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# The Griffin And The Dinosaur: How Adrienne Mayor Discovered A Fascinating Link Between Myth And Science



## Synopsis

Could Griffins have been real? When Adrienne Mayor carefully read the ancient Greek and Roman descriptions, this mythic hybrid of a lion and an eagle sounded like something people had actually seen. What could explain that evidence? After a decade of hunting through myths, poring over old maps, and tracing the discoveries of modern dinosaur hunters, she found the answer: awesome dinosaur fossils observed by ancient gold-hunters in the Gobi desert. Here is the story of one insightful, curious, and determined woman who solved the mystery of the Griffin, and invented a new science. Now she and others travel the world matching myths and fossils.

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 1140 (What's this?)

Hardcover: 48 pages

Publisher: National Geographic Children's Books (April 8, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1426311087

ISBN-13: 978-1426311086

Product Dimensions: 9.6 x 0.4 x 11.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars See all reviews (6 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #821,340 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #67 in Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Archaeology #101 in Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > Science Studies > Nature > Fossils #417 in Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > History > Ancient

Age Range: 10 - 12 years

Grade Level: 5 and up

## Customer Reviews

I remember back in 2007 when the American Museum of Natural History in NYC premiered a show called "Mythic Creatures". It made a fair amount of press and with good reason. It's not every day you see full-scale models of mythical creatures presented in a serious museum setting. The show got some nice write-ups but though I listened to the explanations of why it was going on, I didn't quite catch the whole point. To me it just sort of sounded like a cheap ploy to lure more patrons into the museum's exhibits. A bit of the old P.T Barnum, albeit with a classier imprimatur. Years passed and I forgot about the show right up until the

publication of *The Griffin and the Dinosaur*. As I read the book, memories of the show came back to me, as did my complete and utter misunderstanding of what it had been trying to accomplish. Fortunately, I am happy to report that once in a while in this life a gal gets a second chance. With Marc Aronson and Adrienne Mayor's hard work, now I have a book before me that clarifies the true connection between the prehistoric and the mythical. Focused through a single woman's obsessive search, this book comes off as both a riveting historical mystery as well as a wonderful example of how a person's passions might take them places they never imagined they might travel. The future isn't written in stone but it might just be written in bones. It was kind of a goofy idea. The sort of thing a person might consider off-handedly then forget about five minutes later. But for Adrienne Mayor, the idea stuck. It was simple too. You see, after doing lots of research at the American School of Classical Studies in Athens, Ms. Mayor noticed a strange pattern. Reading texts by ancient Greeks she noticed that when they discussed creatures like griffins they always sounded like they knew about these animals firsthand. Is it possible that these creatures were conjured up after the Greeks found some ancient bones of one kind or another? Not a natural born scholar, Adrienne always considered herself more of an artist than anything else. Still, this question about the griffin's origins intrigued her. What she could not have expected was how her search would take her from Greece to Samos to The Museum of the Rockies to distant China. Infinitely interesting, illustrated with multiple photographs, sketches, ancient images and contemporary illustrations, Mayor not only shows where our ancestors got their seemingly goofy ideas, but gives these people a form of credit and respect that is certainly their due. Every Marc Aronson book is different. Generalizing is not something you can really do when you discuss him as an author. I have found in the past that some of his books ran a bit on the long and lengthy side, but beyond that there aren't any real connecting threads between one project and another. Yet if I found Mr. Aronson to be a bit more loquacious at times than he needed to be, no such objection could possibly be leveled at *The Griffin and the Dinosaur*. Coming in at a svelte 48 pages, a number normally associated with slightly longer picture books, Aronson wastes no time getting to the meat of the matter. Turn to the first page and there's Adrienne, age six. Four pages later she's studying in Athens while her fiancé works on his ancient Greek fortress research. Aronson cuts to the chase, helped in large part by his interviews with Adrienne. The result is a well-rounded portrait of a single woman going against the odds to prove something both interesting and odd. It's research presented to kids as adventure in a format they're going to actually WANT to read. How rare is that? I know that one reviewer of this book was dismayed by an interpretation of Marc Aronson's message here that says that

