Pre- and Post-Visit Activities:
Mythical Creatures

Overview:
These activities, which support the Staten Island Museum’s lesson “Mythical Creatures,” introduces students to the telling of myths and why cultures have them.

Three components:

1. **Background:** Information about mythical creatures to prepare yourself and your students for your trip to the Staten Island Museum.
2. **Pre-Visit Activity:** Before your visit, students can play a game of “mythical telephone” to understand how storytelling can be changed through and because of memory (4-6) OR research a mythical creature in pop culture to learn about their origins (7-12).
3. **Post-Visit Activity:** Back in the classroom, students will create a story to go along with the mythical creature they created (4-6) OR interview an adult to elicit what mythical creatures they remember from when they were a kid (7-12).

Materials:

1. Background information for teachers.
2. Activity ideas.
3. Story template.
4. Interview template.

Background Information:
A myth is a kind of story which attempts to explain or interpret some aspect of the world around us. Myths are an important part of the world’s cultures. Some of the earliest myths attempted to explain how things like the sun, moon, stars, and the earth came to be. Others are sacred and are part of a belief system that is important to the spiritual life of their creators. Many myths are meant to teach important moral lessons.

While myths may have originally been passed on through storytelling, over time many of them were written down. They have also been celebrated through dance, song, and the making of art and objects. In cases where written language hadn’t developed or examples of it no longer exist, images related to mythmaking are important clues that help us determine the beliefs of an ancient culture.

It is very common for the characters in myths to be animals that are composites: made of the body parts of several creatures both real and imaginary. Each body part has been chosen because it represents a particularly desirable characteristic. A mythical creature composed of different parts accumulates each part’s strength, resulting in a powerful being that can be beneficial or harmful to human beings. Mythical creatures appear across cultures, often separated by great spans of time and distance. They represent thousands of years of humankind’s hopes, fears, and dreams.

Vocabulary:

- **Ancestors** - a person from whom one is descended and who lived several generations ago.
• **Anthropologist** – a person who studies humankind. People who study anthropology learn about the origins and development of human beings and their societies and customs.

• **Archaeologist** – a person who studies past human life. An archaeologist digs up and then studies objects such as pottery, tools, and buildings.

• **Myth** - story or group of stories that form part of the traditional knowledge of a society. Myths often use imaginative plots and characters to explain how the world began and why nature and people behave the way they do.

• **Religion** - a set of beliefs about how the universe was made and what its purpose is. Religion usually involves worship of a god or gods, and the belief in certain ideas about right and wrong behavior.

### Before Your Visit:

**Grades 4-6:**

Play “Mythical Telephone.” Mythical creatures can change as artists reinterpret them. They can also change by word of mouth. To explore those concepts, try this: line up students and show the first an image of an unusual animal. He/she should describe (but not name) it in the next student’s ear, and so on. The last student in line can draw it on the board. Compare the drawing to the original image.

**Grades 7-12:**

Have students choose creatures visible in popular culture (e.g., movies, books, mascots, ads, video games, comics, anime) and research their mythic origins. What did they symbolize in the past? How and why are these symbols still used today?

### After Your Visit:

**Grades 4-6:**

Using the mythical creature puppet students create at the Staten Island Museum, students will write a one paragraph story about their creature. They can include how their creature played a role in creating the world or controlling natural elements like wind, fire or water. Display the stories and puppets in the classroom.

**Grades 7-12:**

Students can interview an adult to explore what mythical creatures he or she was aware of as a child. What did this creature mean to him or her? Is it still “in circulation”? Do the mythical creatures lend any insight on the cultural background of this person?
Using the mythical creature puppet you created at the Staten Island Museum, write a one paragraph story about the creature.

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Interview

1. Do you remember any myths you were told as a child? If so, name them.

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2. What would you say is your favorite mythical story? Explain.

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3. Do you think myths are important? Why or why not?

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