the donkey in the yard of his house.

'You did a good job today!' he would say as he scratched the creature's ears. 'Here's your food!'

The washerman fed him hay and vegetable trimmings. Sometimes, the donkey would get a bunch of carrots as well, but that was a rare treat for the animal!

One evening, Umed forgot to tie up his donkey before going inside. The beast realised that he could now go wherever he wanted!



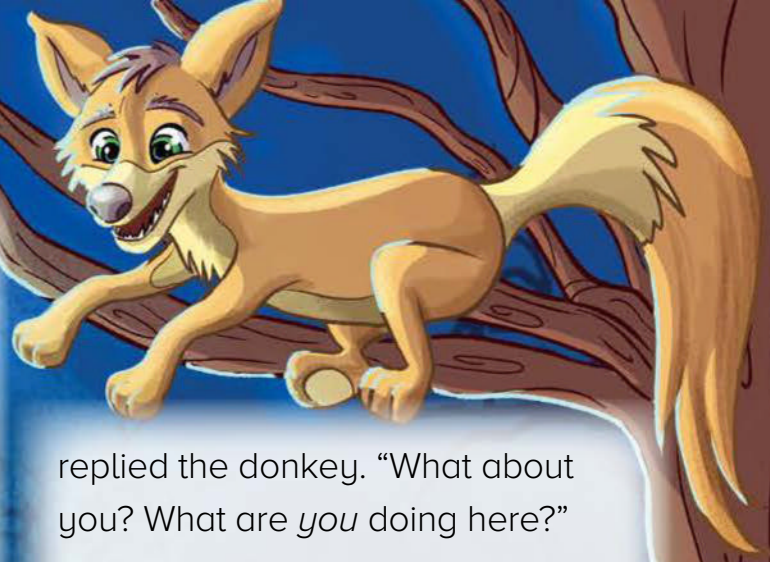
“Ah, I have a taste of freedom!”
the donkey thought to himself.
“I think I’ll have a look around!”

He wandered through the dark
streets until he came to the
edge of the village. Vast fields
of crops stretched out in front
of him – he smelled beans,
onions, maize and sugar cane!

Just then, he saw a shadowy
figure slink towards him.

“Hello!” said the jackal. “What are
you doing on this fine evening?”

“Oh, my owner didn’t tie me up,
so I decided to go and explore!”



replied the donkey. “What about
you? What are *you* doing here?”

The jackal looked around craftily.
“I am going to help myself to the
farmers’ delicious crops. Would
you like to join me for a feast?”

The donkey looked doubtful.
“Stealing is wrong, and I’ve
already had a dinner of hay
and vegetable trimmings...”

The jackal rolled his eyes at him.
“That’s not a *proper* meal. Wait till
you try juicy cucumbers, fresh from
the vegetable patch!”

This sounded nice, so the donkey
followed the jackal through a hole
in a fence and into a field. ➡



All around him were lush vines and beautiful dark green vegetables...

The donkey bit into one and crunched it up with his big teeth. The jackal was right – it tasted delicious! The cucumber was fresh and juicy and crisp – far better than hay and old trimmings!



The jackal and the donkey gorged themselves on the vegetables. It was the best meal the donkey had ever eaten! He felt joy rise up inside him, and he had to let it out.

“Friend jackal,” he said, “this night has been so wonderful, I must sing!”

The jackal looked nervous. “Please don’t sing *now!* If you do, the farmers will hear!”

But the donkey was so happy to be feasting on delicious cucumbers that he didn’t listen. Instead, he threw back his head and brayed loudly.

“HEE-HAW! HEE-HAW! HEE-HAW!”

The sound echoed across the fields, and the jackal scurried away as fast as his legs would carry him!

Lights went on in the village as people woke up.

“What is that horrible racket?” they asked one another.

The farmers stumbled out into the fields, clutching rakes and hoes.





They saw the donkey braying in the middle of the cucumber patch.

“That greedy beast has been eating our vegetables!” they hollered. “Let’s get him!”

