

Activities

- Have students each choose a 'monster' to research. Make a "Creature Feature" bulletin board display with drawings and information about the monsters students researched.
- Insects and other arthropods are an important source of food for many of the world's creatures, but most modern humans do not consume bugs. Some students can research and report on instances where bugs are part of the human diet, while other students can look for links in the food web that make insects important to the food supply of humans.
- Have students research the insect known as "humankind's worst enemy," and report on the ways we have tried to eradicate mosquitoes from the environment, paying attention to the problems associated with human efforts to control mosquitoes.
- Early American colonists depicted a rattlesnake on flags representing the 13 colonies. Crocodile mummies have been found in ancient Egyptian tombs. In ancient Greece, snakes were believed to have healing powers, and doctors used them to treat many different illnesses. Discuss the "reputation" of reptiles, past and present, and the reasons behind the formation of this reputation.
- Have students create an informative pamphlet from a "monster's" point of view that outlines what cautions should be observed if they should come in contact with a human.

Internet Resources

Periodically, Internet Resources are updated on our web site at www.libraryvideo.com

• unmuseum.mus.pa.us/burden.htm

These pages describe an expedition to Komodo, a distant and dangerous island where hunters were sent in 1912 "to catch a dragon."

• www.lochnesscentre.co.uk/kids.htm

This site offers information about the famed Scottish sea serpent.

• www.wh.who.edu/faq/

National Marine Fisheries web page for students gives basic and bizarre information about fish and other marine and aquatic creatures.

Suggested Print Resources

- Augusti, Jordi. *Mammoths, Sabertooths, and Hominids*. Columbia University Press, New York, NY; 2002.
- Coleman, Loren. *The Field Guide to Lake Monsters, Sea Serpents, and Other Mystery Denizens of the Deep*. Penguin, New York, NY; 2003.
- Klimley, A. Peter. *The Secret Life of Sharks*. Simon & Schuster, New York, NY; 2003.
- Long, Greg. *The Making of Bigfoot*. Prometheus Books, New York, NY; 2004.

TEACHER'S GUIDE

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- ARCTIC & ANTARCTIC
- DINOSAUR
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Monster

Grades 4–8

The *Eyewitness DVD Series* explores the natural world with fascinating film footage and nature photography fused with striking special effects and stunning graphics. The programs offer a unique "eyewitness" view of events that shape the Earth and the living things that inhabit it.

Interactive menus allow viewers to easily select and replay any section of a program. Other features include interactive assessment quizzes and "Hotspots" — video icons that appear throughout the program and allow students to further explore specific science content or areas of interest. Each title contains a segment that reveals all the behind-the-scenes wizardry that goes into the production of the *Eyewitness* series, along with recommended web sites for further research.

Included in this guide is a brief synopsis of the program, background on the science concepts presented in the show, discussion topics, activities, vocabulary and additional resources for students to explore.



Background

Mysterious, dangerous creatures of all shapes and sizes populate every habitat on Earth, but more reside within our imagination than anywhere else. Monsters have many different strange or frightening appearances, but they all inspire horror or disgust. It is believed that we are not born with a fear of “monsters” but that our fears develop as children. Seeing someone’s reaction of terror may activate a remnant of primal terror within our subconscious.

Real-life monsters like spiders and scorpions inspire dread for good reason. All spiders have fangs, or chelicerae, that are used to inject the venom that kills or paralyzes their prey. Unlike spiders, scorpions have a tail armed with a stinger, or telson, and a venom sac. The venom varies in toxicity among species. Most of these arachnids have venom that is no more dangerous than a bee sting, while some species of scorpion found in the desert regions of the Middle East and Africa are highly poisonous.

Mythical monsters of Greek legend, like Cerberus, the Minotaur and Medusa had tales associated with them designed to inspire and differentiate between good and evil. But such monsters were not only found in Mediterranean minds — Asian myths were filled with strange creatures and beasts as well. P’an-ku emerged from the cosmic egg and when his moods turned monstrous, so did the weather. And there was Chan, the monster sea clam, whose breath formed palaces in the clouds. Chinese travelers told of the people of “Ting-ling Land,” who were said to have hair down to their knees and hooves like horses. In “Whispering-Ear Land,” there were people with stripes like tigers and ears that reached to their waists! Believe it or not, many of these fearsome fictions have their roots in nature. Vultures, sharks and gorillas are surely the basis for many myths designed to frighten young and old.

