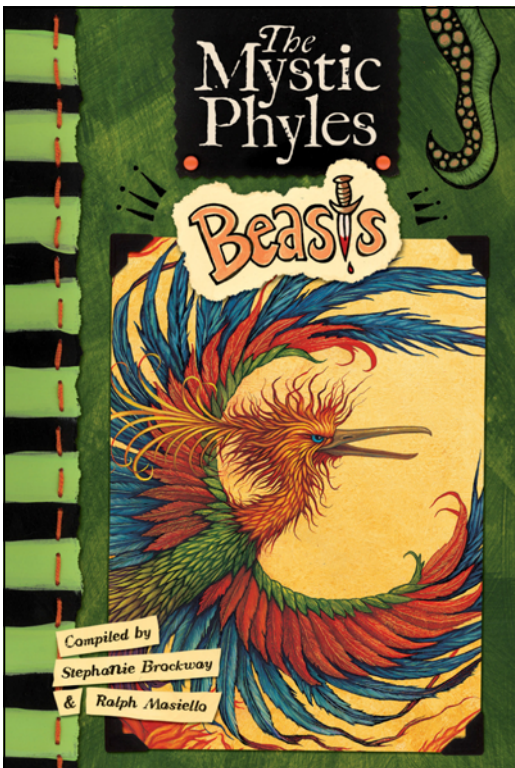


The Mystic Phyles Beasts

An Activity & Discussion Guide

Developed by Charlesbridge

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and Stephanie Brockway



978-1-57091-718-9, HC, \$15.95
978-1-60734-310-3, E-book, \$9.99
Ages 9–12

Abigail Thaddeus is aware of her border-line geek status—which only keeps her secretly yearning for a life of fame and adventure. But as an eighth-grader in the tiny town of Westbrook, tucked away in her grandparents' ramshackle old mansion, her chances for glory are slim. That is, until she discovers a mysterious letter that launches her on an undercover quest to research mythical beasts.

With the help of her best friend Charley, Abigail unearths little-known facts about mythical creatures, including the familiar unicorn and the bizarre bonnacon. The more she learns, the more she finds that all is not as it may seem. When a threatening letter arrives, the lines between fact and fiction, and excitement and danger begin to cross. Pop, her overly-strict grandfather, and Ninny, her nutty grandmother, may both be part of a reality more complicated and mystical than Abigail ever imagined.

Will Abigail pursue top-secret knowledge at all costs or choose the path of safety? Her decision could bring eternal glory . . . or certain doom! In this scrapbook-style journal, Abigail's quest to investigate mythical beasts is full of adventure, mishap, spunky humor, colorful sketches, and real-life research.

Discussion Questions

- 1) *The Mystic Phyles* is written in a journal format. Do you like this way of presenting Abigail's story? How do you think the book would be different if the story was told in the regular prose format of a novel?
- 2) Abigail's grandparents are important characters in the book. Did your opinion of them change as you read? If so, how?
- 3) We learn a lot about Abigail and her town in *The Mystic Phyles*, but there are still a lot of aspects of her life that are a mystery. For example, where is Abigail now? How long ago did she write this journal? Do you think she is still keeping journals yet to be found? Who do you think is the "Devoted Friend"? Brainstorm ideas to answer these and any other unanswered questions.
- 4) Compilers Stephanie Brockway and Ralph Masiello explain in a note to the reader that *The Mystic Phyles: Beasts* is the first volume in a series of journals written by Abigail Thaddeus. What do you think the other volumes might be about?
- 5) Abigail's journal is made up of research. How did she conduct her research? What different kinds of sources did she use? Can you think of any other types of sources that can be used when conducting research?

Language Arts/Poetry

For the following activities, feel free to use the blank journal pages at the back of this Activity & Discussion Guide.

- 1) How would the story of *The Mystic Phyles* be different if Stephanie Brockway and Ralph Masiello had found journals written by another character in the book? What do you think Charley's journals would say? What about Pop's? Peanut's? Choose another character in the book and re-write an entry from that person's (or animal's, or beast's) point of view. What would this new journal entry look like? Would it contain art and photographs like Abigail's? Would it be written out by hand, or typed using a computer or typewriter? Would the subject you choose want his or her story made public as Abigail does?



