

# Believe It or Not?

*A Reading A-Z Level Z2 Leveled Book*  
Word Count: 2,246

## Connections

### Writing

Choose one of the mysteries from the book and decide if it is real or a hoax. Write a persuasive essay to make your point, using information from the book and outside resources.

### Social Studies

Research to learn more about one of the mysteries in the book and create an informational brochure for your class. Include interesting facts and illustrations.

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## Focus Question

Why are people fascinated by unsolved mysteries?

## Words to Know

conundrums	node
decompose	pharaoh
fractals	plasma
hoaxes	reclusive
intricate	retracted
microwave	sporadic

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### Correlation

#### LEVEL Z2

Fountas & Pinnell	Y-Z
Reading Recovery	N/A
DRA	70+



An amateur photographer took this picture in 1952 of what many thought was an alien spacecraft. Do you think it's real or a fake?

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Was this young king's tomb protected by a curse?



Can anyone explain the mysterious losses of ships and planes?

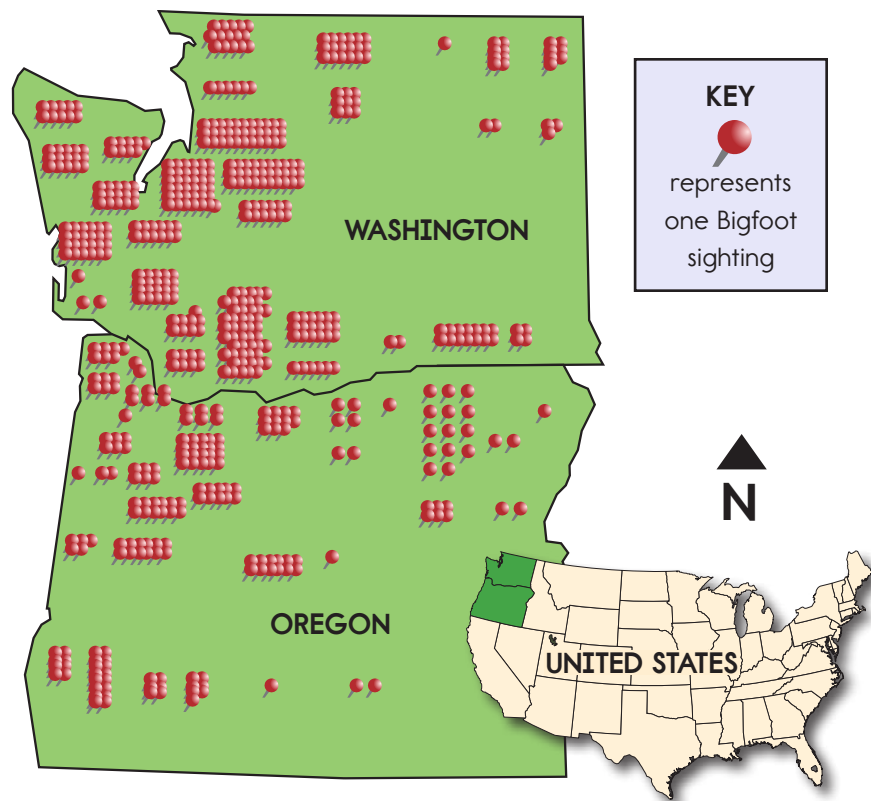
## Introduction

If you heard that hairy, odorous giants live in our wilderness or that extraterrestrials make pictures in wheat fields, would you believe it or discount it? What if a friend told you an ancient curse causes people to die for disturbing a sacred burial site? Or that some force in the Atlantic Ocean makes ships and planes vanish? How would you know whether these stories were true?

After reading this book, you'll have some evidence about these unsolved mysteries. You can decide whether you think they're genuine or **hoaxes**.

