Fishy Tales

The story of the Asrai is just one of many myths and folk tales from all over the world telling of strange creatures – half animal, half human – that live in or near water. Of these creatures the mermaid is best known.

Legends say that mermaids seem human from head to waist. From the waist down, though, they are covered in scales and have fish-like tails. They are supposed to sit on rocks, combing their long, golden hair and admiring themselves in mirrors.

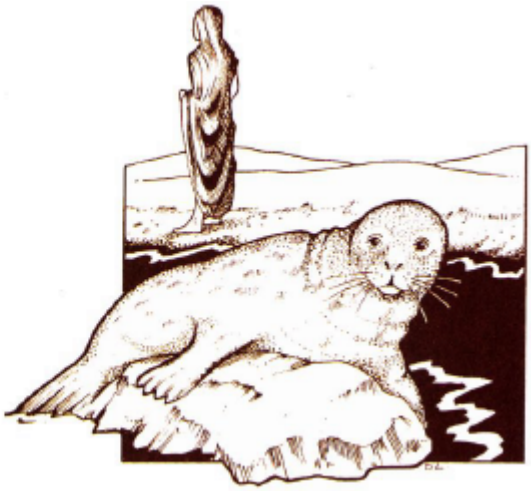
In centuries gone by, sailors were warned to beware of mermaids who, it was said, would sing sweetly to passing ships, luring them to their doom on dangerous rocks. Many people believed that mermaids could foretell the future.

Nowadays, few scientists take the idea of mermaids seriously. It is widely believed that sailors could have mistaken real sea creatures such as seals and whales, or even dolphins, for mermaids. Perhaps they had been away from land for too long!

Mermaids, however, are not the only mythical creatures supposed to have lived in waters around the world. Here are three other descriptions from an encyclopaedia.

Silkie *(also called Kelpie)*

Creature of Scottish folk tales. Seal, becoming human on land. A Silkie keeps human shape only if trusted/loved by a person, otherwise returns to sea.



Asrai

Little-known creature of English folk lore. Green hair, webbed hands and feet. Skin has the appearance of water. Lives at bottom of lakes, rarely seen at the water's surface. Disappears when exposed to daylight. Omen of misfortune. Harmful if threatened.

Siren

Creature of Greek mythology. Body of bird, head of woman. Sweet-voiced, luring sailors onto rocks by beautiful singing. Greek hero Odysseus passed their island safely by blocking his sailors' ears with wax and tying himself to ship's mast.

Sea Monsters

Many people have heard of the Loch Ness Monster, a creature that is believed to live in a lake in Scotland. For centuries sailors have also been giving reports about huge animals living in the sea. Many of these may have been stories invented simply to impress the people who stayed on land. However, several reports of large sea creatures have been made by people who were prepared to swear that their stories were true.

Notable Dates

1734 A report of a sea serpent is made by a Danish sailor, Hans Egede, who saw a monster off the coast of Greenland.

1848 A large animal seen by the crew of HMS Daedalus.

1877 A huge creature with flippers and a long neck is seen near the British yacht Osborne.

1962 Robert Le Serrec spots a serpent-like animal in the sea off Australia.

The Daedalus Incident

It is early in the evening of 6 August **1848**. HMS Daedalus is sailing home after four years at sea. The weather is overcast and dull. One of the officers is gazing idly out to sea, when he sees something moving. He cries out in surprise. Lieutenant Drummond comes over to see what the matter is. He calls the captain over. Together with four others, they watch an amazing sight… Approaching them is an enormous sea serpent, at least 18 metres long. It holds its head and neck out of the water as it swims steadily past the ship. The "monster" passes close enough for the men to see every detail, but it does not seem to notice the ship. It is visible for a full 20 minutes.

Australian Sighting

In **1962** Robert Le Serrec was sailing off the Australian coast. He spotted a large dark animal resting in shallow water. It looked like a huge serpent, about 20 metres long. When Le Serrec swam closer it dived into deeper water.

Cruising on the Osborne

On 2 June **1877**, the British yacht Osborne was cruising through calm waters when three people on deck saw a very large animal, at least 16 metres long. It surfaced close to the ship and quickly swam away. The creature had a large, wide body with two enormous flippers. In front of the body was a long neck and a small head. No one could say what it was.

Only a few reports of sea serpents have been made in recent years. It could be that all the reports were invented, and that sailors in past centuries just invented more stories. There are sensible scientific theories, though, that may explain why such creatures are not often seen today. The noise of modern ship engines may well frighten sea animals away. It is also true that modern ships have smaller crews, so there are fewer people who have a chance to spot unusual creatures.

Whatever the truth, there are still many things we do not yet know about the mysterious creatures of the sea.

2

1. Look at the descriptions of the Asrai, Silkie and Siren.

Draw lines to match each creature to the words or phrases that describe them.

One line has been drawn for you. Draw six **more** lines to match each creature to **two** descriptions.

Creature	Description
Siren	sings
	webbed hands
	winged
Asrai	
	changes form out of water
	cannot live out of water
Silkie	
	lives on rocks
	also known as 'Kelpie'

3 marks

2. Using the information about mermaids, write a description of mermaids for the encyclopaedia. It has been started for you.

Mermaids

Well-known creatures of legend _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3 marks

3. Think about the four creatures described in Mysteries of the Deep.

Which is the only one that human beings had **no** reason to fear?

_____

1 mark

4. Mermaids and sirens are similar in many ways.

Write down **three** ways they are similar.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

3 marks

5. The title is ***Fishy Tales.***

Why did the author choose this title?

_____

_____

_____

2 marks

6. Look at the start of *Fishy tales*.

Do you think the writer believes that **mermaids** exist?

Yes ☐ No ☐

How can you tell that the writer has this opinion?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3 marks

This question is about the *Sea Monsters section.*

7. The report on *The Daedalus Incident* is written in the present tense, like this:

*It **is** early evening of 6 August.....*

The other reports are in the past tense, like this:

*In 1962 Robert Le Serrec **was** sailing .....*

What is the effect of writing in the present tense?

_____

_____

1 mark

8. **Think about the three sightings described in *Sea Monsters*.**

Which **one** of these do you think is **most** likely to be true?

Tick the one you have chosen.

The Daedalus Incident	☐	Cruising on the Osborne	☐	Australian Sighting	☐

Why have you chosen this one?

_____

_____

_____

1 mark

9. **Think about the three sightings described in *Sea Monsters*.**

Which **one** of these do you think is **least** likely to be true?

Tick the one you have chosen.

The Daedalus Incident	☐	Cruising on the Osborne	☐	Australian Sighting	☐

Why have you chosen this one?

_____

_____

_____

1 mark

10. Use the ***Notable Dates*** section in *Sea Monsters* to help you fill the spaces.

Reported Sightings				
When?	_____	_____	_____	*1962*
Who?	_____ _____	*Crew of* *HMS Daedalus*	_____ _____	_____ _____
What?	*sea serpent/* *monster.....*	*enormous* *sea serpent*	*creatures with* *flipped and* *long neck*	*large dark* *animal*
Where?	_____ _____ _____ _____			_____ _____ _____ _____

3 marks