

ENCYCLOPEDIA  
MYTHOLOGICA

# Dragons & Monsters

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The ominous kraken grapples with a vessel on the high seas. Dragons from Eastern and Western traditions burst into life. Medusa, snake-hair twisting and hissing, turns the reader into stone. A vampire rises slowly from his coffin, a lycanthrope is caught in the light of a full moon and transforms, and Bigfoot hides behind a tree, dodging his human pursuer.

Master paper engineers Mathew Reinhart and Robert Sabuda uncover the legends and lore of cultures around the world to reveal these stunning mythological creatures in *Dragons and Monsters*, the third installment in the Encyclopedia Mythologica trilogy.

Intricate and colorful pop-ups unfold, fan, and rotate to bring every tooth and nail, bristle and scale to life. Let this amazing book serve as an inspiration for students, enticing them to dig deeper into the haunting and hair-raising world of dragons and monsters. These classroom activities show you how.

## Fearsome Fables

Numerous fables have been attributed to Aesop, who according to legend was born a slave in sixth-century Greece. Aesop's fables typically feature personified animals chosen as archetypes for their exaggerated characteristics: the fox is cunning, the peacock is proud, the donkey is foolish, and the ant is industrious. But what if we introduced a dragon to the traditional fable genre? What kind of dragon would it be, and what trait would it embody? Would it be the intelligent and ruthless dragon of northern European legend, or the majestic and benevolent dragon of Far Eastern lore? First provide students with numerous fable sources, allowing them to explore the archetypal animals, simple plots, and wisdom-imparting morals. Then challenge students to create a wholly original fable, incorporating a dragon as one of the main characters. Allow students to use *Dragons and Monsters* as well as other resources to research the unique traits of their chosen dragon.



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## In Defense of the Dragon

On the second spread of *Dragons and Monsters*, we read that young Maud befriends a baby wyvern (a two-legged winged dragon), but later fails to save its life when a local knight slays the dragon in order to spare the village. Ask students to pretend that Maud had intervened in time. Instruct students to write a persuasive letter from Maud to the knight, explaining her reasons for why the dragon's life should be spared. Students may need to conduct additional research on the Dragon of Mordiford in order to learn all the details before composing their letters.



## Modern Monsters and Present-Day Dragons

Who says that monsters and dragons never existed? In truth, they crawl, fly, and swim among us today! Form students into teams to research some true-to-life dragons and monsters such as bearded dragons, Komodo dragons, dragonflies, basilisks, Gila monsters, Chinese water dragons, Dracula orchids, dragonets, sea dragons, snapdragons, vampire bats, and devilfish. Among the questions students might explore: How did these plants and animals earn their fearsome names? What stories or superstitions surround them? In what ways do they live up to their namesakes?



## Monstrous Metaphors

Ancient monsters live on through modern-day metaphors. A huge submarine is described as a leviathan, a grumpy teacher as an ogre, a short-tempered and strict person as a dragon, a popular song as a monster hit, and an immense vehicle as a monster truck. We've heard jealousy called "the green-eyed monster," and sometimes we've even reluctantly admitted that we've "created a monster." What do all these expressions mean? Have students research these expressions and others and provide literal translations. Invite students to illustrate their definitions using images of monsters to help symbolize the metaphorical meanings.



## FrankenWords

Traditionally, a portmanteau is a two-sectioned suitcase, with sides that open and lie flat like a book. Lewis Carroll, author of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, coined the phrase "portmanteau word" to mean two words blended to make a new word. Unlike a compound word, a portmanteau word eliminates some letters. Some examples of portmanteau words (often called Frankenwords) are *motel* (*motor* and *hotel*), *smog* (*smoke* and *fog*), *pixel* (*picture* and *element*), *spork* (*spoon* and *fork*) and *camcorder* (*camera* and *recorder*). Discuss the topic with students, asking: Why are these words called Frankenwords? How are they like Frankenstein's monster? Then challenge students to parse the root words that form these common portmanteaus: *brunch*, *infomercial*, *docudrama*, *liger*, *Internet*, *blog*, *heliport*, *croissantwich*, *zonkey*, and *sitcom*. Allow students to create their own portmanteaus, perhaps to name the creatures they create in "Monster Mash-ups" below. For inspiration, students may enjoy hearing a read-aloud of Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky," which contains not only original portmanteau words but also the character of the Jabberwock itself, a fearsome dragonlike beast with "jaws that bite," "claws that catch," and "eyes of flame."