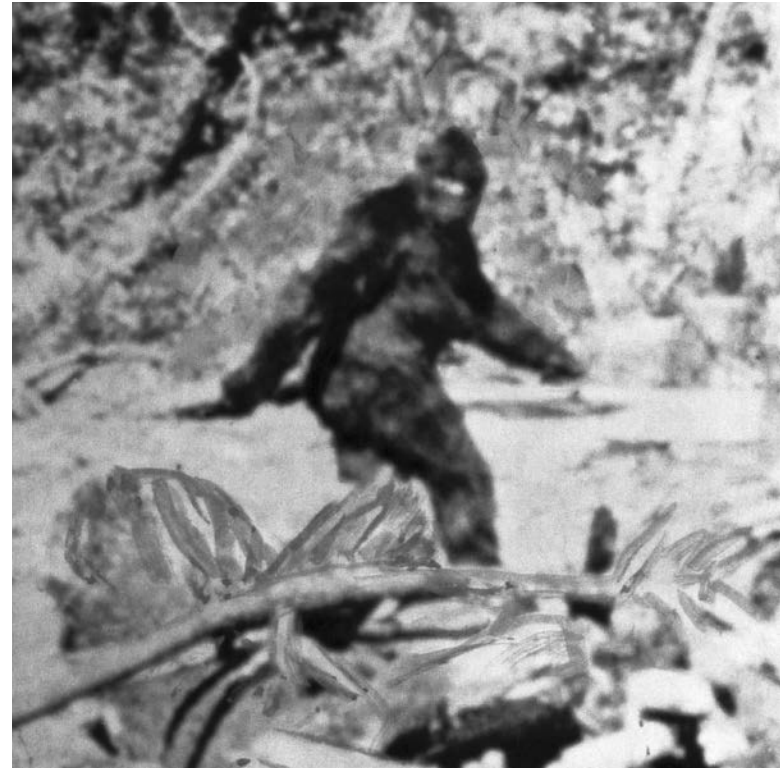


Who or what has made such intricate designs on acres of fields?



## Bigfoot

For hundreds of years in remote areas of the Pacific Northwest, Native Americans have told stories of having encountered gigantic, **reclusive**, bipedal, apelike creatures. The Salish peoples of Canada called them Sasquatch, which means “wild man of the woods,” but other tribes use different names, including Lofa, Omah, and Shampe. All the names have one thing in common—a reference to a human-shaped creature that is larger than most people. Since the 1950s, English speakers have most often used the name Bigfoot.



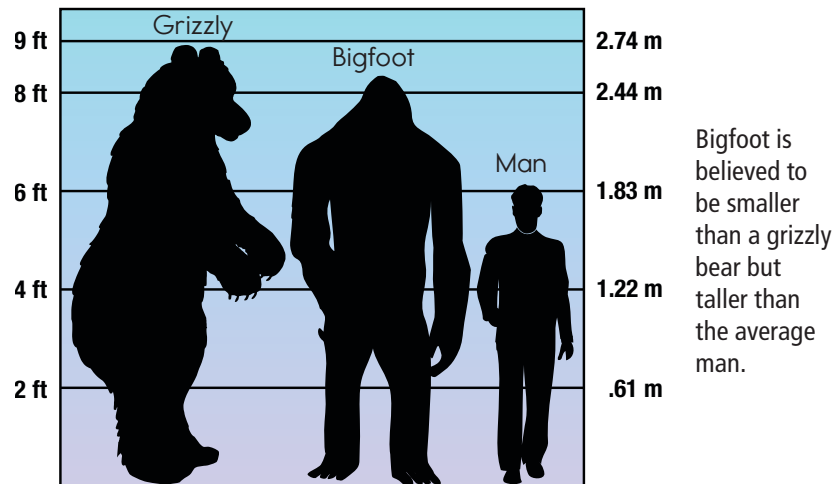
Roger Patterson took this picture in 1967. Is it a Bigfoot, a bear, or a human in a gorilla suit?

In addition to Native Americans, others who have reported encounters with this creature include railway and forest workers, hikers, travelers, and people who live in remote areas. In fact, sightings of these creatures go all the way back to 1811 in Alberta, Canada. Most of the people making reports have never heard the Native American stories, so they haven’t had the opportunity to be influenced by other accounts of these creatures.