The donkey was terrified when the farmers rushed towards him, waving their tools angrily and throwing lumps of dirt. He turned tail and scrambled through the fence as quickly as he could.

The donkey galloped for many miles down the dusty road.

The farmers finally gave up chasing him and went back to their beds.

The donkey returned to Umed’s home just as the sun was rising. The washerman was surprised to see the animal exhausted, with bits of cucumber vine in his fur.

“What happened to *you* last night?” his master asked him.

The donkey let out a big sigh. “I learned that there are times when I definitely *shouldn’t* sing!” ✨

NEW YEAR'S NONSENSE

Animals don't have calendars, and they wouldn't be able to read them if they did! But one bright New Year's morning, a creature of the forest felt something fresh and inspiring in the air..

The frosty ground chilled his toes, but Fergus the fox enjoyed the warmth of the winter sunlight on his russet fur as he strolled through the woods.

"It's such a lovely morning!" he said to Oliver the owl, who was perched on a branch. "I'm going to improve my life in this coming year! From now on, I'm going vegetarian! It's good for the planet, my fur will be shinier, and I will lose flab, too. You'll see!"



Oliver blinked with his big eyes. “That is an excellent idea!” he replied. “You have inspired me, Fergus! I’ve been sleeping in all day and only getting up at night. From now on, I’m getting up at the crack of dawn!”

He flapped away on silent wings, his beak set in a determined expression. He was thinking of the hundred things he could do if he spent the whole day awake!

Sibelius the grass snake slithered by. “What an inspiring idea!” he hissed. “I will improve myself too.

This year, I’m going to stand up straight and tall instead of crawling along the ground.”

The snake stretched up as high as he could and awkwardly wobbled into the bushes on tippy-tail.

Philomena the pheasant fluttered out of a tree. “I overheard what you were saying!” she gushed to Fergus. “You’re absolutely right! I want to take up swimming! Lots of other birds do it, so I don’t see why I can’t! I feel like I’ve been missing out by only hanging around on dry land.”

She strutted off towards the river.

Fergus heard his tummy gurgle – he felt hungry!

“It’s time for a yummy vegetarian breakfast!” he decided. →



He started by nibbling on some grass, but it was tough and stringy! His pointy teeth couldn't chew it, and he retched when he tried to swallow some.

"Perhaps some larger leaves will be better, then?" he wondered.

The ones from a nearby bush were easier to gulp down, but they tasted bitter. He ate them anyway!

★ "Oooh," he whined to himself, "I don't feel too good!"

The gurgling in his belly got a LOT louder – and the fox had to rush into the bushes to go to the toilet!

Meanwhile, Sibelius the snake was making his way through the woods, stretching up as high and straight as he could.

"I should have done this ages ago!" he said proudly. "I can see everything from a new point of view!"

Sibelius fell over once and kept bumping into tree branches... but he kept standing upright. He felt proud of sticking to his New Year's resolution.

Then he heard a sound that made his blood run even colder than usual: the caw of a crow! It swooped down and tried to snatch the snake as he stretched up from the ground.

Sibelius threw himself down and wriggled into the shrubs as fast as he could.

"That was a close call!" he gulped. "Maybe crawling on the ground isn't so bad after all. It's definitely safer!"



While all this action was happening on the ground, Oliver glided through the cool morning air, ready to start his first full day awake.

“It’s so lovely and bright!” he told himself. It was a bit *too* bright for his sensitive owl eyes – he had to squint, and could hardly see where he was going!

“This sunlight is giving me a headache!” he complained. That was when he hit a tree

branch and fell to the ground with an undignified squawk!

He felt embarrassed, so he began to preen his feathers. “I think I’ll get back to my nest,” he said. “I need a nap to recover!”



Philomena the pheasant came to the riverbank and looked at the dark, chilly water. Some ducks were swimming in the river – they moved by paddling with their webbed feet.

“That looks simple!” the pheasant thought as she stretched her wings.

After taking a deep breath, she leaped into the river head-first.

