

## Stories With Art: Make Your Own Bestiary

### What is a bestiary?

In the Middle Ages (about 500 – 1500 CE), animal stories were immensely popular throughout Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. The people of the time were, of course, dependent on wild and domestic animals for their survival, and so had an obvious interest in the animals around them. This led to the creation of a kind of encyclopedia of animals called a bestiary that brought many real and imaginary animals to life through physical descriptions, religious and other associations, as well as iconic illustrations.

Medieval bestiaries contained anywhere from a few dozen to more than a hundred descriptions of animals. Some descriptions focused on the animals' physical features while others highlighted their symbolic significance and magical characteristics. This was because the aim of the stories and illustrations was not to impart factual information or visual accuracy but rather to convey the fascinating variety and hidden meanings in nature.



*This is what a bestiary looks like. This particular page is from a very popular one called the Aberdeen Bestiary, stored in a university in Scotland.*

*Notice how the first letter has been given a decorative form! Also, do you see the gold colouring? That is not just gold-coloured paint – it's made of real gold!*

## Text and Image: Part One

Here is a story from an original bestiary:

*Ants are strong creatures, able to carry immense loads proportional to their size; they carry smaller loads with their mouths and push larger loads with their shoulders. They share their labor, have a system of government, and possess memory and diligence. They work constantly, even at night if there is a full moon; their travels form paths and wear down rocks.*

Can you complete the exercise below by taking hints from this story? Figure out the name of the specific creature the story is about, draw an illustration of it in the space given, list down it's physical attributes as well as it's personality traits.

*Name of the Species :*

Draw Here

*Physical Attributes:*

*Personality Traits:*

Here is a second story from another bestiary. Can you do the same exercise for this one?

*The plumage of the phoenix is partly red, partly golden, while the general make and size are almost exactly that of the eagle. It does not live on seeds and herbs, but on drops of incense, and the sap of the cardamom plant. When it has lived for five centuries, it then builds a nest for itself in the topmost branches of a swaying palm tree, using only its beak and talons. As soon as it has lined it with cassia bark, and smooth spikes of nard, cinnamon fragments and yellow myrrh, it settles on top, and ends its life among the perfumes. From the father's body, a young phoenix is reborn, destined to live the same number of years.*

*Name of the Species :*

Draw Here

*Physical Attributes:*

*Personality Traits:*

## Text and Image: Part Two

The images in bestiaries were as important as the stories, and could show things that were part of the story, but also more. So, let's try reading some images this time, and see what we can learn about an animal from them! Here are some animals from MAP's collection. Can you fill in the details, like the last time?

*Pro Tip: Move from observation to imagination! First look closely and carefully at the animal and its surroundings to learn all you can about it from the image, then try and think up what traits the animal might have.*

*Name of the Species :*



*Physical Attributes:*

*Personality Traits:*

*Name of the Species :*



*Physical Attributes:*

*Personality Traits:*

*If you liked doing this exercise, why don't you try creating your own bestiary by using all these animals or entirely new ones? You can use the template below to get you started.*



Don't forget to take photographs of your creations and DM it to us on Instagram @mapbangalore. You can also email them to us at [education@map-india.org](mailto:education@map-india.org)