A Bigfoot is reported to be huge, as tall as 8 feet (2.4 m), with tangled hair all over its body. Based on the length and depth of its enormous footprints—more than 14 inches (35.5 cm) long and 3 inches (7.6 cm) deep—its weight is estimated to be between 350 and 800 pounds (160–360 kg). People who see one usually report hearing high-pitched screams and smelling a terrible odor.

Cryptozoologists (scientists who study animals that may or may not exist) and other curious people have spent a great deal of time and money to discover whether Bigfoot really exists. Many websites are dedicated to recording and investigating Bigfoot sightings. After following up on thousands of eyewitness reports, they have not yet been able to find proof.



In 1998, Dr. John Bindernagel examined a pit in which he thought a Bigfoot had built a nest.

In 1924, a lumberjack named Albert Ostman went into the mountains alone to prospect for gold. He had worked for more than a year on a construction job and decided to take a three-week vacation. During the third night of his trip, he was carried off in his sleeping bag by something huge and smelly. After several hours, it dropped him in a clearing, where four huge, hairy, apelike creatures surrounded him. They seemed to be a family made up of four members: a father, a mother, and two children. Albert escaped, badly shaken but unharmed, after nearly a week. This is just one report of a Bigfoot encounter, though not all were so nonviolent.

In the vast uninhabited forests and glaciers of the northwestern United States, nature quickly disposes of dead bodies. They **decompose** or are eaten by insects or other scavengers. Some people believe that the reason a Bigfoot body hasn't been found is because they live between dimensions, spending only short periods of time in this dimension. However, scientists believe that if Bigfoot does exist, someone should be able to find a dead body, a skeleton, or fossil remains, yet nothing has ever been found.

In 1977, a Bigfoot sighting in northern Washington turned out to be a hoax planned by three young men using gorilla suits and walkie-talkies. This makes some people think that other reports must have been faked as well. Some websites report that up to 80 percent of sightings have been confirmed as hoaxes.

Do you think the Bigfoot sightings are real or a hoax?

A man's foot compared to a cast of a Bigfoot footprint



Many crop circles are very large. This one consisted of 149 circles and appeared near Stonehenge within 20 minutes in broad daylight.

## Crop Circles

In fields of tall crops, circles where the plants have been flattened were reported as early as 1590. While the majority of crop circles appear in England, they also appear in twenty-nine other countries. Farmers thought they were made by wind. In the 1980s, the number of circles increased dramatically all over the world, and since then, they have changed from simple circles to complex designs illustrating mathematical concepts that include **fractals**.

Most crop circles form mysteriously in the night, but a few people report having seen them formed by spaceships or whirlwinds, and almost always during a full moon. Sometimes lights are seen in the sky, accompanied by humming or music, and sometimes radiation can be detected inside the circles.



The crops inside circles are not crushed, but instead are bent at the lowest **node** on the stalk. Often these bent crops grow better than the unbent plants outside the circles. Scientific research has shown that chemical and physical soil modifications inside the circles allow for better crop growth. Scientific experiments suggest that high-powered **microwave** beams might cause the crops to lie down in this way. But from where would they originate, and who would control them? Some people think they are messages from extraterrestrials.

In areas where many circles are found, especially Wiltshire, England (the home of Stonehenge), people who watch the fields overnight for signs of activity and new circles say that **intricate** circle patterns can appear in just a few minutes.



The stalks inside a circle bend in a spiral pattern.

Many crop circles are made by humans for a variety of reasons. Some people use barrels and long planks on ropes to fold over the plants to a uniform height just to prove that it can be done. Some people want to play tricks and create hoaxes, and others who call themselves “crop artists” say that God inspires them.

In 1991, Englishmen Doug Bower and David Chorley claimed they had made every crop circle since 1978. They said their motivation was to see what kind of reaction they could get when people noticed the strange shapes. Some people accepted their explanation of a gigantic hoax. But others doubt they would have been capable of creating huge, complex patterns in the dark of night without being seen. Doug **retracted** his confession seven years later, declaring that “unknown forces” made the circles.