The icy water went right through her feathers and chilled her to the bone! She felt herself sinking, so she began thrashing with her feet. →

They didn't have any webbing, though, so the water went between her toes. She couldn't stay above the surface, no matter how frantically she kicked. The poor bird began to panic!

Just then, she felt two feathery bodies dive under her wings and lift her up.

"What do you think you're doing, foolish pheasant?" asked one duck.

"You should stay on land, where you belong!" quacked the other.

The two waterfowl helped the bedraggled bird to the bank, where she shook out her feathers.

"That didn't go well" she said, feeling rather disappointed.

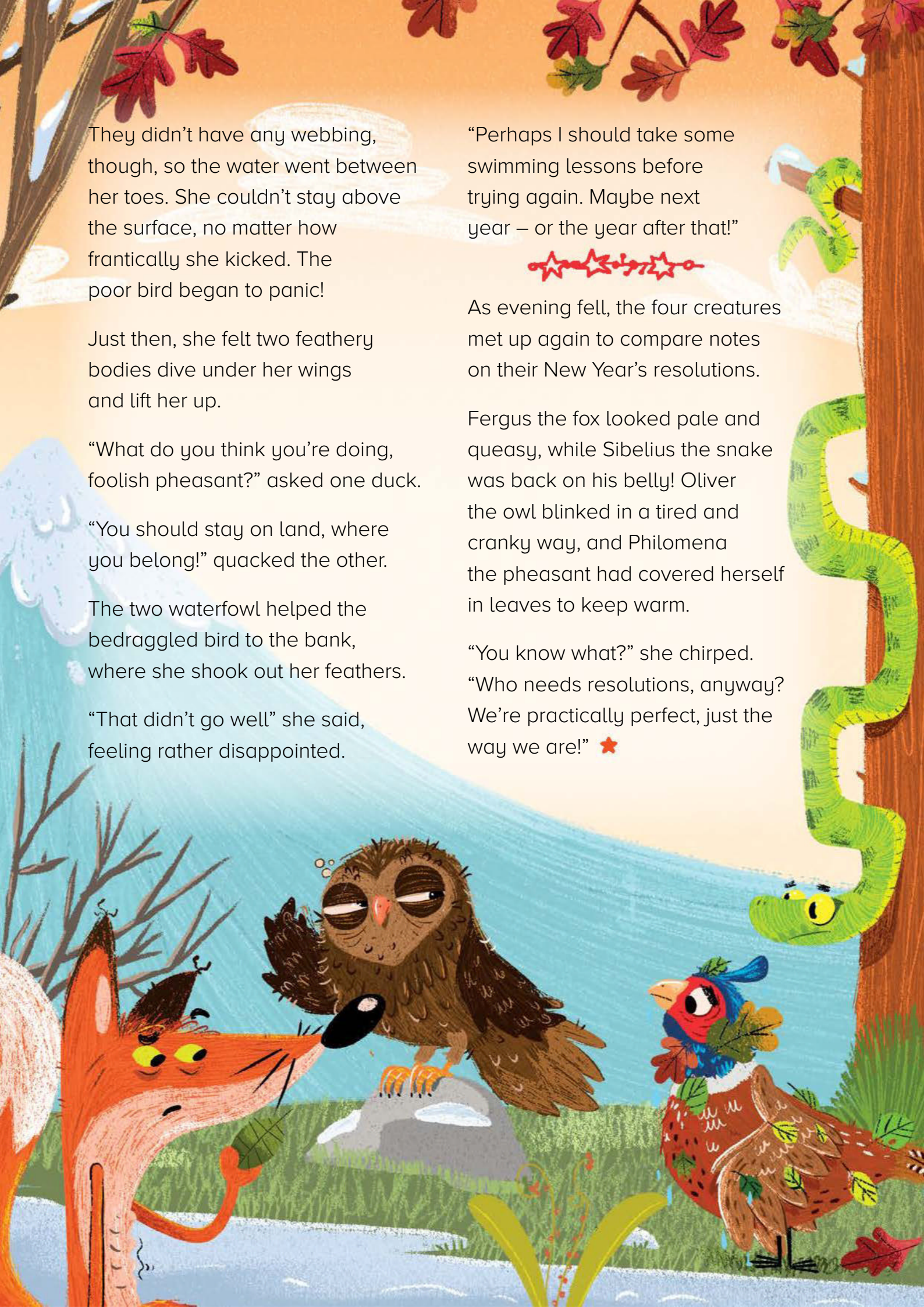
"Perhaps I should take some swimming lessons before trying again. Maybe next year – or the year after that!"