people who closely observe the world around them are just as good as professional scholars in the field. For the record, I do not happen to agree that that is what Aronson is saying. I think it far more likely that Aronson is displaying the need for balance. You can sit behind dusty tomes all day long with your professional degree hanging up upon a wall, but if you don't go out and try new ideas and speak to new people and even do a bit of exploring (of one kind or another) then you cannot be surprised when a woman like Ms. Mayor goes about making a fabulous, hitherto unknown (or unproved) discovery. By the same token, the person who observes the world around them closely but never picks up a book or does even rudimentary research is going to completely miss the potential connections out there that could justify their work. Mayor exhibited both a willingness to learn and a sharp-eyed curiosity that was willing to question. In an era when so much research is beholden to outside interests, it does the heart good to read a book about a woman who set out to discover what many might have considered impossible to prove. The extra details turn out to be just as enchanting. The entire history of the Scythians and how they might have been an inspiration for some of the women tales out there is captivating. Even more so their gold, as well as the discovery of Megalopolis. And then there's that amazing look at mammoth skulls and how they might have inspired the stories of the Cyclops. It all got me to thinking about the role of myths in the world and their beginnings. Maybe a kid will read this book and begin to wonder what the roots of other great myths might be. Will they start poring over Hindi and Norse myths, looking for clues to the past? Or will they simply get a better sense of one of the big themes of the book: that ancient people had reasons for making up the stories that they did. For me, that was a moral well worth taking away from the story. We have a tendency to look down our nose at our ancient ancestors, but as this book shows, these people had their reasons for thinking the way that they did. We should never be so egotistical as to believe that we are the first people to find the bones of long extinct creatures and to make up reasons for their existence. As for the art, for the most part it's okay but artist Chris Muller gets off to a shaky start. His presence in the book makes a lot of sense. I could completely understand the need to ratchet up the kid-friendly elements of the story, of course. If you name your book *The Griffin and the Dinosaur* then you better bloody well have a couple griffins in there (to say nothing of the dinosaurs). In fact, when Muller is working on the mythical, he is at his best. The cover, for example, is striking, as are his images of an griffin or a sleeping griffin protecting its nest. Where it all breaks down is when he has to deal with reality. The publication page says that the paintings were made with "traditional media" pencil and watercolors "and" digital painting. Traditional media is fine with me, but the digital painting proves to be occasionally painful. For example, a preliminary image of young

Adrienne dowsing above the skeleton of a dinosaur is baffling partly because I couldn't find any mentions of dowsing in the text and partly because the CGI cloud cover contrasts horribly with the drawn Adrienne. It feels like a cheap image in an otherwise classy book. Happily, it is the only moment when I felt that way. Other images in the book border or plunge right into the fantastical, and that's appropriate for the moments they tend to illustrate. This is the Possession by A.S. Byatt of children's literature. An honest-to-goodness historical mystery complete with an early hypothesis, a likable heroine, multiple dead ends, and at the end? GOLD! Literally. It succeeds at doing many things at once, but never runs too long or bores the reader with its findings. Mayor is a likable and ultimately unintimidating subject for kids to follow. For those children obsessed with myths and legends, this might be the ideal way to transition them gently from the world of the fantastical into one of research and exploration. For Percy Jackson lovers everywhere. For ages 9-12.

An exciting adventure in a way, this story begins with Adrienne Mayor born in 1946, as a young schoolgirl who is fascinated by mythology and in particular with the story of the Griffin. How does a shy, quiet kid from Souix Falls, South Dakota, come to develop a new field of research - geomythology? This book by Marc Aronson follows her path as student from country to country as she searches through ancient texts about mythical creatures. This is no easy task as she learns ancient languages in order to read these texts. How Adrienne is able to discover what others miss is the way she thinks. She is sure that these ancient people had to have seen something real, even if only bones. She knows she is onto something meaningful and very early in history. At first she knows very little about these early dinosaurs and other prehistoric animals, but she is determined and learns. Her goal is set on the Griffin. There must have been bones of a real animal to influence the people of the time. Therefore, she must go back through the pages of time to find one thing. Where did the first story come from, and why? The Griffin was said to protect gold. Where was gold found along with prehistoric bones? This is how she progressed until finally finding the link from paleontology to her "Griffin." A enticing story for young and old, a detective story of how to seek and find from the most ancient of times. The fascination of paleontology captures our imagination already, and here the vision of what can be discovered turns to mythology. How exciting is that? I, for one, want to read all the books in this genre published by National Geographic Kids. I received this book in exchange for an honest review. The review and rating are based on my own perception.

Interesting premise, the whole family enjoyed reading it. My 11 year old is enamored with mythology

and loved this book. The stand-out feature is the art. Mr. Muller is an artistic genius! I'm considering purchasing a second copy so I can frame the prints.

This book was so amazing for our entire family, we purchased it after stumbling across it on the library shelf. Excellent real learning mixed with natural fascination. We later bought more books by the same author.

Perfect!

A book I needed, fast service, every thing good.

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