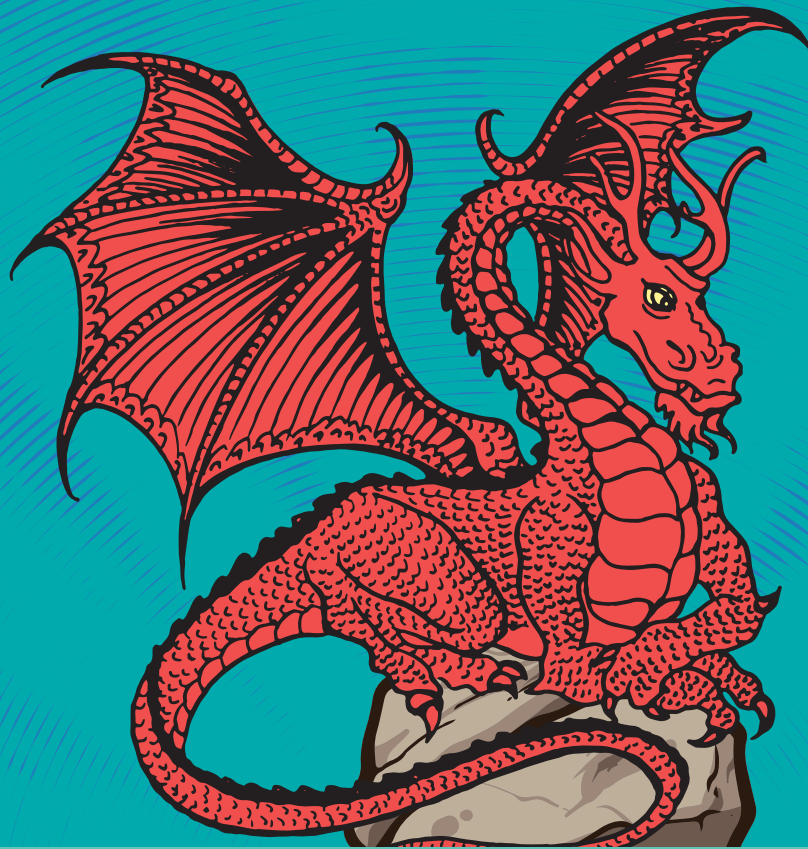


EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

GIANTS DRAGONS & UNICORNS

The World of Mythic Creatures



amnh.org/mythiccreatures

INSIDE:

- Suggestions to Help You Come Prepared
- Key Concepts
- Activities to Extend Learning Back in the Classroom
- Correlations to Standards
- Glossary

keyCONCEPTS

You can connect *Giants, Dragons and Unicorns: The World of Mythic Creatures* to your curriculum using these key concepts. They convey the main educational themes of the exhibition.

Mythic Creatures Teach Us About Cultures Around the World

Stories about mythic creatures embody belief systems, identity, moral codes, impressions of the natural world, and other aspects of humanity. As cultures change over time, the qualities of their mythic creatures can change, too. Therefore, we can study these creatures to learn about the history and evolution of cultures both ancient and modern.

Many Mythic Creatures Reflect Attempts to Describe the Natural World

Mythic creatures can offer perspective on how scientific discovery changes over time. Before formal scientific methods came about, a fleeting glimpse of an animal or a finding of unfamiliar bones was often enough to confirm a being's existence. Indeed, many mythic creatures are bizarre assemblages of parts of real animals. As methods for scientific observation and interpretation evolved, it became clear which animals exist in nature—and which are mythical.

Mythic Creatures Are a Medium of Cultural Interaction

When people from different cultures interact, they often blend and borrow myths, stories, and images. This cultural exchange can explain why numerous cultures have mythic creatures that appear similar. Some even retain similar meanings.

Mythic Creatures Take Shape Through Human Imagination

Mythic creatures are evidence of the uniquely human capacity for symbolic expression: the ability to express abstract thoughts about our world using symbols in language, art, and music.

Cultures Keep Mythic Creatures Alive Through Art and Literature

The narratives of mythic creatures frequently appear in literature, oral traditions, music, dance, drama, celebrations, and many other art forms. These powerful stories continue to resonate with us and persist as artists reinterpret them over and over. Knowing more about mythic creatures can help us interpret their symbolic use in art and literature.

WHAT IS A MYTHIC CREATURE?

Dragons, unicorns, mermaids... Mythic creatures are fantastic beings—some familiar, others unusual—that take shape through human creativity. Their forms and meanings are as diverse as their cultural origins. Ultimately, mythic creatures serve as symbols of the human experience. That the often ancient stories about these beings endure today is a testament to their powerful imagery and broad appeal in cultures around the world.

WORDS TO KNOW

Become familiar with the language of the exhibition.

- **culture:** sum total of ways of living practiced by a group of human beings and transmitted from one generation to another
- **evidence:** observations or other materials that support ideas, concepts, or scientific hypotheses
- **hoax:** something intended to deceive; fraud
- **identity:** the qualities and characteristics a person or group uses to describe who they are
- **imagination:** the ability to form images and ideas in the mind, especially things never seen or experienced directly
- **interpret:** to translate or explain
- **legend:** an unverifiable story handed down by tradition and popularly accepted as having some basis in history
- **mythic:** having supernatural or extraordinary qualities; often associated with traditional or legendary stories
- **representation:** the visible form of an idea or concept
- **ritual:** any practice or pattern of behavior repeated in a prescribed manner including but not restricted to religious rites
- **stylize:** to give something a distinctive artistic or cultural style
- **symbol:** a material object representing something visible or invisible; a characteristic mark used to represent something
- **traits:** distinguishing characteristics or qualities
- **witness:** to be present at an occurrence; a spectator or bystander

FIELD JOURNALS

Working independently or in small groups, have students choose one of these three open-ended investigations.