As evening fell, the four creatures met up again to compare notes on their New Year's resolutions.

Fergus the fox looked pale and queasy, while Sibelius the snake was back on his belly! Oliver the owl blinked in a tired and cranky way, and Philomena the pheasant had covered herself in leaves to keep warm.

"You know what?" she chirped. "Who needs resolutions, anyway? We're practically perfect, just the way we are!" ★




THE THRONELESS PRINCE

Kong He was a mighty warrior, and he lived in a time of conflict. Twenty-five centuries ago, lords and kings battled each other for control of China, and their soldiers ravaged the land.

Kong He was a commander in the armies of the Duke of Lu. He was over two metres tall and incredibly strong. Battlefields were dangerous places, but Kong He was not afraid of charging into combat! When he was ordered to attack the enemy castle of Bi Yang, he led his men through an open gate – but discovered too late that his foes had let them into a trap!

They began lowering the castle's iron gate, planning to capture the commander and his men inside. But brave Kong He stepped forward and held the heavy gate on his broad shoulders so his troops could escape. For saving his men, he was given many awards. ➔





When the war was over, a weary Kong He went back to his young wife, Yan Zhengzai. She hugged him and cried, “I’m so glad that you are still alive!”

He smiled warmly at her. “Yes, and I have been richly rewarded. But what I want most of all is a son who will follow in my footsteps!”

That night, Yan Zhengzai prayed to the heavens that she would give Kong He a son. When she went to sleep, she had a most amazing dream!

In it, she was visited by a magical creature called a qilin. It had the mane of a horse, the scales of a dragon and the horn of a unicorn. It spoke to her in an echoing voice.

“Your prayers will be answered!” it declared. “You will soon give birth to a son, who will be a king without a throne!”



Nine months later, Yan Zhengzai gave birth to a healthy baby boy. Kong He was overjoyed!

“What name shall we give him?” he asked his wife.

Yan Zhengzai looked at the smiling baby and noticed a little bump on top of his head. “I’ll call him *Qiu*, which means ‘mound!’” she said with a laugh.



Kong He passed away when Qiu was three, and his mother showed him how to perform ceremonies in his memory.

“It’s important to honour our parents and our ancestors!” she told him. “We are here because of them!”

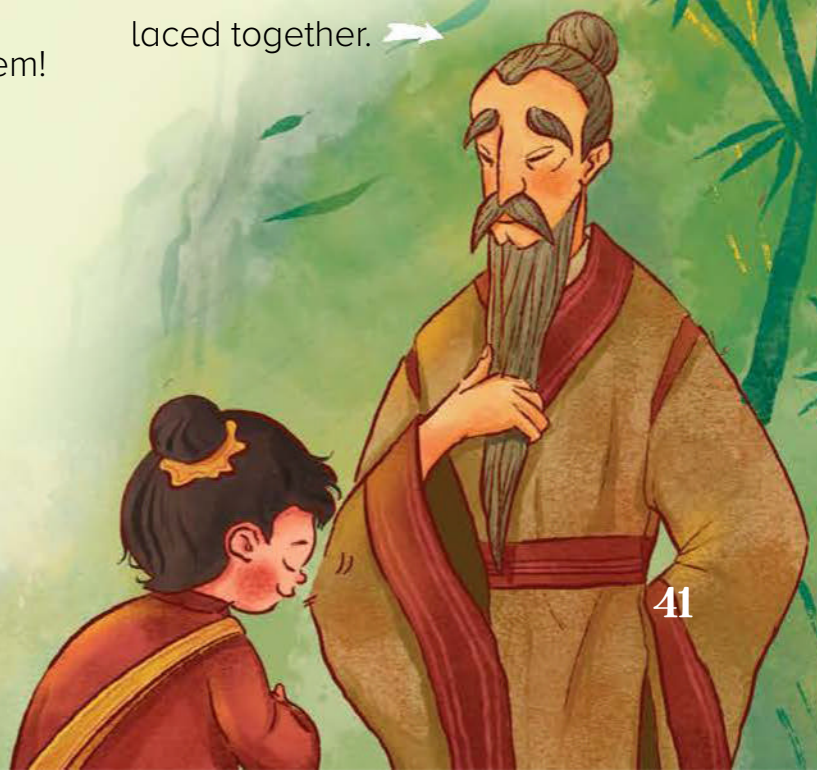
Qiu loved doing these ceremonies and performed them every day – they made him feel as if he was still in contact with his father.

