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# Classification – Historical Discoveries!

Many years ago, people could only learn about the world by listening to travelers returning from abroad. For centuries, European explorers brought back tales of the supposedly ‘unexplored’ areas of the world and the strange animals they saw. In 1730, a man called Thomas Boreman wrote a book describing some of the animals that most people agreed existed around the world. The language in it is very old-fashioned. Can you use his descriptions to classify each mystery animal as a fish, amphibian, reptile, bird or mammal? Then see if you can work out or guess what animal he is describing!

In the descriptions, look for any sign of these features to help you classify them into the right group:

Fish: *gills* to breathe, *fins* for swimming and covered in *wet scales*.

Amphibians: *slimy/wet skin*, which some can breathe through.

Reptiles: *hard, dry scaly skin*, lay *eggs on land*.

Birds: covered in *feathers* and have *wings* and a *beak*, lay *eggs on land*.

Mammals: *hair* or *fur* covering their bodies, they feed their babies with *milk*.

e.g. If he describes an animal with dry scaly skin, which group is the animal in?

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## Mystery Creatures

1) *“It is alike in appearance to a rabbit, but more like a pig, and much covered all over with sharp, thorny hairs, as to make prickles. For when ‘tis scared it draws itself round as a football, so that all that appears are its natural needles.”*

This animal can be classified as a \_\_\_\_\_. I know this because it has \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ which is a feature of this group. I think he is describing a \_\_\_\_\_.

2) *“It is very beautiful and smooth, broad and thin. It has two long dark fins on each side of its gills, and is otherwise shining pearl to golden in colour. It is a peaceful creature.”*

This animal can be classified as a \_\_\_\_\_. I know this because it has \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ which are features of this group. I think he is describing a \_\_\_\_\_.

3) *“From sharply pointed beak to tail tip, about three feet nine inches in length and eight spans, in breadth, with wings extended. The neck feathers are of a rusty colour, the rest golden or chestnut, sprinkled with white spots. It possesses extraordinary fierceness.”*

This animal can be classified as a \_\_\_\_\_. I know this because it has \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ which are features of this group. I think he is describing a \_\_\_\_\_.

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4) *“Known as one of the chief beasts ideal for human food, as one may readily eat their flesh or drink their milk, and for its wool made for clothing, which forms a fur coat most curled, beyond that of any other animal. Its horns grow in many different forms.”*

This animal can be classified as a \_\_\_\_\_. I know this because it has \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ which are features of this group. I think he is describing a \_\_\_\_\_.

5) *“Of these, it is said they are common in both land and water. The back legs are very long, which they use in leaping. They have a thin skin, most moist, which helpeth them in swimming. Their tongue is lengthy and used in hunting for food.”*

This animal can be classified as a \_\_\_\_\_. I know this because it has \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ which is a feature of this group. I think he is describing a \_\_\_\_\_.

6) *“The teeth in its snapping jaws are long and sharp. Impressively, the opening of the mouth reacheth to its ears. The tail, as with the whole body, is rough and armed with hard skin. It lays its eggs, once a year it seems, in the earth on dry Land.”*

This animal can be classified as a \_\_\_\_\_. I know this because it has \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ which are features of this group. I think he is describing a \_\_\_\_\_.

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7) *“It hath a great head and hard beak, which it uses like a hook for climbing, alongside the feet. The feet are of a strange fashion: two toes point forward and two back. It does not only imitate man's voice, but in wit exceeds all other creatures.”*

This animal can be classified as a \_\_\_\_\_. I know this because it has \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ which is a feature of this group. I think he is describing a \_\_\_\_\_.

8) *“Its neck swells when provoked and it flings poison with passion, to which there can be no cure. The scales are hard and dry and run down its three to six feet length. The Egyptians are said to have great respect for them, providing them food after they have eaten which is most polite of them, to ensure they come to no harm.”*

This animal can be classified as a \_\_\_\_\_. I know this because it has \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ which is a feature of this group. I think he is describing a \_\_\_\_\_.

Bonus: *“A beast doubted by many, those who insist upon it say it has one horn, curled like a flaming sword, growing out of the head. The rest of its form puts one in mind of a stag or perhaps a horse. Its mane and other hair is of a yellowish colour.”*

This animal can be classified as a \_\_\_\_\_. I know this because it has \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ which is a feature of this group. I think he is describing a \_\_\_\_\_.

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## Dragons Discoveries

The last animal in the previous activity is a mythical creature. There are lots of mythical creatures in this book, such as dragons. The author is not sure if they are real, but includes them, as travelers swear to have seen them. Use the features shown in the images to classify each of the dragons:

1)



This dragon could be classified  
as a \_\_\_\_\_.