## Travelogue of Terror

*Dragons and Monsters* presents readers with terrors from nearly every corner of the world. Assign each student a monster to research more fully, collecting information from multiple sources. As students gather data, they should include the following: monster's name, meaning of name, country or region of origin, physical traits, nasty habits, enemies and weaknesses, and last known whereabouts. Students might also retell a tale involving their creature, or create an original tale and drawing. When students have finished with their individual research, challenge them to organize the mythical creatures by location, or (alternatively) on a timeline, from the ancient leviathan to the just-seen-yesterday Loch Ness Monster. The final collaborative travelogue might be a book, digital slide show, wiki, bulletin board collage, or interactive web-based presentation.



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## Creature Classifieds

What if dragons and monsters used their powers to provide services to others? Assign each student a creature from *Dragons and Monsters* and challenge them to create a classified ad for a job that takes full advantage of their creature's special skills. What will the job entail? Where is the job located? What skills are needed? What compensation would attract the most "qualified" applicants? If time allows, invite students to create a final draft on a word processing program and include a picture of their creature in the ad. Projects may be printed out and consolidated on one large bulletin board, in the column format of a newspaper, under the title "Creature Classifieds."

## Diminutive Demons

Every monster, no matter how large and hideous, began its life as an itty-bitty beastie. Ask students to imagine the youth of one of the creatures from *Dragons and Monsters*. When did its "abnormalities" begin to show? When did its childish mischief turn to mayhem? What are the root causes of its antisocial behavior? Did its parents encourage this behavior, or were this beast's monstrous manners too much for them to bear? The final format of this project could take one of many forms, from scrapbook pages to narratives to report cards to journal entries.

## Creatures Featured

While not as haunting and hair-raising as the werewolves and Wendigos mentioned in spread five of *Dragons and Monsters*, invasive species are real-life monsters that plague us today. Invasive species are non-native plants and animals whose introduction to a foreign environment threatens to cause an unhealthy change in the ecosystem. Assign students to research and report on common invasive species such as cane toads, Africanized honey bees, northern snakeheads, European gypsy moths, and brown tree snakes. As students collect data about their creature, encourage them to ask: Why is this animal considered a threat to its new environment? How did it come to be there? What attempts have been made to control its population? What long-lasting damage could this species cause? What is one possible solution for its control or removal that hasn't yet been tried?

## Epic Endings

Beowulf's slaying of the ogre Grendel is told in epic poetry form. Share with students selected portions of *The Song of Hiawatha*, *Beowulf*, and the *Iliad* (all freely available online), and discuss the lyrical attributes of epic poetry. Then encourage students to further research a creature from *Dragons and Monsters* and write a poem featuring that creature. Remind students that although the poems need not rhyme, they should still contain literary devices such as similes, metaphors, hyperbole, alliteration, and onomatopoeia. Some students may wish to write in rhyme and should be encouraged to do so; others may even choose to set their poems to music.

## Monsters Inked

For all their fearsomeness, monsters hold a special charm for younger students. As a fun cross-grade activity, have lower elementary students create original monster drawings and later describe those drawings to upper-grade buddies. Be sure that the upper-grade students have been trained in conducting an interview so that they can ask questions that yield valuable data about the monsters: their names, their habitats, their physical traits, their habits, and their fears. If time allows, the cross-grade buddies might compose the first draft together; if not, older students could use their notes to create an original story based on data they gathered. Allow a time for buddies to get back together and share their stories. Publishing these tales digitally (via a wiki, blog, or video channel) is an excellent way to share the results with the family members of both students.

## Monster Mash-ups

Many monsters are hybrids of known animals. The ancient chimera (kī-mir-ə), for example, was part lion, part goat, and part serpent. Challenge students to create original creatures by combining body parts and behavioral traits of several different animals. Students might draw these animals, create mash-ups using magazine pictures, or use any number of online applications that permit photographic permutations. Once they've created their hybrids, students should name and describe them, and perhaps even create a tale that explains their creature's origin. Some students may even wish to try their hand at creating their very own pop-up page in the style of *Dragons and Monsters*.



*This guide was written by Keith Schoch, a sixth-grade reading and language arts teacher and creator of three blogs: Teach with Picture Books, How to Teach a Novel, and Teaching That Sticks.*



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