His mother also taught him many songs. In those times, books were rare and expensive, so people passed on stories by singing them! Qiu learned them all by heart. He was a friendly and curious child, and he asked priests and scholars who passed by their home to teach him any other songs that they knew as well! He learned a lot from these travellers and grew wise beyond his years.

When he was old enough, Qiu’s mother took him to a humble schoolroom and introduced him to the teacher. Qiu bowed politely, and the teacher greeted him.

“Welcome, Qiu. We hope you will enjoy learning with us. Please take a seat with your fellow pupils!”

The kindly teacher taught him writing, mathematics and music. It was at school that Qiu discovered the wonder of books. Books in ancient China were made up of strips of bamboo that were laced together. ➔



Little Qiu quickly learned to read so he could discover all the knowledge contained in these volumes!

In the afternoons, the teacher took Qiu and the other students outside.

“Knowledge is very important,” he told them, “but to become a perfect gentleman, you must master other arts as well! The mind and the body are equally important.” That was why they had lessons in how to ride horses and shoot a bow, which Qiu really enjoyed.

The most important thing that Qiu learned was good manners!

“What good is knowing many things if you do not know how to behave in a way that is kind and just?” his teacher said. This inspired Qiu, and he tried to be kind, polite and respectful in everything he did.



After Qiu had gone to school for many years, he talked to his mother about what he should do with his life.

“You are now as big and strong as your father was!” his mum told him. “Perhaps you should join the army of a lord like he did and bring honour to our family!”

Qiu thought about this. Various lords and kings were still fighting each other for control of China, and it was the ordinary people who suffered. Soldiers would ride in and burn houses in nearby villages, and nobles in rich robes took rice from poor peasants as taxes, leaving them to starve. Qiu found it very upsetting!



“I don’t think I can be a soldier!” he replied.

“The lords and their armies are bringing misery to our country. How can that be right? Our rulers should be just and fair to their people, so the land can prosper!”

His mother sighed. “Unfortunately, that isn’t the way the world works. Rulers use their power as they want, and we can’t do anything about it.”

She patted his shoulder. “Don’t worry, you can’t change the world...”

But Qiu shook his head. “You taught me to be wise and respectful, and so did my teacher. I want to share the wisdom that I have been given. Perhaps if I teach the people of China and their rulers how to live good lives, it will make the world a better place for us all!”

It was then that his mother remembered the dream she had had before Qiu was born. The qilin had said that her son would be a ‘king without a throne’, and perhaps her little prince was going to become a great man. He might not rule any lands, but his ideas were noble, and his wisdom could help bring peace to China. ★

THE WISDOM OF CONFUCIUS

- ★ To study and not think is a waste, but to think and not study is dangerous!
- ★ Do not do to others what you would not want done to yourself.
- ★ A superior person speaks little, but acts and accomplishes great things instead.

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT...

Qiu went to work for the Duke of Lu, but not as a soldier. Instead, he worked for the government, keeping records. He also taught students and wrote about education, morals and the qualities of a good leader.

His wisdom was noticed, and he was promoted to an important position in the government. He did his best to bring peace, but had to leave after making powerful enemies. He then travelled throughout the different Chinese kingdoms and spread his ideas about how to live a good life.

