



First Dragons

Dragons pop up in myths and legends from countries across the world. There are stories from Asia, Australia, Europe and Britain that feature creatures that are suspiciously dragon-like. Where they first began is hard to say because lots of these stories are ancient.

Some experts think that dragons were created because ancient humans had a built-in fear of snakes. Most dragons are very snake-like, even if they have wings and legs. One of the stories in First Nations Australian stories is of the Rainbow Serpent. This is a creator god that native Australians believed helped them to find water. They believed that rainbows were the Rainbow Serpent moving between water holes in the sky.

This was similar to some dragons in East Asian stories. Chinese culture has lots of dragon mythology, and some of them were also linked with finding water. Snakes are used in lots of cultures around the world as symbols of power or intelligence. In Mesoamerica, the Aztecs had a feathered serpent god called Quetzalcoatl.

There were two main types of dragons in European myths. One type seems to have originated in Germany or the surrounding areas. This is the type of dragon that stomps and flies around, breathing fire and hoarding gold. It's probably the type of dragon you think about when you hear the word "dragon". It sleeps on top of its treasure and eats anybody it finds. Smaug in *The Hobbit* is this type of dragon.

That type of dragon isn't very common in British folklore. British dragons are smaller and tend to breathe poisonous gas. They live in marshes and caves and don't always have wings or fly. They eat cattle and steal princesses for heroes to save.

In some ways, it makes sense that humans created stories to warn children away from dangerous animals such as snakes. On the other hand, there are lots of dangerous animals that didn't have monsters created based upon them. Dragons have also been used to explain natural phenomena, and this might be another explanation for them.



In 793 CE, monks wrote about a group of dragons that flew through the night sky over Northumbria. We now know that this was most likely a comet shower. Back then, they didn't know what comets were, so dragons made more sense. They truly believed that dragons might exist in other countries.

Other dragons were believed to have created actual countries. There was a story in the islands off Scotland that a giant dragon lived in the sea and ate children every Saturday. One day, a young man sailed out to see the dragon and was eaten, but something he was carrying caused the dragon to explode. Its teeth scattered across the ocean and created the islands. The body of the dragon floated on the sea and became Iceland. The dragon's smouldering liver is said to be the reason why Iceland has so many volcanoes. We might know that none of this is true, but it might explain why they all believed in dragons!

SUMMARY FOCUS

1. Which animal might have caused humans to create dragons?
2. How was the Rainbow Serpent similar to East Asian dragons?
3. How were German dragons different to British dragons?
4. Why did ancient people need a way to explain natural things?
5. How was a dragon linked to Iceland?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

V

Which word in the first paragraph means that you "suspect" something?

R

Which culture has a Rainbow Serpent god?

R

What was the Aztec feathered serpent god called?

V

Find and copy a word that means "placed in lots of different spots".

V

Work out what "smouldering" means.