

Wondering About Wonder: An Exploration of Mythological Creatures and Cryptids

Grade

● K–5

Teacher-In-Residence

● Kevin Goodwin

Subjects

● Art, English Language

Arts, Science, Social Studies

Carnegie
Museum of Art

Goals

- Students will experience wonder through the exploration of artwork as well as sculpture and architecture.
- Students will develop their own mythological or cryptozoological creatures.
- Students will create a story connected to the artwork.
- Students will use their imagination to feel more connected to the pieces.
- Students will exercise the freedom to write or draw whatever they can imagine.

Objectives

- Students will explore artwork by noticing, wondering, and imagining what might exist in these spaces.
- Students will reflect, write and draw about creatures that they could connect to the landscapes in the artwork.
- Students will develop stories using the artwork as inspiration.
- Students will explore architecture from different cultures and time periods to look for forms of creatures throughout time.
- Students will present their work to their peers.

Standards

Common Core/National Core Arts Standards

PA Standards

Approaches to Learning through Play—Constructing, Organizing, and Applying Knowledge

- **Standard Area AL.1** Constructing and Gathering Knowledge
- **Standard Area AL.2** Organizing and Understanding Information
- **Standard Area AL.3** Applying Knowledge
- **Standard Area AL.4** Learning through Experience

Language and Literacy Development—English Language Arts

- **Standard Area 1.1** Foundational Skills
- **Standard Area 1.2** Reading Informational Text
- **Standard Area 1.3** Reading Literature
- **Standard Area 1.4** Writing
- **Standard Area 1.5** Speaking and Listening

Key Learning Area: Creative Thinking and Expression—Communicating through the Arts

- **Standard Area 9.2** Historical and

Cultural Context of Works of Art

- **Standard Area 9.3** Critical Response to Works of Art
- **Standard Area 9.4** Aesthetic Response to Works of Art

Key Learning Area: Social and Emotional Development—Student Interpersonal Skills

- **Standard Area 16.1** Self-Awareness and Self-Management
- **Standard Area 16.2** Establishing and Maintaining Relationships
- **Standard Area 16.3** Decision-Making and Responsible Behavior

Materials

- Clipboards
- Scavenger Hunt sheet (see below)
- Reflection sheet
- Pencils
- Colored pencils
- Blank paper
- Writing paper (lined)
- Printouts of the artwork or digital projection of artwork (If you are going to do the activity in your classroom instead of the museum)

Vocabulary

- **Wonder:** A feeling of surprise mingled with admiration, caused by something beautiful, unexpected, unfamiliar, or inexplicable.
- **Adventure:** An unusual and exciting, typically hazardous, experience or activity.
- **Landscape:** All the visible features of an area of countryside or land, often considered in terms of their aesthetic appeal.
- **Nature:** The phenomena of the physical world collectively, including plants, animals, the landscape, and other features and products of the earth, as opposed to humans or human creations.
- **Mystery:** Something that is difficult or impossible to understand or explain.
- **Creature:** An animal, as distinct from a human being.
- **Cryptid:** An animal that has been claimed to exist but never proven to exist. Contrary to popular belief, cryptids don't have to be supernatural, mythical or even all that strange—though many popular creatures acquire these characteristics as their legends grow.
- **Folklore:** The traditional beliefs, customs, and stories of a community, passed through the generations by word of mouth.
- **Mythology:** A collection of myths, especially one belonging to a particular religious or cultural tradition.
- **Imagination:** The faculty or action of forming new ideas, or images or concepts of external objects not present to the senses.

Artworks



Gustave Doré, *Deer in a Pine Forest (Vosges)* (*Biches dans une forêt de sapins [Vosges]*), ca. 1865, Gift of the family of Tillie S. Speyer in her memory, 80.9



Frederic Edwin Church, *The Iceberg*, 1891, Howard N. Eavenson Memorial Fund for the Howard N. Eavenson Americana Collection, 72.7.3



Joseph R. Woodwell, *The Gorge*, 1899, Purchase, 16.4

Artworks



Albertis Del Orient Browere,
*Prospector in the Foothills of
the Sierras*, ca. 1855, Howard N.
Eavenson Memorial Fund for the
Howard N. Eavenson Americana
Collection, 72.7.1



William J. Webb, *Twilight*, ca. 1855,
Robert S. Waters Charitable Trust
Fund, 2005.62

Feel free to seek out other artwork
that follows this natural theme of
mystery, adventure, curiosity, and
wonder.