He became known as ‘Kong Fuzi’, but Europeans know him as ‘Confucius’.

His ideas about respecting ancestors, improving oneself and encouraging good conduct among rulers spread to many other countries. He taught the value of education and the traditional ‘Six Arts’ of Chinese culture: calligraphy, mathematics, music, good manners, archery and horse-riding. His wisdom is still valuable to us today!

STORYTIME PLAYBOX

Have festive fun with a midwinter maze, a Santa Claus craft project and a completely cuckoo game!

1 WHAT'S THAT TUNE?

The donkey is getting into the Christmas spirit by singing a carol – but he has jumbled up the words! **Work out which song he is trying to sing so you can join in!**

JEN LIG SELB
GEJLN LAL
ETH YAW!



2 FOLLOW THE SCROLL!

Follow the scroll to find where Qiu is hiding in these pages. **Colour in this Chinese Yin and Yang symbol when you spot him!**



3

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

Work out which animal has which resolution! The six statements below will give you clues about which things they do and don't plan to change...

	 I'm going vegetarian!	 I'm off for a paddle!	 I'm tired of being a night owl!	 No more slouching!
A. Stand up straighter!				
B. Eat healthy food!				
C. Try a new sport!				
D. Wake up earlier!				

- ✦ The reptile is not changing his diet or his sleeping routine!
- ✦ The birds don't worry about their posture or diet!
- ✦ The mammal isn't trying a sport or getting up earlier!
- ✦ None of the male characters want to get more exercise!
- ✦ The fox thinks he stands up straight already!
- ✦ The pheasant is happy with her waking-up time!

4 KITTENS IN THE CRADLE

The floods have carried the kittens away! **How many cute little cats are in the baby's cradle?** Write your answer here!

I count this many kittens!





7

TRAIL OF KINDNESS!

Little Vaclav is lost in the snowy forest! Find the path that will take him back to Good King Wenceslas – and pick up the presents the ruler accidentally dropped along the way!



ANSWERS: 1. What's That Tune? – Jingle Bells! 2. Follow the Scroll! – he's on this page! 3. New Year's Resolutions – A. snake, B. fox, C. pheasant, D. owl. 4. Kittens in the Cradle – there are 13 kittens! 5. Where are the Toys? – see right. There are 5 sweets! 3. Trail of Kindness! – see right.

5 WHERE ARE THE TOYS?

The nutcracker, the ballerina and the mouse king are all somewhere in this Christmas scene.

Circle them in the picture – and then count all the sweets you can find!



6 MAKE AN ENVELOPE PUPPET

Get creative by making a double-sided Santa-and-imp envelope puppet that you can use to act out stories!

ASK A GROWN-UP!

- You will need a large envelope (C5 size is best!), scissors, paints and a paintbrush, a small tin or jar and the puppet template sheet you can download and print out from storytimemagazine.com/free.
- Seal the envelope, then trim off one of the short sides to make it into a 'pocket'.
- Paint one side of it skin-coloured (for Santa) and the other side red (for the imp). Then stand it up over the small tin or jar to dry.
- Cut out the features for both characters from the template sheet: hat, beard, moustache, eyes, ears, nose, horns and so on.
- When the envelope is dry, stick the cut-out features onto each one. You can even get creative and mix the features up!
- Now you can put your hand in the pocket of the puppet and bring the characters to life! Turn the puppet around to switch between characters, and use different voices for each one!



TIP!

Add texture to your puppet! You could put cotton balls on the Santa side and some tinsel hair on the imp side, for example!

SCRAPE OR SPARE?

In this game, players take on the roles of brothers Scrape and Spare from 'The Christmas Cuckoo'. One wants money and the other wants happiness – who will win in the end?

How to Play

You will need two players, a **Scrape** counter and a **Spare** counter, the deck of 16 cards downloaded and printed out from storytimemagazine.com/free, a dice and the game board on these pages!