- 2) Haiku is a form of poetry that originated in Japan. An English haiku generally has three lines containing five, seven, and five syllables respectively. For example, on page 12 of *The Mystic Phyles*, Abigail shares with the reader the following haiku:

*Oh cookie cookie
How I love to say the word
But love more to eat.*

- a) Write your own haiku and share it with the class.

- b) What other kinds of poetry are there? Research three different poetry forms. Answer the following questions, then write an original poem in each form.
- Where did this form of poetry originate?
 - What are the rules of this form?
 - Find an example of a well-known poem in this form.

- 3) Make your own beast! Add a chapter to *The Mystic Phyles: Beasts* by creating your own cryptid (the name for an animal studied by cryptozoologists). What is your creature's name? Where does it come from? When was it discovered? Who discovered it? What does it look like? Does it have any special powers? Is it a friendly or hostile creature? How many of its kind are alive today? Make sure you include drawings!

Science and Research/Critical Thinking

Key terms:

Hypothesis: a tentative explanation for an observation, phenomenon, or scientific problem that can be tested by further investigation.

—*Yahoo! Kids Dictionary*

Primary Source: a document, speech, or other sort of evidence written, created, or otherwise produced during the time under study. Primary sources offer an inside view of a particular event.

—www.knowledgecenter.unr.edu

Secondary Source: secondary sources provide interpretation and analysis of primary sources. Secondary sources are one step removed from the original event or “horse’s mouth.”

—www.knowledgecenter.unr.edu

Works Cited: a list of all the sources used in one’s research, both electronic and physical.



- 1) Now that you know the difference between a primary and secondary source, can you think of some examples of each? If someone were to use Abigail’s journal to do research of his or her own, what kind of source would it be?
- 2) Early on in her research Abigail learns about cryptozoology: “the study of unknown animals and the quest to prove they exist.” What more can you find out about cryptozoology? When was this term created? Who created it? Is cryptozoology considered a recognized field of science?
- 3) At the end of each section Abigail offers her own ideas as to what each beast could actually be. These suggestions are Abigail’s conclusions. Conclusions are an important part of any research project. Choose a beast from Abigail’s journal and review her research again. Then make a list of your own conclusions about that beast.
- 4) Choose another species that is studied in the field of cryptozoology. Using Abigail’s journal as a guide, prepare another entry about this new “beast.” Where has it been sighted? When was it first discovered? Who discovered it? What does it look like? Your research must contain the following:
 - a) At least four sources, two of which must be a book.
 - b) A works cited.
 - c) At least two images of the beast—one drawn by you, and one found in your research.
 - d) A conclusion in which you offer your own thoughts about the beast you researched.

Feel free to use the blank journal pages at the back of this Activity and Discussion Guide.

Meet the compilers

Stephanie Brockway and Ralph Masiello



Stephanie Brockway is a writer, illustrator, and designer. She grew up in Massena, New York, a small town on the Canadian border that often wins the distinction of being the coldest spot in the U.S. Although she's quite proud of her northern New York heritage, she has come to call New England home.

For the past fifteen years, Stephanie has worked as a magazine art director, a job that inspired her reverence for the marriage of beautifully crafted words and pictures.

The Mystic Phyles: Beasts is Stephanie's first book. It was born from her love of all things mystical and her need to find magic in the mundane.

Ralph Masiello, a graduate of Rhode Island School of Design (BFA, Illustration, 1985), has illustrated for magazines, newspapers, and books; created posters and prints; and shown his fine-art paintings in galleries throughout the world.

Beginning with *The Icky Bug Alphabet Book* in 1986, Ralph has become internationally known for the children's books he's written and illustrated. Since 1987, he has visited over 2,300 schools all over the world, inspiring children with his life story, humor, and art. While visiting schools, he is often inspired by the enthusiasm, creativity, and hard work of the students and teachers. This led him to create his unique drawing book series, beginning with *Ralph Masiello's Bug Drawing Book*.



Stephanie and Ralph currently live in central Massachusetts with their two daughters, Alexa and Talia, two sons, Ben and Sam, a very good dog named Mr. Bojangles, and lots and lots of books.