1. Discover a Creature

Find a creature that is unfamiliar to you. Record the name and age of an object that depicts this creature, the culture it is associated with, where it was found, and what it is made of. Describe and draw it. Why did you choose this creature? Are there any similarities between this creature and other mythic creatures that you were already familiar with?

2. Animal I.D.

Pick a creature in the exhibition. Record the name and age of an object that depicts this creature, the culture it is associated with, where it was found, and what it is made of. List the real animal parts that make up this creature. What are the traits of these animals? What might these traits tell you about the behavior and meaning of this mythic creature?

3. Different Dragons

Find one dragon from an Asian culture and one dragon from a European culture. Record the name and age of an object that depicts each dragon, the culture it is associated with, where it was found, and what it is made of. Describe how the dragons are shown. Do dragons mean different things to Asian and European cultures? How do you know?

COME PREPARED

Review this guide prior to your visit to the exhibition. In addition, go to amnh.org/mythiccreatures for an in-depth description of the exhibition, activities, book and web lists, and information about planning your visit.

Class Discussion

Before you visit the exhibition, let students know they'll be able to explore many kinds of mythic creatures from different cultures and time periods. Read aloud the sidebar "What is a mythic creature?" and discuss the Key Concepts with students. To continue the dialogue, ask:

- What mythic creatures have you encountered in books, artwork, television, video games, comics, and other media? List them.
- What do you know about these creatures?
- Do these creatures have symbolic meaning? Solicit examples.

Your visit to the exhibition can be correlated to the national standards listed below. Additional correlations to New York State and City standards can be found at amnh.org/mythiccreatures.

National Content Area Social Studies Standards

K–4 Standard 1: Culture; B: People from diverse cultural perspectives may interpret experiences differently; C: Language, stories, folktales, and artists serve as expressions of culture
5–8 Standard 1: Culture; B: People from diverse cultural perspectives and frames may interpret information and experiences differently; C: Language, literature, the arts, and other artifacts, traditions, beliefs, and behaviors contribute to the development and transmission of culture
9–12 Standard 1: Culture; C: Apply an understanding of culture as an integrated whole; D: Compare and analyze societal patterns for preserving and transmitting culture

National Science Education Standards

K–4 A1: Ask a question about objects, organisms, and events in the environment; G1: Science and technology have been practiced by people for a long time
5–8 A2: Current scientific knowledge and understanding guide scientific investigations
9–12 A2: Scientific explanations must abide by the rules of evidence; it must be open to questions and be based on historical and current scientific knowledge; G3: The historical perspective of scientific explanations demonstrates how scientific knowledge changes by evolving over time

National English Language Arts Standards

All grades 1: Reading for perspective; 2: Understanding the human experience; 3: Multi-cultural understanding

National Standards in the Arts

All grades 3: Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas; 4: Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

back in the **CLASSROOM**

ACTIVITIES

All Subjects

- **Design a Mythic Creature (K-12):** Have students develop a mythic creature of their own design. They should consider: What inspired its attributes? Does this creature have a message? How is it relevant to the students' world—or the world at large? Have students draw and label a picture of it. Older students may want to express their creature through a cartoon strip, book jacket, coat of arms, costume, or other media.
- **Mythic "Telephone" (K-8):** Mythic creatures can change as artists reinterpret them. They can also change by word of mouth. To explore those concepts, try this: Line up students and show the first an image of an unusual animal. He/she should describe (but not name) it in the next student's ear, and so on. The last student in line can draw it on the board. Compare the drawing to the original image.

Social Studies

- **Modern Mythic Creatures (3-8):** Have students choose creatures visible in popular culture (e.g. movies, mascots, ads, video games, comics, anime) and research their mythic origins. What did they symbolize in the past? How and why are these symbols still used today?
- **Interview an Adult (6-12):** Students can interview an elder to explore what mythic creatures he or she was aware of as a child. What did this creature mean to him or her? Is it still "in circulation"? Do the mythic creatures lend any insight on the cultural background of this person?

Science

- **Fleeting Impressions (K-12):** Students can experience how difficult it can be to describe an animal based on one fleeting observation. Walk around the class with a photo of an unusual animal so each student observes it for just a few seconds. Take the image away, and have students describe the animal in as much detail as possible. Compare student recollections to the picture.

English Language Arts

- **Read a Story (K-12):** Have students read stories, comics, or manga that feature mythic creatures. Explore the creature's attributes, symbolism, and role in the story. Is this creature based on ancient legend? Older kids may want to compare and contrast depictions of European and Asian dragons. Recommended books are available on our website.

Visual and Performing Arts

- **Create a Mythic Creature Mask or Puppet (K-12):** Have students design a mask or puppet of a creature they saw at the exhibition.

DISCUSS THE EXHIBITION

Extend your visit with a class discussion. Below are some conversation starters.

- What mythic creatures were new to you? Did any surprise you?
- How can learning about mythic creatures and their origins help us understand people and cultures around the world?
- How are mythic creatures depicted in our culture today? What do they tell you about the world we live in?
- Think of a favorite book or movie with a mythic creature. Compare how it was portrayed in the book or movie versus how it was portrayed in the exhibition.

ONLINE ACTIVITIES

Visit amnh.org/mythiccreatures

Students can explore mermaid migration; research early explorers and the real animals they mistakenly identified as mythic creatures; investigate mysterious modern species; and interpret unfamiliar bones.

Visit ology.amnh.org

Students can investigate an interactive map; explore a mythic creatures photo gallery; design a creature mask or puppet; download stationery; and create OLog projects.

CREDITS

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