I think this because it has

\_\_\_\_\_

which are features of this group.

2)



This dragon could be classified  
as a \_\_\_\_\_.

I think this because it has

\_\_\_\_\_

which is a feature of this group.

3)



This animal could be classified  
as a \_\_\_\_\_.

I think this because it has

\_\_\_\_\_

which is a feature of this group.

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## Extension: As knowledge grows, the world changes

(There are no wrong answers to these questions!)

a) The author had most likely not seen most of the animals in his book or spoken to people who had directly. Do you think the descriptions are trustworthy? Why?

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b) The comment about Egyptian people will most likely have come from returning travelers and may have been untrue. Do you think the author should have spoken to local people themselves to find out about these animals? Why? Do you think they would describe the animals in the same way?

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c) Why do you think this 'scientific' book describes so many mythical creatures? Do most people still believe in these animals today? Why so/why not? What changed?

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In the book, Thomas Boreman describes a whale like this:

*“The whale is the mightiest fish at about fifty or sixty feet in length. It has two large fins and the tail is forked. The female has teats and suckles her young on milk in the manner of land animals. The throat is very straight and can hardly take the arm of a man, therefore it is strange that this fish should have swallowed up Jonah. It is probable that it was not the whale that did this, rather some other great fish with a name translated as ‘whale’.”*

d) The whale is not a fish, it is a mammal. What piece of evidence does he include that shows that whales are mammals?

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e) Boreman has been scientifically describing animals that have been reported to him. But in this description, the story of Jonah is included. This is a story from the Bible, where a man spends three days in the stomach of a whale. As this is a religious story and not a proven scientific account, do you think he should include it in his scientific book? Why do you think he might have chosen to include it?

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## Classification – Historical Discoveries Answers

### Mystery Creatures

- 1) This animal can be classified as a mammal . I know this because it has hair which is a feature of this group. I think he is describing a hedgehog (a porcupine, would also be possible, though many do not curl up) .
- 2) This animal can be classified as a fish . I know this because it has fins and scales which are features of this group. I think he is describing a goldfish .
- 3) This animal can be classified as a bird . I know this because it has a beak, wings and feathers which are features of this group. I think he is describing a eagle (a golden eagle in this case) .
- 4) This animal can be classified as a mammal . I know this because it has milk and wool (fur) which are features of this group. I think he is describing a sheep .
- 5) This animal can be classified as an amphibian . I know this because it has wet skin which is a feature of this group. I think he is describing a frog .
- 6) This animal can be classified as a reptile . I know this because it has hard skin and lays eggs which are features of this group. I think he is describing a crocodile .
- 7) This animal can be classified as a bird . I know this because it has a beak which is a feature of this group. I think he is describing a parrot .
- 8) This animal can be classified as a reptile . I know this because it has hard, dry scales which is a feature of this group. I think he is describing a snake (specifically an asp) .



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Bonus: This animal can be classified as a mammal . I know this because it has hair which is a feature of this group. I think he is describing a unicorn .

## Dragon Discoveries

Dragon 1: This dragon could be classified as a bird . I think this because it has feathers, wings and a beak which are features of this group.

Dragon 2: This dragon could be classified as a mammal . I think this because it has fur which is a feature of this group.

Dragon 3: This dragon could be classified as a reptile . I think this because it has scaly skin which is a feature of this group.

## Extension

Remember there are no wrong answers here!

- a) The descriptions are probably not very accurate as he has not seen them himself, so they may be exaggerated. Exaggerating the descriptions might make the book more interesting and so it would sell better. Thomas Boreman also had no way of checking whether the facts were true or not.

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- b) The author should have spoken or written to local people as they see the animals every day and so will have a better understanding of them. The Egyptians may have had a different understanding of the asp's behavior that could have been in the book!
- c) In 1730, there was no television, social media or internet, so people only had the accounts from other people to learn from. They would have had no reason not to believe them. Today most people do not believe in most mythical creatures. Scientific understanding is much greater and there is very little evidence, such as photos or footage, that these creatures exist.
- d) The text describes the whale feeding its babies on milk, like mammals do.
- e) This story does not really belong in a purely scientific book like this book attempted to be, as these deal only with proven facts. He may have included the story as he believed it to be as true as the scientific facts he is providing elsewhere, or he may believe it will help familiarize readers with the animal, as the story could back up or dispute his description. Alternatively, he may have believed it was interesting and would make the book more informative or enjoyable.

Why not have a go at describing an animal in the style of this book? Can your family work out what animal it is?

Send us your descriptions and test us out too!