

MYTHICAL CREATURES

ART CONNECTIONS > Recommended for ages 5 and up

A myth is a type of story that explains things and sometimes includes imaginary creatures that have magical powers. Some mythical creatures you may know are mermaids, werewolves, and centaurs. Explore the Museum and search for mythical creatures in works of art. Start in **Gallery 177**.



Dragon and Clouds Gallery 177

Go halfway up the stairs. Stand on the landing and look up to see a huge wooden dragon. Be careful on the stairs, but move up for a closer look.

In Japan, people believe that dragons are powerful and protective. This big dragon used to be attached to a large building, probably guarding a doorway.

Look closely at the dragon. Japanese dragons are made up of parts from other powerful creatures.

- > Do you see
 - a body like a snake? • claws like an eagle? • horns like a deer?

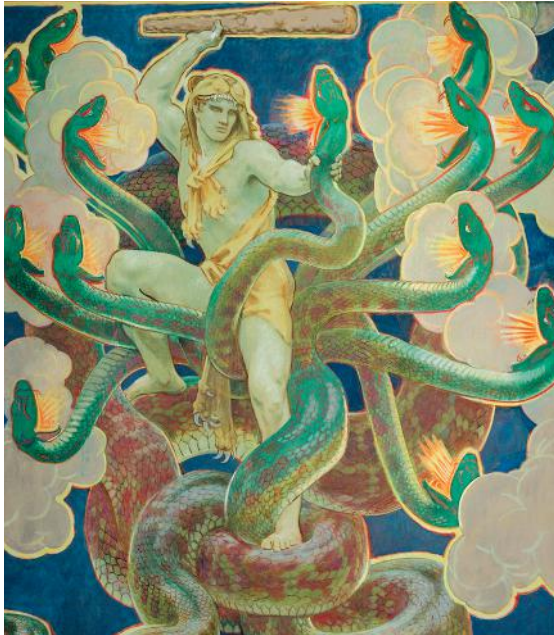
Asian dragons are thought to live in mountains, lakes, rivers, and the sky. This dragon looks like it is flying. Notice the curly clouds around the dragon's body. Imagine how the dragon might move in the sky. Would it fly in a straight line?

- > Would it move quickly, or slowly? Use your finger to trace the dragon's flight across the sky.
- > Can you spot the two creatures attached to the wall under the dragon? These are guardian lions, and are often found on either side of a doorway. Look for other guardian lions as you explore the Museum.



Museum of Fine Arts Boston

FRONT: DRAGON AND CLOUDS, JAPANESE, EDO PERIOD, 1702. WOOD, CARVED ARCHITECTURAL ORNAMENT. WILLIAM STURGIS BIGELOW COLLECTION.
BACK: JOHN SINGER SARGENT, *HERCULES AND THE HYDRA*, 1922-25. OIL ON CANVAS. FRANCIS BARTLETT DONATION OF 1912 AND PICTURE FUND.
KETTLEDRUM, GERMAN (HANOVER), ABOUT 1830. SILVER, VELLUM. ANONYMOUS GIFT. © 2019 MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON.



Hercules and the Hydra Gallery 204B

Go to the colonnade on Level 2 at the top of the Huntington entrance stairs. Look up to see the painting of Hercules fighting the Hydra.

In Roman mythology, Hercules was the son of Jupiter, the ruler of all the gods on Olympus. Hercules was very strong, but he had to complete 12 nearly impossible challenges. Here, Hercules fights the Hydra, a water monster with snake-like heads and poisonous breath!

To defeat the Hydra, Hercules had to chop off each of its heads, but when he did, the heads grew back! Hercules used fire to keep the heads from growing back.

- > Can you count the number of heads on the Hydra? What else do you see in this painting? Discuss what you find with your Museum buddies.
- > Walk around the colonnade and look up to see other mythical creatures.

After your visit

MYTHICAL CREATURES

Think about the different mythical creatures you saw at the Museum today. If you could have a mythical creature as a friend, what would it be? What magical powers would it have? What would it look like?

Draw a picture of your magical friend or write your own mythical story.

Kettledrum Gallery 250

Go into Gallery 250. Look for the kettledrums on the wall with silver plates.

These drums were used by the royal army of King William IV of England. They announced the arrival of the king and his royal army and were played by riders on special “drum horses” trained not to be frightened by noise.

On the front of each drum, find the coat of arms of King William IV. Look closely to find a unicorn.

- > Notice the unicorn’s body. It is made up of parts from different animals. This unicorn has a goat’s beard. Notice the lion’s tail—it is the same!

The first picture of a unicorn was painted in caves in France around 15,000 BC. In most stories, unicorns are powerful and peaceful, but impossible to catch.

- > Where do you think a unicorn would live?
- > How would you try to catch a unicorn?



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