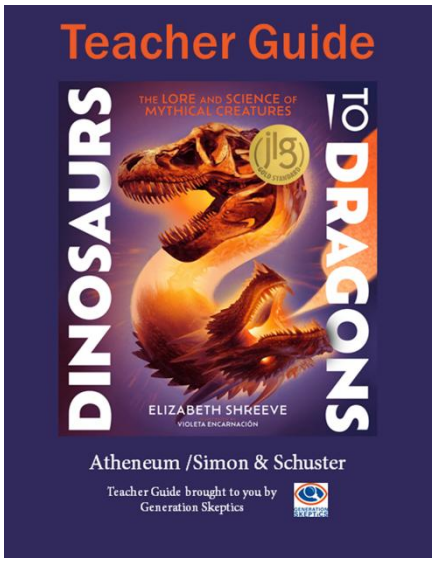

Teacher Guide: *Dinosaurs to Dragons The Lore and Science of Mythical Creatures*

A Junior Library Guide Selection, Grades 5-8
By Elizabeth Chreeve
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Atheneum/Simon & Schuster 2026

Exploring the Intersection of Mythology, Paleontology, and Early Civilizations

Dinosaurs to Dragons is an imaginative nonfiction exploration for middle-grade readers that weaves together global folklore and scientific discovery. From the hooked beak of the griffin to the elusive kraken, this book investigates how our ancestors interpreted fossil remains and mysterious living animals to create the legendary beasts that haunt our dreams. By bridging the gap between "pre-science" storytelling and modern evolutionary biology, students are invited to see the world through the eyes of both a mythmaker and a paleontologist.

This teacher guide offers lesson ideas for multiple subject areas. For each activity, teacher can access a link which will take them to a complete lesson, with classroom slides, student response sheets, rubrics, etc.

- **Grades:** 5-8
- **Subjects:** Science, ELA, Gifted, Art
- **Skills:** Critical thinking, evidence evaluation, creative writing, artistic interpretation, visual communication, imagination, observation, and myth/story development.

Note for Gifted & Talented Educators: While each lesson aligns with specific standards, the interdisciplinary nature of *Dinosaurs to Dragons* makes all three activities ideal for GT clusters. These lessons foster higher-order thinking by requiring students to synthesize complex scientific data with creative cultural expression.

Reading the book with your students?
Try our *Dinosaurs to Dragons* Activity Packet
These lessons build directly on the book's content, asking students to analyze, compare, and extend the ideas presented in the text. By engaging more deeply with the reading, students connect storytelling with scientific thinking, strengthening their understanding of how humans have interpreted the natural world across time.

Stand-Alone Activities: These lessons are inspired by Dinosaurs to Dragon but are not directly tied to the book.

Activity 1: Make Some Good Monsters!!

Best Suited For: ELA Teachers (e.g. 6th Grade Common Core: Cultural Myths & Narrative Writing), Art Teachers, and Gifted/Enrichment Programs.
In this creative-writing and design lab, students step into the shoes of a pre-scientific society. Before the modern scientific method existed, people used myths to explain the natural world around them. Using the "Evidence Files," a collection of strange fossils and "weird" living animals, students must write an original discovery scene and construct a myth that explains their creature's powers, habitat, and cultural role. Students can use the included student response sheet as a guide to organize their ideas before writing their paragraphs.
Key Skills: Creative writing, understanding narrative structures, and character design.

Activity 2: The Detective Lab

Best Suited For: Science Teachers (Scientific Method & Claims/Evidence) and History Teachers (Early Civilizations & Cultural History).
Students become "myth-detectives" to reverse-engineer supernatural beings. Following the investigative paths of researchers like Daniel Taylor (the Yeti) and analyzing the biological impossibility of mermaids, students learn to mirror the scientific process. This lesson explores how ancient cultures used legendary tales to describe unexplained phenomena, acknowledging that while these stories pre-date modern science, they hold rich cultural importance and lasting legacies.
Key Skills: Evaluating evidence, reverse-engineering, understanding the fossil record, and analyzing cultural significance.

Activity 3: Creatures of the Future

Best Suited For: Science Teachers (Evolution, Climate Change, Plate Tectonics) and STEM/STEAM Instructors.
Looking forward instead of back, this activity uses the principles of adaptation and geology to predict life on Earth millions of years from now. Students must construct a future scenario, factoring in plate tectonics and climatic shifts, to design a “future-beast.” Using the pterosaurs and giant insects of the past as a guide, students will hypothesize how life-forms might adapt to a changing planet.
Key Skills: Modeling future ecosystems, understanding natural selection, and geological forecasting.

Activity 4: Myth, Mystery, and Meaning: A Writing Exploration

Best Suited For: ELA Teachers (Grades 5–8: Informative & Argumentative Writing), Science Teachers (Nature of Science), and Cross-Curricular Literacy.
In this writing-focused activity inspired by *Dinosaurs to Dragons*, students explore how humans have historically interpreted unfamiliar observations—transforming fossils, animals, and natural phenomena into myths. Students choose between descriptive and argumentative prompts to either vividly imagine a creature or habitat using sensory details or construct a reasoned argument about the role of myths and scientific

discovery. This activity emphasizes the connection between observation, imagination, and evidence-based thinking.
Key Skills: Descriptive writing with sensory detail, argumentative writing (claims, reasoning, evidence), distinguishing observation from inference

Activity 5: Objective vs. Subjective Case Study-A Cryptid Case Study

Best Suited For: ELA Teachers (Grades 5–8: Informational Text & Argumentation), Science Teachers (Nature of Science), and Computer Science/Digital Literacy (Media & Information Evaluation).
In this analysis-based lesson, students investigate a reported cryptid sighting through two contrasting articles, one written as a dramatic, emotional news story and the other as a cautious, evidence-based scientific report. Students identify differences in tone, language, and reliability, then practice rewriting subjective descriptions into objective, precise statements. By examining how language shapes interpretation, students develop the skills needed to evaluate extraordinary claims in both media and scientific contexts.
Key Skills: Identifying bias and tone, distinguishing objective vs. subjective language, evaluating claims and evidence, and rewriting statements using precise, evidence-based language.

Activity 6: Misinformation and the Digital Kraken

Best Suited For: ELA Teachers (Grades 5–8: Informational Text & Argumentation), Computer Science/Digital Literacy (Media Literacy & Algorithms), and Social Studies (Civic Reasoning & Source Analysis).
In this media literacy investigation, students examine how misinformation spreads by analyzing three famous cases of strange sightings, the Loch Ness Monster, Bigfoot, and a UFO. Using a mix of blurry images, biased sources, and seemingly credible "expert" claims, students evaluate source authority, evidence quality, and potential motives behind the information. Building on earlier lessons about myths and evidence, students learn how sensational claims, once used to explain the unknown, now spread rapidly through digital media and can influence real-world decisions.
Key Skills: Evaluating source credibility, identifying bias and motive, analyzing quality of evidence, and applying critical thinking to digital media and misinformation.

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Hi, I'm Elizabeth Shreeve, author of *Dinosaurs to Dragons: The Lore and Science of Mythical Creatures.*
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