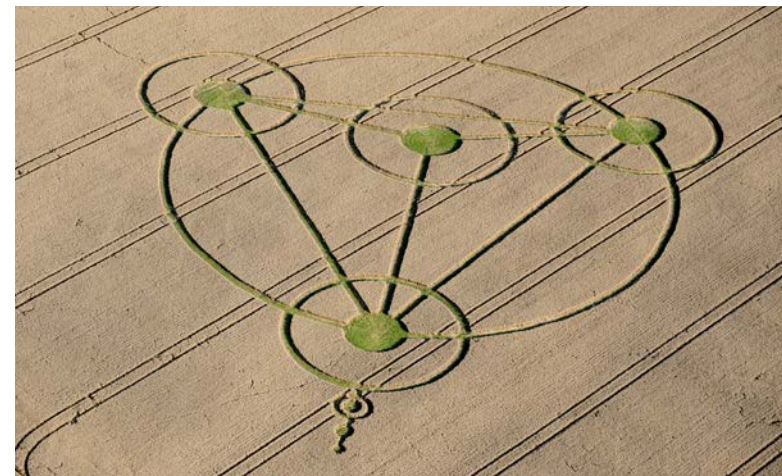
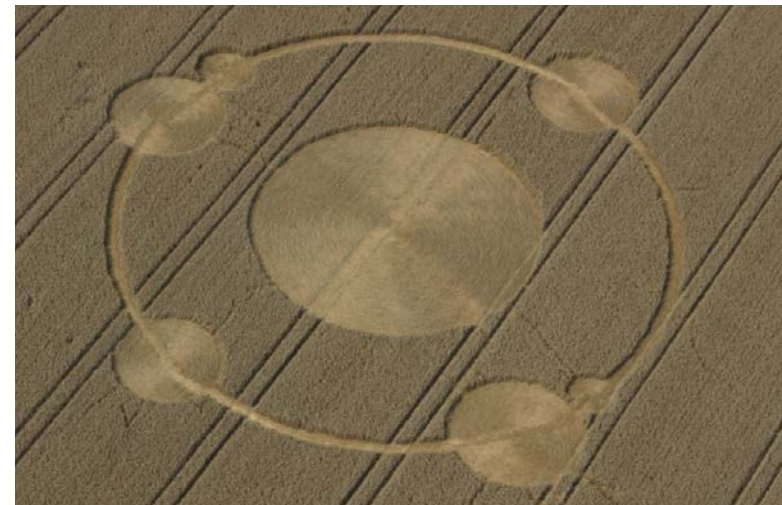
Doug Bower demonstrates how to make a crop circle in a field. Someone could fake crop circles, but it's a lot of work.



Some people suggest that the circles are created by tornadoes, but crop circle designs are controlled and intricate, while a tornado destroys a wide area. Another weather theory is based on an electrically charged whirlwind called a **plasma** vortex. The theory says that microwaves from these phenomena heat water in plants so rapidly that the plants collapse. A plasma vortex could also create the strange lights and humming sounds reported by eyewitnesses. Such a vortex could hover in one place or move as if it's under remote control, making it look like a UFO.

Some researchers have suggested that the U.S. and British military are developing a high-energy weapon that emits focused microwave radiation. In this scenario, crop circles are produced by test firings of this top-secret weapon.

Do you think crop circles are real or a hoax?





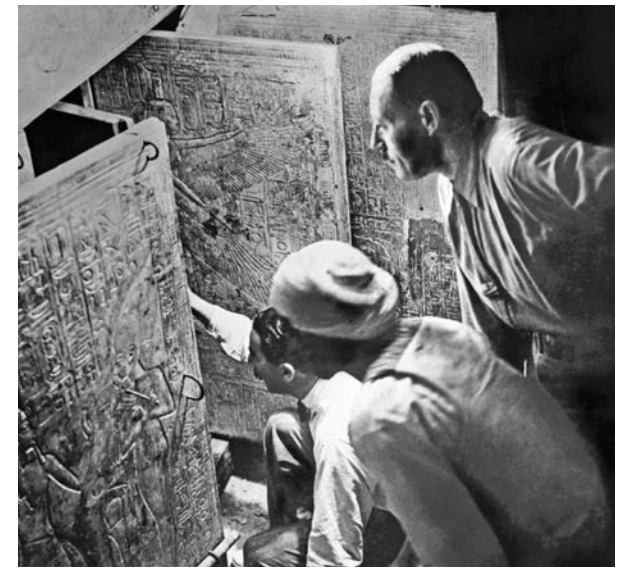


King Tut's tomb was filled with valuable treasures.

