

Name: _____

Date: _____

THE HISTORY OF MERMAIDS

Read the passage below to learn about the history of mermaids, then answer the questions on the next page.



Mermaids have fascinated people for centuries, appearing in stories, art, and legends from many cultures. These mythical sea creatures, usually shown with the upper body of a human and the lower body of a fish, are both enchanting and mysterious. Mermaids have been portrayed in different ways throughout societies over time.

The idea of mermaids goes back to ancient times. One of the earliest mermaid-like figures was Atargatis, a Syrian goddess who turned into a mermaid because she felt guilty for having a child with a shepard. In Greek mythology, there were Sirens, who were originally half-bird and half-woman. They lured sailors to their doom with their beautiful voices. Over time, Sirens were often shown as mermaids instead.

In medieval Europe, people believed that seeing a mermaid was a bad omen, meaning that something terrible, like a storm or shipwreck, was about to happen. Mermaids appeared in bestiaries, which were books describing various animals, both real and mythical. During the Renaissance, people became interested in ancient myths again, and mermaids were often shown in art and stories, representing beauty and mystery.

Mermaids are not just a European legend. In Japan, there is a creature called the ningyo, which has a human face and a fish body. It was believed to bring bad luck if caught. In Africa, Mami Wata is a water spirit often shown as a mermaid and is associated with fertility and healing. In Caribbean folklore, the Aycayia is a mermaid who can turn into a human and walk on land.

Today, mermaids are still popular in movies, TV shows, and books. They symbolize freedom, mystery, and the unknown, and continue to capture our imaginations.



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QUESTIONS FROM THE PASSAGE

Use context clues to determine the meaning of the following words.

1. mythical _____

2. omen _____

3. bestiary _____

4. lured _____

Answer the following questions about the text.

1. Why did mermaids appear in bestiaries? _____

2. Why were mermaids seen as omens of disaster? _____

3. What do you infer about the role of mermaids in culture? _____

4. Why are mermaids portrayed differently in various cultures? _____