Without question, though, there exists a group of animals more fearsome than any other. Reptiles have roamed the Earth for over 200 million years, dating back to a time before the extinction of the dinosaurs. Since then, crocodiles, lizards and turtles have captured our imagination, as countless myths and legends from around the world have commented on their perceived strength and power. In Egypt, a serpent-dragon named Apepi chased the sun across the sky each day. It was slain each night by champions of the sun god. Chopped into bits, the dragon reassembled at dawn and the chase would begin again. This story could have originated after observing a legless lizard, known as a glass snake that can shatter its own body into bits. The spare parts wriggle to distract its predator as the essential part of the lizard makes its escape!

One of the most notable members of Class Reptilia is the snake. All snakes eat other animals; some swallow them live, some squeeze the victim to death, while others kill their prey with a venomous bite. The toxins released in a

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snake’s venom can either paralyze the victim or cause it to bleed to death. In order to combat a poisonous snake’s bite, herpetologists are able to “milk” some snakes for their venom, collecting enough to develop medicines to counteract the poison. Unfortunately, many snakebite victims live in remote areas and never have a chance! Thankfully, less than 10 percent of all the snakes in the world are venomous! Despite the villainous light in which they are often portrayed, reptiles are beneficial to the Earth’s environment. They play an important role in the world’s food web and should be respected, not feared.

Vocabulary

aye-aye — (*Daubentonia madagascariensis*) A strange-looking lemur that lives on the island of Madagascar. Natives believe that sighting an aye-aye leads to death.

Cerberus — The three-headed dog from Greek mythology.

chupacabra — (from Spanish “goat sucker”) A mythical, fanged, nocturnal creature that got its name from the first reports of mutilated goats. It kills its prey by draining all of the animal’s blood from its body, through a single hole.

dragon — (from Greek *drakon*, meaning serpent) A legendary monster usually conceived in Western minds as a huge, evil, bat-winged, fire-breathing, scaly snake with a barbed tail. Eastern dragons are usually depicted less menacingly and are thought to bring good luck.

gargoyle — (from the French word for *throat*) Initially a waterspout shaped like a grotesque bird or beast sitting on its haunches designed to drain water from rooftops. Gargoyles were thought to frighten away evil spirits.

Gila monster — (*Heloderma suspectum cinctum*) One of only two types of venomous lizards in the world, found in the southwestern United States.

great white shark — (*Carcharodon carcharias*) The largest predatory fish in the world.

legless lizard — *Ophiosaurus* species. Also called glass lizard. Legend says that if you shake a glass lizard, it will break into many pieces, just like glass. When alarmed, this lizard will shed its tail, which can break into many wriggling pieces.

megamouth shark — (*Megachasma pelagios*) A one-ton shark with a huge mouth and 50 rows of teeth, that was not discovered until 1976.

Minotaur — A mythical creature that was part bull, part human. Imprisoned in a labyrinth on the island of Crete, it fed on the flesh of young men and maidens.

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Komodo dragon — (*Varanus komodoensis*) The world’s biggest monitor lizard, first discovered in 1911 on the Indonesian island of Komodo. It is a fierce meat-eater and cannibal.

spotted hyena — (*Crocuta crocuta*) A dog-like carnivore found in the Sahara, which has a fearsome reputation as a skulking scavenger and killer of young and sick animals. Witches were said to consort with these animals.

vampire — A dead person believed to come from the grave at night and suck the blood of human victims.

vampire bat — (*Desmodus rotundus*) A small, flying mammal found in Central and South America that feeds on the blood of large birds, cattle, horses and pigs.

Vlad the Impaler (circa 1431 – 1476) — Also known as Dracula (son of the devil), a Transylvanian prince known for his atrocities.

Yeti, Bigfoot, yowie — A tall, hairy creature which looks more human than ape. These creatures are said to have no neck, broad shoulders, longish hair covering their bodies and large feet.

Discussion Topics

- Discuss the fact that one person’s monster is another person’s god. For example, dragons are worshipped and honored in Eastern culture and considered destructive and evil in the West.
- Discuss the research that found that girls were fearful of monsters under their bed while boys were afraid of monsters at the window. What “evolutionary hangover” could explain this?
- Discuss the characteristics that make animals appear monstrous and then describe how these characteristics are actually adaptations for predation, protection or courtship.

Focus Questions

1. What makes jellyfish monstrous?
2. Describe the origin of the dance called the tarantella.
3. Why do so many ancient buildings possess gargoyle sculptures?
4. What does ‘dragon’ mean?
5. What is the world’s deadliest snake?
6. What did a snake’s flickering tongue lead people to believe?
7. How can you slow down a Chinese vampire?
8. What creature is considered the biggest monster of all time?