

Creature Features

Fangs, claws, wings, and beaks!

Cultures throughout the world have created fantastical creatures with the features of many different animals, making the resulting being especially powerful. People in these cultures have used images of these beasts to give themselves more power. Helmets with features of mighty animals, for instance, make their wearers feel stronger.

What else might these imaginary creature features have represented? **Let's look at three examples of imaginary creatures in the Museum to find out.**



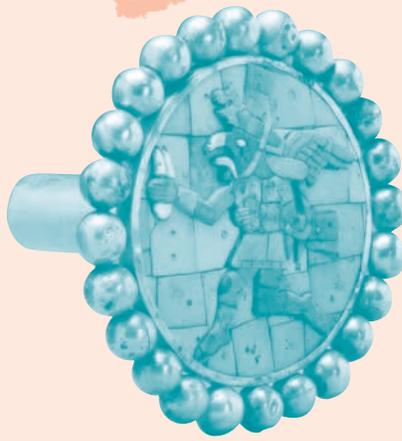
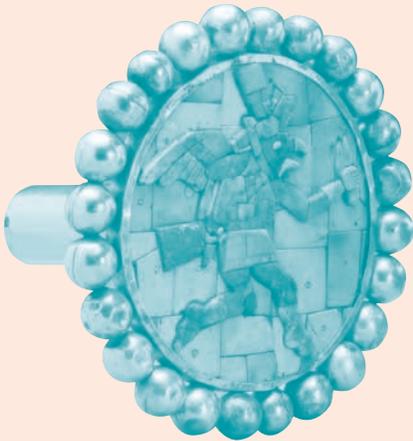
What would you do if you had the claws of a lizard, the fangs of a crocodile, and the wings and beak of a mighty bird?

Start in *The Jan Mitchell Treasury in the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas galleries on the first floor.* Find the large ear ornaments below. They are in one of the small, square cases in the center of the gallery.

Winged Runners

Pretend you are a young boy from the highest ruling class in ancient Peru. According to tradition, your ears are pierced when you are young, so you can wear earflares like these. As you get older, you wear larger and larger earflares to stretch the holes in your ears.

Each earflare shows a winged runner with the head of a bird (or wearing a bird mask) and the body of a person, holding a bag of beans. Bags of dried beans with markings on them have been found in tombs in Peru. The marks might have been a kind of writing, so these runners could be carrying special information or messages. And their wings may help them move faster. **What kind of information might need to be delivered in a hurry?**



How many different colors were used to decorate the earflares? Name four:

Possible answers: turquoise, green, purple, red, white, gold

How did the ornaments stay in place? The hollow part in the back (the post) balanced the part in front. Originally, they would have been held in place with a material like string or metal.

Next, leave the Treasury the way you entered. Make a right and walk past the set of three doors on your left. Stop at the second set of large glass cases on your left, and find this African helmet mask.



Animal

This mask combines features of at least three different animals. Can you find them? Why do you think these animals were chosen? Draw a line to match the animal with its feature:



Boar

curly tail

Can you think of a reason why this mask has two faces? Two means double the strength — and it also shows that whoever wears the mask is all-seeing.



Mask

Imagine a special group of people whose job is to protect others against evil and crime. This group is called Poro (pronounced pour-o) and it prepares young Senufo men of Côte d'Ivoire, Africa, to become adults. The men wear helmets like this one at performances designed to protect people and fight evil. Such masks are also worn at other events, like funerals.

Crocodile



tusks sprout from snout

Chameleon



rows of sharp teeth

Finally, walk ahead and take the elevator on the left to the second floor. Make a left, walk down the hallway, and make another left into the Cypriot galleries. Walk into the third gallery. Find the panel with mushhushshu dragon above on the right wall.

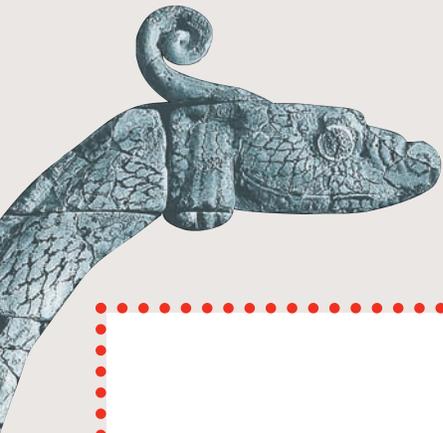
Fantastic Dragon



In a long-ago time, you are walking along a road toward a great city in Mesopotamia (ancient Iraq). You stop suddenly before a gate, looking at the image of a fierce creature on a wall (originally one of many). You have no doubt he is there to protect the city — and he is. The creature is a kind of fantastic dragon, known as *mushhushshu*, (pronounced moosh-hoosh-shoo). He serves as a guardian and protects the city of Babylon.

What parts of animals can you find in this creature? He has the head, neck, and body of a horned snake; the front legs of a lion and the hind legs of a bird of prey (like a hawk). His front legs represent the strength of a lion. How could these and his other features help him? Name two ways:

This dragon can't fly like some others you might have seen, but he's still pretty forbidding. Have you seen pictures of dragons from other cultures? How were they different from or similar to this one?



Creative Creatures

Now that you have seen some of the creatures in the Museum that are made up of different beings, create a creature of your own! What kinds of features will you give it? What powers will those features have?



Pair of Earflares, Peru (Moche); 2nd–5th century; hammered gold, turquoise, soladite, and shell inlay; Gift and Bequest of Alice K. Bache, 1966, 1977 (66.196.40, 41). **Janus-Faced Helmet Mask (Wanyugo)**, Côte d'Ivoire, Korhogo region, Ladiokaha, Senufo peoples; 19th–20th century; wood, paint; Collected by Emil Storrer, 1952; The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1964 (1978.412.311). **Panel with mushhushshu dragon**, Mesopotamia, excavated at Babylon, Ishtar Gate; Neo-Babylonian period, reign of Nebuchadnezzar II (604–562 B.C.); glazed brick; lent by Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin, L.1995.48.1 (reproduced by permission from the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin)



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