Lesson

Introduction:

What does it mean to wonder? Are there things out there that have not been discovered? What kind of creatures could be lurking under the waves or in the vast stretches of forest that cover our world? It seems to be human nature to create creatures, cryptids, and mythological beasts. These things can help describe natural events, act as warnings for danger, or simply add some fantasy elements to a story. They could also be real. It depends on what you want to believe. This act of wondering about these creatures can help open the mind to wondering about all kinds of other things.

This series of activities will utilize several pieces of art as well as the Hall of Architecture to allow for an exploration of cultures and creatures and provide inspiration for creating your own creature, artwork, and story. The work is very open-ended. To wonder about the idea of wondering requires that space and time be given to the learners to really stretch their imaginations. There might be questions asked that have no answers. Things explored at the museum can be extended back into

the classroom or learning space at your discretion.

The hope is that students are invited to explore artwork that will help inspire thinking and wondering and sharing. On the surface we are thinking about creatures, but through this work you can connect to other times and other cultures and see connections between the past and the present. Magic can be unleashed when you allow time and space for your learners to wonder. Have fun exploring the spaces and artwork in Carnegie Museum of Art!

Main Activities:

This lesson is split into two exploration activities that utilize different pieces of art along with sculptural aspects found in the Hall of Architecture. The activities will be split into two 45-minute sessions. Work can also be done to explore the idea of wonder, mythology, folklore, and cryptids ahead of the lesson. Work can also be continued afterwards, as learners will be working on writing and drawing projects that could be extended to classroom work.

Lesson

The learners will be connecting with the idea of wonder by exploring landscape artwork that invokes a sense of adventure, mystery, exploration, and curiosity. While exploring the idea of wonder, educators should be open to all manner of questions, ideas, and answers from their students.

Start either of the two activities below with the questions:

“What does it mean to wonder?”

“Why do we wonder?”

“What do you often wonder about?”

Answers and reflections on this question can be gathered either in a discussion format, a small poster session with sticky notes, or writing in a notebook or journal, depending on the grade level or age of learners.

Artwork Exploration:

Come into the gallery quietly and start with the *Deer in Pine Forest* (located in Scaife Gallery 6). Gather around the painting. Ask your learners to imagine stepping into the painting and take the time to slowly notice details. Ask learners to wonder about the painting and the landscape. Think about how you would feel in the space. Give

learners the time to share either with a partner or the whole group. Take them to each of the five works of art. Repeat this activity if needed.

Now ask them, “What kind of creatures could exist in this space?” These can be real, imaginary, or undiscovered. “What could be hiding in these spaces?” Provide them with the word cryptid and see how they respond. You can reference popular ones like bigfoot or Nessie. Explain that these kinds of undiscovered creatures exist in lots of spaces, cultures, and stories. As learners are thinking, provide them with clipboards, paper, and pencils. They can sketch or write what they are imagining. They can find one of the five artworks that really speak to them. Again, they are imagining what could be hiding in these landscapes; whether living in the trees, the water, the sky, underground. There is no correct answer for this prompt. Give the learners 10 to 15 minutes to draw and write. Then gather them together to share their work. They can present to the whole group or with a partner.

Some guiding questions:

“What did you draw?”

“Where would this creature live?”

Lesson

“How would this creature sound?”

“How did you come up with this creature?”

These drawings can be kept and further expanded upon back in the classroom. The creatures could become part of a larger story that is inspired by the paintings. Provide printouts from the Carnegie Museum of Art website for the learners to look at. This writing project could take many forms. They could work on their own or in groups to create a story about their creature, make a comic book, present a short performance, or design a 3-D model of their creature and use the painting as a backdrop to their work.

