

Dragon

Facts



Tales of dragons roaming the Earth have existed for centuries. They can be fiery, flying beasts, watery serpents or have poisonous breath. In some cultures, they represent evil whereas in others they represent good fortune. However, the stories all bear strong similarities with each other.

Origins of Dragons

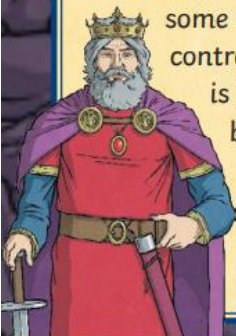
Many scholars have identified parallels between the tales of dragons in different cultures. Dragons are consistently described as large lizards or serpent-like creatures. Some of them are capable of flight, others possess legs to walk and some can do both.

When looking at the **etymology**, the English word 'dragon' is derived from the Latin term 'draco' and the Greek word 'drakōn' came before it. It was originally a word used for any enormous serpent. The way a dragon's shape is described has typically remained similar to the shape of a snake, with some experts believing that this came from humans' innate fear of snakes.



Medieval English Dragons

Dragons in tales from medieval England were frequently described as having wings, long tails and the ability to breathe fire. However, some English folklore describes a contrasting kind of dragon that is flightless and has poisonous breath. Ahead of the Norman Conquest, the royal insignia had dragons on it as they were considered of high value.



In Arthurian legend, it claims that these symbols were used by Uther Pendragon, King Arthur's father.

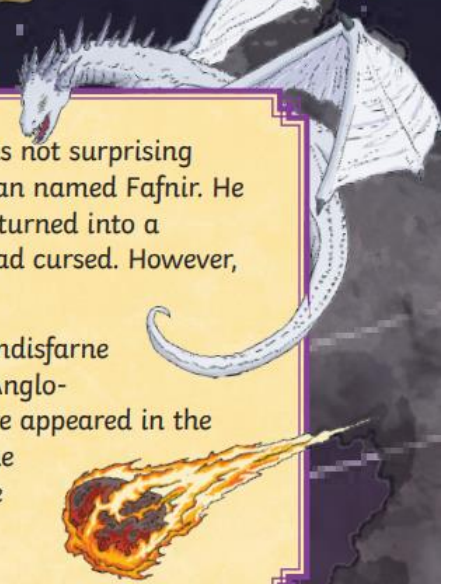
English folklore also contains the legend of Saint George, the patron saint of England. This legend is considered by many to tell the story of a Roman soldier who saved a king's daughter from a dragon before slaying it.



Norse Mythological Dragons

There are many well-known tales in Norse mythology and it is not surprising that dragons can be found among them. One tale tells of a man named Fafnir. He took an extensive amount of gold from his father. Fafnir then turned into a dragon to guard his precious gold that the Viking god Odin had cursed. However, the dragon was eventually slain by Sigurd.

A well-known Viking attack took place at the monastery in Lindisfarne in Northumbria in AD 793. According to evidence within the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, fierce dragons were thought by many to have appeared in the sky. These sightings were considered to be a warning about the invasion. However, it is now thought that these sightings were more likely to have been a comet.



East Asian Mythologies

In comparison, East Asian dragons are seen much more positively. In tales from Chinese, Korean, Indian and Vietnamese cultures, dragons are often featured as symbols of good fortune. In Chinese mythology, a lung dragon roams the skies and represents the heavens.

Intriguingly, the dragon was the emblem of the imperial family and once appeared on the Chinese flag. This was before the founding of the Republic of China in 1912.

Although associated with air, Japanese and Chinese dragons are typically believed to be wingless creatures.



Glossary

etymology: The study of the origin of words and their meaning.