## The Curse of the Mummy

On November 4, 1922, Howard Carter discovered the tomb of the Egyptian **pharaoh** Tutankhamun, known today as King Tut. The tomb was filled with incredibly valuable treasures. The *Daily Mail* and other London-based newspapers began to circulate stories of a curse painted on a tomb wall that said, "They who enter this sacred tomb shall swift be visited by wings of death." It wasn't long before other newspapers picked up the story and transmitted it worldwide.

Early Egyptians believed that cobras are the protectors of the pharaohs. On the day Carter opened the tomb, his canary was swallowed by a cobra. Many people took it as a bad omen.



Howard Carter opens a door to King Tut's tomb in 1922.

Carter's search for the tomb was funded by George E. S. M. Herbert, fifth Earl of Carnarvon. When Lord Carnarvon died in Cairo in 1923 from an infected mosquito bite, newspaper stories said that he was killed by a pharaoh's curse. It was also said that Carnarvon's dog howled and dropped dead in England at the same minute as his owner and that all the lights in Cairo flickered.

The newspapers, knowing that sensational stories drove subscriptions, reported that twenty-six people involved with the tomb's discovery died in the first ten years, many under suspicious circumstances. This fascinating mystery has been used as the theme for many movies, books, and games.

In the early 1900s, reporters sometimes invented details to make stories more exciting. Lord Carnarvon had actually been ill for twenty years before he died from the infected mosquito bite, so the timing of his death might have been just a coincidence. Research shows that only six people involved with finding the tomb died in the first ten years. Many of the tomb workers lived long lives. Howard Carter worked on the tomb for at least ten years, and yet he lived for seventeen years after the discovery. He rejected the idea of the curse, calling it “tommy rot.” The curse that was reportedly written in the tomb was never there.



Howard Carter with Lord Carnarvon (right, inset photo), who funded the search for King Tut's tomb in an area of Egypt called the Valley of the Kings (above)

Some people believe the curse has a rational, biological explanation. Decomposing bodies sometimes produce molds and bacteria that could cause illness and death. Could this have contributed to Lord Carnarvon's death? Today's archaeologists wear rubber gloves and special clothing for protection, but early archaeologists and tomb robbers might have become sickened in this way. This might have been how stories of a curse started.

Ancient Egyptians went to a lot of trouble to prepare their kings for burial. They believed that kings should be buried with riches to use in their next life. These Egyptians may have started legends of danger to protect the tombs.

Do you think the curse of the mummy is real or a hoax?



Egyptian pharaohs were buried in pyramids.





Some people include a larger area when describing strange events in the Atlantic Ocean.

## Bermuda Triangle

As far back as 1780, there have been **sporadic** reports of strange things happening to ships and planes in an area of the Atlantic Ocean between Miami, Florida; Bermuda; and San Juan, Puerto Rico. In 1965, Vincent Gaddis wrote a book called *Invisible Horizons* about these strange occurrences. He was the first to call the area the Bermuda Triangle, and he also called it the Triangle of Death and the Devil's Triangle.

In this area, numerous planes and ships disappear without a trace, in fair weather and for no easily explainable reason. Crews mysteriously vanish from ships, dense fogs suddenly appear and disappear, and compasses and navigation equipment malfunction.