Hall of Architecture Exploration:

Gather in the center of the space and sit in a circle. Let students take in the space around them. Talk about how these are plaster casts of architecture from different cultures and periods of time. Allow time for learners to share anything they are noticing. Then explain to them that they are going to go on a creature scavenger hunt. Show them the scavenger hunt sheet and let them know that they are looking for creatures hidden within

the architecture. They can use the boxes to draw or write about their discoveries. They do not have to fill in every single box. They should leave the final question and box blank till after the hunt is over. To give an example, you could direct their attention to the large sphinx statue and model what it would look like to sketch and write about that piece. Learners might wonder “When was it built?” or “Which animals can you see in the statue?” or “Did people believe that this creature actually existed?”

Then learners can take their clipboards and quietly and carefully explore the space. Be sure to tell them to look up and down the architecture. Some of the creatures might really be hidden, and it is ok if they do not know exactly what the creature is. That mystery is part of the project. Tell them to really take their time with searching and sketching. After about 15 minutes of exploring, gather back in the center of the space.

Give everyone a chance to think about what they saw and wondered. Give learners a few minutes to turn to a neighbor and share some of their discoveries. Then allow them to share with the whole group. You can help

Lesson

extend their wondering by asking questions like: “Why do you think that creature is on that building?”, “What kind of creature is it?”, “Do you think the creature stands for something?”, “How is the creature depicted or shown? Is it scary? Is it underneath things?”, “What time period or culture do you think this is from?” Then they can answer the final question on the sheet.

For older students, you can have them write down the date and place the architecture is from for further research in the classroom.

Make sure to take photos of the discoveries by the learners so that you can refer to them in the classroom, in case you want to extend any learning from this experience. There is also a slideshow that contains photos of some of the creatures in this space.

Transitions:

As students move through the spaces they can be invited to wonder about everything around them. What if you stepped into that painting? What was the artist trying to convey? How old is that?

Questions:

*See Creature Reflection Sheet
This reflection sheet can help learners think about the process they went through. This can be done at the Museum or back in the classroom or learning space. Learners can also share their artwork and stories and reflect on the work of their peers.

Lesson Extensions and Modifications

- Use the books included in the Resources section of the lesson plan. These books can further the learner's insight, curiosity, and wonder about these subjects.
- MysteryDoug Youtube Channel has several videos based around cryptids and mythological creatures.
- Carnegie Libraries have an extensive collection of folklore, myth, monster, and animal books in their collection.
- Extensions for learning could include a more in-depth look at the cultures and time periods that the replicas in the Hall of Architecture come from.
- Learners could make 3D models, dioramas, costumes, stop motion movies, and many other art projects based on their creature.
- Pairing with Carnegie Museum of Natural History, educators could find more resources on living animals as well as prehistoric animals. Dinosaurs and other extinct animals are a great source of wonder and questions. Something as simple as asking "what color were dinosaurs?" can go a long way into providing an open space for learners to wonder.
- You could show learners other relevant pieces in Carnegie Museum of Art, such as Francis Bacon's Landscape or SoiL Thornton's Am Not, You Want, (Analog Digi).

Slideshow of Artwork

Slideshow of Hall of Architecture

These books can all be found at the Carnegie Library.

HP Newquist, *Here There Be Monsters: The Legendary Kraken and the Giant Squid* (HMH Books for Young Readers, 2010)

Kelly Milner Halls, Rick Spears, and Roxyanne Young, *Tales of the Cryptids-Mysterious Creatures That May or May Not Exist* (Millbrook Press, 2006)

K.A. Holt, *I Wonder* (Random House Studio, 2019)

Marc Aronson, *The Griffin and the Dinosaur: How Adrienne Mayor Discovered a Fascinating Link Between Myth and Science* (National Geographic Kids, 2014)

Creature Scavenger Hunt Sheet

Name:

Throughout this space there are creatures and animals carved into the architecture. Take a look around and see what you can find. Be sure to look closely. Look up and down. There are lots of things to find.

Write or draw about each of your discoveries in the spaces below:

Creature Scavenger Hunt Sheet

Write or draw about something you are wondering about as you think about all the different creatures and animals you discovered. (ex: How long ago were they made? Did they actually exist?)

Creature Reflection Sheet

Name:

What does the word “wonder” mean to you?

What did the artwork and sculptures make you wonder about?

Why do you think different people have created different creatures, cryptids, and mythical beasts?

Do you think there are still things out there for us to discover? What kinds of things?