Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: What A Beast! by Sophia Kelly", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1368. Entry version as of November 11, 2026.

Sophia Kelly

What A Beast!

United States (2010)

TAGS: Amazons Balius Centaur(s) Cerberus Chimera / Chimaera Cyclops / Cyclopes Giants Harpies Hecatoncheires / Hundred-Handed Hydra Medusa Minotaur Oracles Pegasus Python Satyr(s) Sirens Sphinx Triton Typhon / Typhoeus / Typhaon Xanthus (Horse)





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	What A Beast!
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	USA and worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2010
First Edition Details	Sophia Kelly, *What A Beast!* New York, Scholastic, 2010, 128 pp.
ISBN	9781606310601
Genre	Encyclopedias, Nonfiction*
Target Audience	Children (10–14 years old)
Author of the Entry	Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@biu.ac.il
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Creators



Sophia Kelly (Author)

Sophia Kelly is the author of numerous books on various subject, such as, *Go, Speed Racer, Go!*, *Adventure to Adelie Land*, *I Was Made Ready* and more.

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Additional information

Summary

This informational text is a mythology look-it-up guide to the monsters of Greek mythology. The book includes family portraits, family trees, glossary, constellations, further reading, web sites and index.

The text is accompanied by colourful illustrations and stock photos.

The following beasts and themes are mentioned: introduction, illustrated map of specific locations (such as Delphi, Rhodes), Amazons, Balius and Xanthus, Centaurs, Cerberus, Chimera, Cyclopes, Gigantes, Harpies, Hecatoncheires, Hydra, Medusa, Minotaur, Pegasus, Prophets and Oracles, Python, Satyrs, Sirens, Sphinx, Triton, Typhon.

The introduction briefly discusses the character, purpose and relevance of myth, and the nature of a beast. Each entry includes the name of the character in Greek letters, a profile, family, a brief explanation, short myths and modern reference (for example in the Amazons section there is repeated reference to Wonder Woman). There are also amusing "quotations", supposedly uttered by the characters. For example, in the Python section, it declares, "I was born bad and ready to fight"; "Apollo was treated like a hero and I was dead. Doesn't sound fair to me." (pp. 88–89).

There is also an introductory two-page illustration which is titled, "welcome to Ms. Sphinx's class" (pp. 102–103) in which the Sphinx resembles an angry teacher, wearing glasses and sitting in a class, eating a student. This shows that the book strives to appeal to the cultural world of the young readers and connect the ancient myths to their own modern world and definitions. The Sphinx was likely chosen due to her knowledge and wisdom.

Each entry also contains links to further relevant information, such as to earthquakes or particular constellations, providing further material on the natural phenomena which are discussed in the entry. Some entries demonstrate a connection to other cultures, as in the Chimera entry, where additional information about Chinese fire-breathing dragons and their alleged inspiration by dinosaurs is provided.

Next to the text there are "reality check" sections in different colours which refer to the reality behind the myth, considering topics such as whether the Trojan War really happened, the source of the phrase

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Achilles' heel, and the Cyclops character in X-MEN. These provide information on classical reception that connects the ancient characters and myths to modern history, language and pop culture.

Analysis

This book aims to provide various information on Greek mythological creatures in a fun and colourful way. There are several first-person references in each entry, as if the beasts themselves speak. There are also general references written in a more attractive way for the young readers.

For example, in the Python entry, it is noted under "here's looking at you" title: "what an image! Smelly, slimy, huge, and territorial- where does a beast like that come from?" (p. 88).

Each entry is filled with information, and the organization of the facts appeals to younger readers although some might be distracted by the different colours and assortment of photos.

The illustrations and photos also appear more associative at times. For example, in the *Pegasus* entry, there is a photo of a real horse's head after the information which compares Pegasus to regular horses ("most horses are beautiful… Pegasus was beyond simply beautiful – he was spectacular", p. 78). There is also a photo denoting the fly which was sent by Zeus to stung Pegasus when Bellerophon tried to reach Olympus.

Overall, this book provides plentiful interesting information on the beasts and their related myths and connects them to our modern-day lives using the "reality check" sections, which relate to classical reception of the various beasts and show the relevance of the ancient myths and their influence today. The information is delivered in a light and humorous tone, using bright and colourful settings.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Amazons Balius Centaur(s) Cerberus Chimera / Chimaera Cyclops / Cyclopes Giants Harpies Hecatoncheires / Hundred-Handed Hydra Medusa Minotaur Oracles Pegasus Python Satyr(s) Sirens Sphinx Triton Typhon / Typhoeus / Typhaon Xanthus (Horse)

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Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Humour Intellect Joy of reading
Addenda	Content adviser: William Hansen, professor emeritus, classics and folklore, University of Indiana.

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