

1 The Origins of Dragons

How did ancient people create the fictional creature?

1 What do you know about dragons?

Pairwork. Each pupil reads one text. Focus on the creature and on the people's characteristics, then report back to your partner.

1. Dinosaurs and crocodiles

Ancient people may have discovered dinosaur fossils and understandably misinterpreted them as the remains¹ of dragons. A giant beast was discovered in China, it was about 30 feet in length², 14 feet tall and was covered in armored plates³ and spikes⁴ for defense. In Africa, Nile crocodiles may have been bigger in ancient times, perhaps inspiring European dragon legends. They were among the largest of all crocodile species, up to 18 feet in length and were capable of a movement called the "high walk," in which the trunk⁵ was elevated off the ground.

10 It may have been easy to mistake them for dragons.

1 restes • 2 one foot = 30,48 cm • 3 plaques • 4 pointes • 5 tronc, buste

Adapted from

2. European dragons

The dragons that lurk¹ in European stories are powerful, wicked² and dangerous. In Christian tradition, they can symbolize Satan or sin³. Some nest in caves and guard marvelous treasures. [...] Epic poems from the Middle Ages tell of warriors and knights who battle cruel and voracious dragons. In some stories, the hero slays his foe⁴ and wins fortune and honor. In others, he fails and is killed. During the Middle Ages, dragons became popular figures in heraldry, appearing on banners⁵, seals and other emblems of authority and military might.

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1 wait hidden • 2 evil • 3 péché • 4 enemy • 5 oriflammes, étendards

Adapted from

2 The myth of Beowulf

A. Read the introduction. Focus on the dates, the countries and the characters. Memorise them.

B. Study the picture on the opposite page:

- Focus on the dragon's characteristics (appearance/action).
- Imagine why it is attacking. Use *may* and *must*.

C. Read the rest of the text. Focus on the feelings of the dragon (actions and adjectives).

D. Compare with the texts above (activity 1). What are the similarities between these dragons?

The manuscript about Beowulf was discovered in England in the 1600s. It is written in Old English, sometime between 700 and 950. The story reflects the warrior culture of ancient Germanic peoples, among whom wars were common and fighting was a traditional occupation. It tells the story of the hero Beowulf.*

* /'beɪwulf/

- 1 **W**hen the dragon awoke, trouble flared again. He rippled¹ down the rock, writhing² with anger when he saw the footprints of the prowler³ who had stolen too close to his dreaming head. [...]
- 5 The hoard⁴-guardian scorched⁵ the ground as he scoured⁶ and hunted for the trespasser who had troubled his sleep. Hot and savage, he kept circling and circling the outside of the mound. No man appeared in that desert waste, but he worked himself up by imagining battle [...].
- 10 Then, to his delight, the day waned and he could wait no longer behind the wall, but hurtled⁷ forth in a fiery blaze⁸. The first to suffer were the people on the land [...].

1 onduler • 2 se tortiller • 3 rôdeur • 4 trésor • 5 brûler • 6 fouiller • 7 foncer • 8 embrasement

Beowulf,
Seamus Heaney's translation, 1999

