

## Reading and writing

### Modern legends about places

Modern myths and legends have been created to explain mysterious events.

You are going to read about two of these mysteries and consider how and why they have been created.

#### Activity 3.10

Before you read the first extract, read the title and respond to it quickly.

- What is this about?
- What does the title make you feel or think about?

#### WORD ATTACK SKILLS

Work out the meanings of the following words from the context if you can:

- ✓ livestock
- ✓ mutilation
- ✓ sanction

## 'The Beast of Bodmin Moor'

A mysterious cat-like creature with yellow eyes and long sharp teeth ... It prowls around at night and attacks farm animals. It's been known to chase people too ... What is it? It's the Beast of Bodmin Moor. Or maybe the Beasts of Bodmin Moor. A modern myth or is it true?



Bodmin Moor is an area in northern Cornwall in the United Kingdom.

Cornwall attracts many tourists who come to enjoy the natural beauty and history. And since the late 1970s they have also been able to enjoy a local myth. How has this myth been created?

In 1978 farmers near Bodmin Moor reported the loss of some **livestock**. The livestock seemed to have suffered **mutilation** of the sort that could have been carried out by a wild creature with sharp claws and teeth. Something like a panther perhaps – dark, very fast and known to slink around at night? But there are no panthers in the UK. So theories started to emerge. Some said that it was an animal that had been kept illegally in a private zoo. Perhaps the animal had been released into the wild to escape **sanction** from the authorities? And now the animal lived on Bodmin Moor. Perhaps it was a puma rather than a panther? Eventually there was an official investigation into the matter. The investigators announced that the evidence was not verifiable.

Shortly after the investigation there were further rumours about a cat-like creature roaming around at night. And then a young boy found a skull. The skull was of a cat-like animal – a leopard! It was sent off for analysis. Speculation reached new heights! The result? Yes, it was the skull of a leopard, but the skull came from an imported rug. (Animal skin rugs with attached heads used to be popular!) And then, a few years later, a video clip emerged





**EXERCISE 3.8**

- 1 Using information from the extract, describe Bodmin Moor and the mythical Beast of Bodmin Moor.
- 2 According to the extract, what evidence is there that the Beast of Bodmin Moor is real?
- 3 What do you think is a likely explanation for the events that started the myth?
- 4 Write a summary of the different accounts of the Beast of Bodmin Moor in your own words.

of a young black jaguar roaming at night around the moor. At last there was real evidence of the existence of the Beast of Bodmin Moor.

Or was it? Where was the video taken? Who took it? Does it matter? A modern myth had been created. People who visit the area claim to hear or see this mysterious creature and others come many miles to look for it.

**LET'S TALK**

- 1 Talk about the style of the extract you have read.
  - Is it formal or informal?
  - Why do you think the writer used this style?
  - Does the style relate to the writer's point of view? What is that point of view?
- 2 Imagine that you work for the Cornish Tourism Board.
  - What would your attitude be to the myth of the Beast of Bodmin Moor?
  - Would you promote the myth? If so, why and how?

**EXERCISE 3.9**

- One of the most famous legends of modern times concerns the strange happenings in an area of the North Atlantic Ocean called the Bermuda Triangle.
- Do you know anything about the Bermuda Triangle? Think about how a modern-day legend might differ from a traditional legend, then read the following text carefully.

## The Bermuda Triangle

The Bermuda Triangle is an imaginary and undefined region in the western part of the North Atlantic Ocean that is not on any official map. It is a place where a number of aircraft and ships are said to have disappeared under mysterious circumstances.

Two incidents in the area, both involving military craft, started the legend. The first event occurred in 1918 when a ship, the *USS Cyclops*, which was **en route** from Brazil to the USA, disappeared inside the Bermuda Triangle. No traces were found of the ship or the people who were on board. Then nearly 30 years later a squadron of bombers called Flight 19 also disappeared in the Bermuda Triangle. Again, no wreckage was ever found.

Unusual features about the area have been noted in the past and other ships and planes have simply vanished without trace within the imaginary triangle. However, it was only in 1964 that the area got its name. A journalist wrote an article for a magazine about the disappearance of Flight 19 in an area that he called The Bermuda Triangle and the legend making began in earnest. Ten years later the publication of a book on the subject promoted the legend. Stories were told about missing travellers and about giant sea monsters living in the area. Some even suggested that the travellers were abducted by creatures from space.

But there was no real evidence and the truth of the disappearances may have more to do with human error. Lieutenant A.L. Russell, in the US Coast Guard's official response to Bermuda Triangle inquiries, wrote: 'It has been our experience that the combined forces of nature and the unpredictability of mankind outdo science-fiction stories many times each year.'

### Unusual features of the area

The Bermuda Triangle region has some unusual features.



First of all, it's one of only two places on Earth where true north and magnetic north line up. This makes compass readings difficult. The other place where this occurs is the so-called 'Devil's Sea' which is off the east coast of Japan.

It must also be remembered that the sea is very, very deep in the area. The sea floor is about 5,800 metres down and even goes as deep as 8,230 metres at one point. This great depth would make it very difficult to find any wreckage.

There are strong water currents as well as dangerous reefs in the region.

The weather in this part of the world also presents dangers. **Hurricanes** are the biggest issue. The Gulf Stream travels along part of the area. This is like a big river flowing within the ocean and it can create certain weather patterns. Storms and high waves can form suddenly in the area, as a result of the atmospheric conditions. The waves can reach heights of 6 to 8 metres. There are also **waterspouts** which are particularly dangerous to ships.

Clearly this is a dangerous part of the world for travellers, but there are many who choose to believe in the legend of the Bermuda Triangle.

#### GLOSSARY

**en route** – on a journey

**hurricane** – tropical storm with strong winds and a lot of rain

**waterspout** – a column of water

#### EXERCISE 3.10

- 1 By referring to the opening paragraphs, explain, using your own words, what the mystery of the Bermuda Triangle is.
- 2 Explain what is meant by 'the legend making began in earnest'.
- 3 Using your own words, explain what theories have been put forward to explain the disappearances in the Bermuda Triangle, and how other people have responded to these theories.
- 4 Explain, using your own words, the comments made by Lieutenant Russell at the end of the first section of this extract.
- 5 From the 'Unusual features of the area' section, write a summary of what you have learned about the unusual features of the Bermuda Triangle. You should write about 50–60 words.

#### LET'S TALK

In small groups of three or four discuss the similarities and differences between the traditional myths and legends and the contemporary stories of the Beast of Bodmin and the Bermuda Triangle.

#### KEY WORD

**suffix** a letter or group of letters added to the end of a word (or a word stem) in order to form a new word or to alter the grammatical function of the original word

## Key skills

### Vocabulary and spelling

#### Suffixes

As you know, a **suffix** is a letter or group of letters added to the end of a word (or a word stem) in order to form a new word or to alter the grammatical function of the original word. The main function of suffixes is to create new nouns, verbs and adjectives.