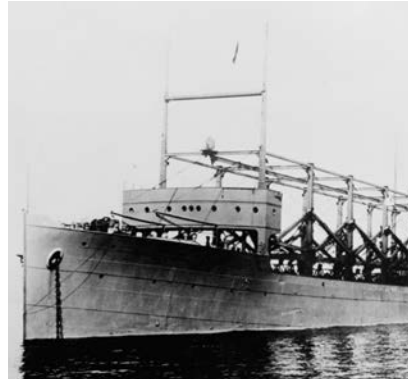
On a clear day in 1945, while a group of planes called Flight 19 was on a U.S. Navy training mission, all five Avenger bombers lost their bearings and disappeared while trying to avoid worsening weather conditions. The rescue airship that went to look for them also disappeared.

In 1881, the merchant ship *Ellen Austin* was on its way from London to New York when it discovered a ghost ship floating without a crew. There were no signs of struggle on board the empty vessel. A crew boarded to steer her to New York, but when a thick fog surrounded both ships during a squall, they lost contact overnight. When the ghost ship was found the next day, the second crew had disappeared as well.



If a deserted ship could be brought to port, the crew could claim a reward.

The USS *Cyclops* disappeared in March 1918 while traveling from Barbados to Baltimore, Maryland, with 306 people on board. This is one of the earliest incidents linked to the Bermuda Triangle.



The USS *Cyclops* disappeared in 1918.

In 1966, Captain Donald Henry's tug, the *Good News*, was towing a cargo barge from Puerto Rico to Fort Lauderdale, Florida, on a clear day. When a dense fog suddenly swirled around the barge, the *Good News* lost the use of all of its instruments and partially lost power. For five minutes, the *Good News* struggled in a tug-of-war with the fog bank; it finally managed to pull itself and the barge free. It appeared that the sea inside the fog was bubbling and choppy, while the sea outside was calm.

People claim that a mysterious power causes the many losses of ships and crews in the Bermuda Triangle. Christopher Columbus claimed to have seen strange white lights on the horizon, and his compass malfunctioned. Because weird lights are seen there, some think that UFOs capture humans and take them away.

Others say the unexplained losses are a result of the severe weather natural to the area. Hurricanes and violent waterspouts blow up suddenly, and tidal waves are common. The Gulf Stream, which flows through the Triangle, is known to cause violent atmospheric changes. Any vessel that is destroyed would wash away without a trace. Some of the missing crews, when rescued later, tell stories of being forced to leave their storm-damaged ships.

Some say that nothing unusual is going on in the area and that more strange accidents happen there simply because it is one of the most heavily traveled areas of the ocean. They also suggest that some of the losses blamed on the Bermuda Triangle actually happened hundreds of miles away. Other vessels that have been reported lost showed up later. Some vessels claimed to have been lost in the Triangle existed solely in the imaginations of storytellers.

Do you think the Bermuda Triangle is real or a hoax?

In the vast ocean, violent weather could destroy a ship and not leave any evidence.







Easter Island

How were the moai statues carved and moved?



Stonehenge

Why and how were these structures built?

## Conclusion

Mysterious occurrences—things we can't understand—will always exist. Some people will think they are nonsense, and others will claim they are real. Now that you've read some evidence here about four of them, it's time to consider what you've read and determine what you believe. Research these **conundrums** for yourself using the Internet and the library to find more information. What do you think about these mysteries, and what others can you find?

## Glossary

<b>conundrums</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	confusing and puzzling situations or problems; riddles (p. 23)
<b>decompose</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	to decay, rot, or break down into small parts (p. 9)
<b>fractals</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	curves or geometric shapes repeated many times within a design with varying sizes but the same proportions (p. 10)
<b>hoaxes</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	things meant to mislead or trick (p. 4)
<b>intricate</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	very detailed or complicated; complex (p. 11)
<b>microwave</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	an electromagnetic energy wave that is shorter than a radio wave but longer than infrared radiation, often used in heating and radar devices (p. 11)
<b>node</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the place on the stem of a plant from which a leaf or branch grows (p. 11)
<b>pharaoh</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a ruler in ancient Egypt (p. 15)
<b>plasma</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	charged particles of gas that can conduct electricity (p. 13)
<b>reclusive</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	shut off or apart from the world; solitary (p. 5)
<b>retracted</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	took back or withdrew (p. 12)
<b>sporadic</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	happening occasionally or in irregular or random intervals; not steady or constant (p. 19)