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PENGUIN ACTIVE READING

LEVEL 4

# The Monkey King

Wu Ch'êng-ên



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## it's the book about?

Look at the picture on the front of this book. Talk to another student.

- 1 Have you read stories about the Monkey King? Have you seen films or television programmes about him? What kind of story do you think this is?
- 2 Which words in the box describe these events or characters in the story, do you think? Write them next to the pictures.

brave clever dangerous entertaining difficult magic  
powerful violent



- 1 .....
- 2 .....
- 3 .....
- 4 .....



- 5 .....
- 6 .....
- 7 .....
- 8 .....

## 1.2 What happens first?

Read the title of Chapter 1 and the sentences in *italics* under it. Then look at the pictures in this chapter and discuss these questions.

- 1 Is Monkey a human or an animal?
- 2 What does Monkey use to make more monkeys?
- 3 What else can Monkey do?
- 4 Who teaches him?
- 5 Will you read about strange gods or normal families?
- 6 Who or what are the characters on page 14?



# Monkey's Story

*Monkey pulled out some hairs from his chest and, crying 'Change!', threw them into the air. At once, they became several hundred small monkeys.*

From the beginning of time, the rock was smoothed and cleaned by Heaven and Earth, by the strong sun and the gentle moon, until one day it broke into two pieces and gave birth to a stone egg, about as big as a child's ball. From the egg came a stone **monkey**.

At once, this monkey learned to climb and run. But first, it looked north and south and east and west. As it looked, a strange light came from its eyes. The light shone as far as the **Jade Emperor**, who sat in the Cloud Palace of the Golden Gates. The Jade Emperor asked his ministers to open the gate of the Southern Heaven and look out at the light.

'This light,' reported the ministers, 'comes from the small country of Ao-lai, to the east of the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit.'

And in the country of Ao-lai, the monkey ran and jumped. He picked flowers, ate grass and fruit, and drank from streams and rivers. His friends were all the animals of that country, and the other monkeys were his family. At night, he slept among the rocks and in the day he walked through the **caves**.

One day, the monkeys were washing in a stream when one of them spoke. 'None of us knows where this stream comes from. Let's follow it and find out.' So they all ran up the stream until they came to a great waterfall.

The monkeys shouted, 'Lovely water, lovely water! It starts in a mountain cave and runs all the way to the Great Sea. Who can find the place where the water comes from? If one of us could find this place and return safely, we would make him our king!'

'I will go!' shouted the Stone Monkey. 'I will go!'

Look at him! He shuts his eyes, and with one big jump he passes through the curtain of water. But there is no water where he has landed. Instead he finds a great, shining iron bridge in front of him.

Monkey walked along the bridge and came to a cave. Outside the cave there was a sign: *This Cave of the Water Curtain in the Country of the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit Leads to Heaven.*

Monkey laughed and jumped with happiness. He ran back across the bridge, shut his eyes and jumped through the waterfall to the other monkeys.

**monkey** /məŋki/ (n) a small tree-climbing animal with a long tail  
**jade** /dʒeɪd/ (n) a valuable green stone which is used in jewellery  
**emperor** /'empərə/ (n) the ruler of a large area, of many countries  
**cave** /keɪv/ (n) a deep hole inside a mountain



‘Good news!’ he shouted. ‘Good news! Come with me, all of you!’

They followed the Stone Monkey to the Cave of the Water Curtain. There the Stone Monkey sat down and talked to them.

‘Gentlemen!’ he said. ‘I have been through the waterfall and have come back again. I have given you a home in this cave, so am I not your king now?’

The monkeys **bowed** to the Stone Monkey and they all cried, ‘Great King for a thousand years!’ The Stone Monkey became the Monkey King and he made other monkeys his ministers.

And all the monkeys were happy. During the day they walked and played on the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit, and at night they slept in the Cave of the Water Curtain. They had everything they wanted. Their lives were complete.

The Monkey King enjoyed this simple life for several hundred years. But one day at a great party with all the other monkeys, he suddenly started to cry.

The other monkeys all bowed, saying, ‘Why is our king so sad?’

‘Today,’ said the Monkey King, ‘I am not sad. But I am worried about the future. Sadly, the time will come when I will become old and weak. Yama, King of Death, is waiting to destroy me. I do not want to be born again on Earth. How can I live for all time among the people of the sky?’

The monkeys all started to cry, each thinking of his own **mortality**. One of them said, ‘Only Buddhas and Immortals do not go to Yama, King of Death. Only they live forever.’

‘Where can I find these Immortals?’ asked the Monkey King.

**bow** /bau/ (v/n) to bend at the waist with your head down, as a sign of politeness

**mortality** /mɔ:ˈtæləti/ (n) the state of being human and having to die. A mortal is someone who is unable to live forever.



...ere on Earth they live in very old caves far to the West.'

'Tomorrow,' said the Monkey King, 'I shall say goodbye to you. I shall go down the mountain and travel to the end of the world. I want to learn to live for all time and to escape from death.'

Next morning, he walked to the sea and sailed in a boat to the borders of the Southern World. There he climbed out on to the beach. And then he walked and walked, through towns and cities, to the West.

On the way, he learned to wear clothes and to behave like a human. But he met humans who wanted only to be rich and famous. He met nobody who worried about his mortality.

One day, he came to the Western Ocean, where he built another boat. Then he sailed to the Western Continent, where he saw a very high and beautiful wooded mountain. At the top of the mountain was the Cave of the Moon and Three Stars, where the Immortal Subodhi lived.

Monkey at once bowed and touched the ground with his head three times.

'Where do you come from?' asked the Immortal.

'I am from the Cave of the Water Curtain,' said Monkey, 'on the Mountain of Flowers and Fruit in the country of Ao-lai.'

'That is impossible!' shouted the Immortal. 'Between there and here are two oceans and the whole of the Southern Continent. You are lying!'

'I have sailed across the oceans and walked over the continents for more than ten years,' said Monkey. 'At last I have reached here.'

Monkey told the Immortal how he had come from a magic stone. The Immortal thought that Monkey was a natural product of Heaven and Earth, so he agreed to teach him. Monkey jumped up and down with happiness.

Day after day, he and the other students learned to speak and behave correctly. They learned to write well and to study the Scriptures\*. When they were not studying, the students grew flowers and trees. They lit fires and fetched water. And so Monkey lived in this way for six or seven years.

Finally, the Immortal sent for Monkey late one night because he wanted to teach him the Way of Long Life.

'Come close and listen carefully,' said the Immortal.

Monkey went down on his knees on the floor at the Immortal's feet, listening carefully. The Immortal **recited** a magic poem with many lines. The words shook Monkey's **soul** and he was never the same Monkey again. He thanked the Immortal many times, because now he knew the Way of Long Life.

\* Scriptures: the books of a religion

**recite** /rɪ'saɪt/ (v) to say something from memory so that everyone can hear you

**soul** /səʊl/ (n) the part of a person that is not the body. In some religions, it is believed to be the most important part of a person.

# Monkey King



PENGUIN  
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READING

Level 4  
1700 headwords  
Intermediate

Wu Ch'êng-ên

British English  
*Contemporary*

The Monkey King is an excitable, selfish creature with magic skills. As punishment for bad behaviour, he is sent by the gods on a long, hard journey to the West, to protect a young Buddhist priest. The travellers have many frightening and amusing adventures on the way. Can they reach their destination and return unharmed?

Number of words (excluding activities): 29,672

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