

DRAGONS

recommended for all ages

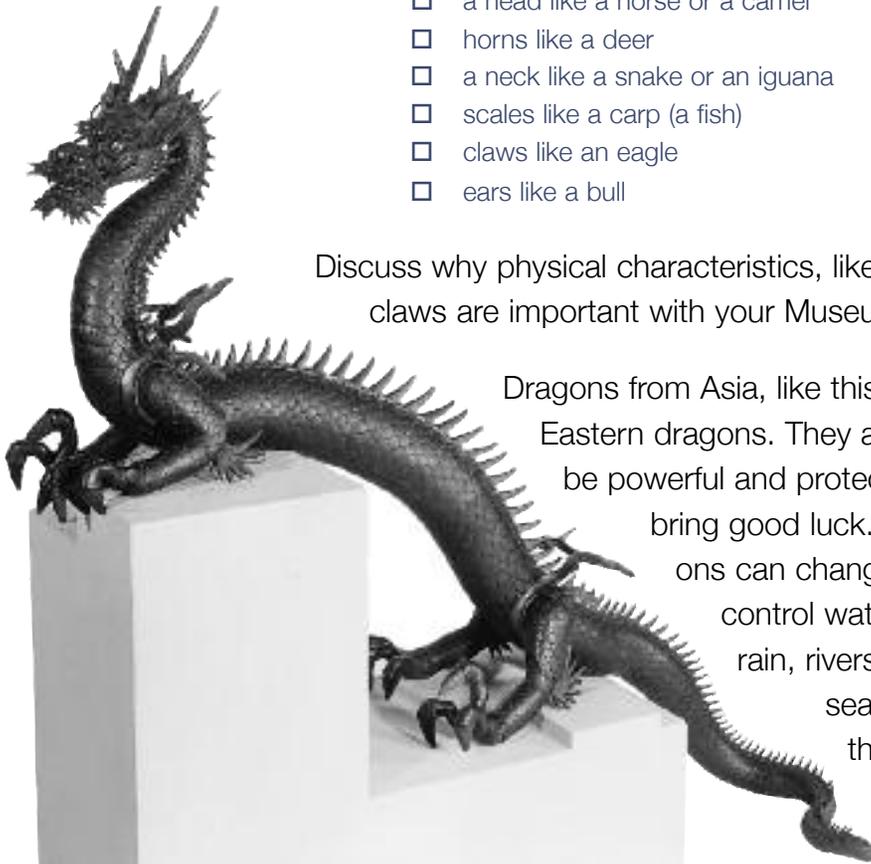
Dragons may never have existed, but art and stories about these fantastic creatures have been created and told for millennia. Images of dragons from around the world and across cultures are surprisingly similar: most look like flying lizards. However, there are some important differences in how Eastern and Western civilizations thought of dragons. Begin your dragon adventure in the stairway near the Japanese galleries.

Find this long, reptilian dragon (pictured below).
Dragons are made up of parts from other powerful creatures.
Look closely at the details on this dragon's body.
Can you see that it has:

- a head like a horse or a camel
- horns like a deer
- a neck like a snake or an iguana
- scales like a carp (a fish)
- claws like an eagle
- ears like a bull

Discuss why physical characteristics, like horns and claws are important with your Museum buddies.

Dragons from Asia, like this one, are Eastern dragons. They are believed to be powerful and protective. They also bring good luck. Eastern dragons can change shape and control water, including rain, rivers, storms, and seas. Some of them have whiskers, too.



Find this dragon-turtle vessel in the Korean gallery. Artists from many Asian cultures, including Korea, Japan, China, Vietnam, and Indonesia, decorated objects with dragons. Look for another dragon-turtle nearby.

- What do you think these two objects were used for?
- Look for other everyday objects decorated with dragons in this gallery.
- Which characteristics do these dragons have?

In western culture, tales involving dragons date back to the ancient Greece and are still told today. Have you seen the vicious purple dragon in the Disney animated movie *Sleeping Beauty*? Do you know the story of Norbert (or Norberta) from the *Harry Potter* series?

- What do you remember about these dragons or others from movies, stories, or cartoons? How were they described?

Unlike Eastern dragons, legendary Western dragons typically breathe fire and terrify people. For centuries, Europeans believed that dragons were evil, lived in caves, and ventured out to destroy towns and innocent people.

Travel to the Medieval gallery on the second floor of the Museum and search for this 500-year-old ceremonial saddle made for knights. Look closely at the carvings and discuss what you see with your Museum buddies.

The carved figures were once painted in bright colors, but the paint has worn off over time. Re-create the story of St. George in a colorful drawing of your own. Use your imagination, sketch additional details that were not included in the saddle's designs.

Whether Eastern or Western, all dragons are symbols of power. Some people believe they are bad, while others believe they can be good. How do you feel about these mythical creatures? As you travel through the MFA look for more dragons!

After your visit: Design a Dragon

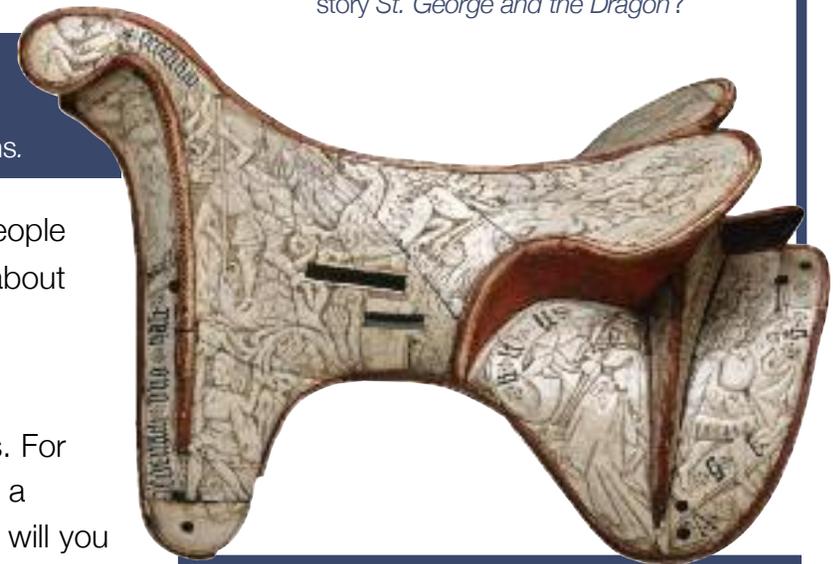
At home, create a dragon of your own by combining features from many animals. For example, sketch your dragon's head with ears like an elephant's and a snout like a crocodile's. Will you choose protective traits or dangerous traits? And what color will you choose for your dragon? In China, the color of a dragon is symbolic. See examples below.

Black = north, winter, worrying. **Blue** or **Green** = east, spring, good health, luck.
Red = west, capable of causing storms. **Gold** = royalty.



One side of this saddle depicts a scene from an often-told story about a town threatened by a horrible dragon. To keep the dragon from destroying their village, residents fed him sheep each day. When the sheep ran out, they reluctantly fed him their children! One day, the king's daughter was selected and sent out to the dragon. As she approached the dragon's lair, the knight, St. George was passing through. He rescued the princess, killed the dragon, and became a hero.

- Can you find the characters from the story *St. George and the Dragon*?



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