- ★ The youngest player picks who they want to play as. **Spare** wants *happiness* and **Scrape** wants *money*!
- ★ Each player should take their counter and place it on the **START** space.
- ★ The players take turns rolling the dice and moving that many spaces. (The **Scrape** player goes first!) If they land on a space with **Pick a Card!** on it, they take a card from the deck and keep it.
- ★ If they draw a **Cuckoo!** card, they draw *two extra cards* from the deck and keep them!
- ★ If they land on a space with a **Frowny Face** on it, a disaster occurs! The other player takes a random card from their hand and discards it. If they land on a space with a present on it, they must give one of their cards to their opponent as a gift!
- ★ When both players have got to the **FINISH** space, it's time to work out who won!
- ★ The **Spare** player should add up the smiley faces on the cards they have collected. The **Scrape** player should count up the number of coins on their cards. The player with the highest total wins!

BE STRATEGIC! Remember that your opponent needs cards with lots of smiles (or coins!) on them. Keep this in mind when giving them cards as presents!



START

FINISH





Pick a Card!

Pick a Card!

Pick a Card!

Pick a Card!

Pick a Card!

Pick a Card!

Pick a Card!

Pick a Card!



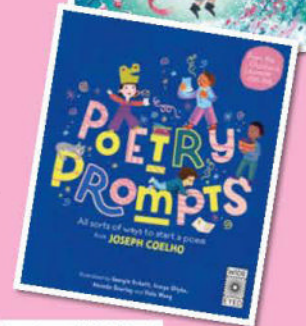
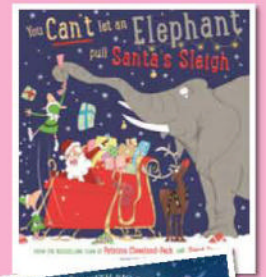
STORY MAGIC

THE GIFT OF BRILLIANT BOOKS!

➔ **YOU CAN'T LET AN ELEPHANT PULL SANTA'S SLEIGH** by Patricia Cleveland-Peck, illustrated by David Tazzyman (Bloomsbury) features lots of animals – and the bouncy rhyming text lists very good reasons why you *wouldn't* want them to help with various Christmas tasks! The art is amazing, with a loose, colourful style that captures the character of each creature...

➔ **HELLO WINTER** by Jo Lindley (Farshore) is part of a series of beautifully illustrated books set on Season Isle. It stars the seasons in the form of four cute fairy kids – but the others don't like hanging out with Winter because she makes things too frosty. Don't worry, though – this tale has an ending that celebrates difference and the wonders of the chilly season!

➔ **POETRY PROMPTS** by Joseph Coelho, illustrated by Georgie Birkett, Amanda Quartey, Grasya Oliyko and Viola Wang (Wide Eyed) would make a perfect present for the budding poet in your life! It's packed with tips, challenges, art and cool ideas that will inspire a child's creative spirit.



To buy from independent booksellers, visit uk.bookshop.org/shop/storytimemagazine or scan:



STORY CLUB!

PROMOTING YOUR CLUB!

THE MORE, THE MERRIER!

By now, you might have held your first **Story Club** meeting – we hope it went well! The next thing to do is let more people know about your club, so they can join in the fun!

MAKING POSTERS!

Why not turn promoting **Story Club** into a fun activity by getting your members to draw posters about it – featuring scenes from their favourite tales? Don't forget to include information about what your club does and when and where it meets!

LET PEOPLE KNOW!

The posters can be put on noticeboards in school libraries and other places where interested kids might spot them. You can also ask teachers to mention your club and what it does at school assemblies or in newsletters.

Don't worry too much about getting dozens of new members. It's better to have a few enthusiastic participants rather than lots of people who aren't really interested!

NEXT MONTH: making your club meetings extra-special!



WHAT FUN IT IS TO READ AND SING!

NO PLASTIC
AND NO ADS
INSIDE!



SCAN HERE FOR OUR NEWSLETTER
AND A CHANCE TO WIN BOOKS!



A HAPPY NEW YEAR OF STORIES AWAITS!

