

'Big cat' country? New Zealand's obsession with giant feline sightings

Level: Advanced

Article summary: Is New Zealand's mysterious big cat fact or fiction? Why do we find sightings of mythical creatures so interesting?

Time: Up to 90 minutes

Skills: Reading, Speaking, Writing

Language focus: Vocabulary building

Materials needed: One copy of the worksheet per student

1. Warmer

To introduce the topic of well-known mythical creatures, ask the students to match the creatures with the place they are said to live. Find out how many of these creatures the students have heard of and whether they believe that any of them actually exist.

Show students online depictions or drawings of these creatures, or ask them to find them themselves. Ask students to describe the creatures.

Key:

1. c
2. d
3. b
4. a

2. Key words

- a. Students read the words in the box and match them to the definitions.

Key:

1. blob
2. stocky
3. aura
4. feral
5. cryptid
6. paranormal
7. frenzy
8. wholesome

9. poignant
10. uncannily
11. credible
12. absurd

- b. Before reading the article, ask students to use some of the key words to fill the gaps in the sentences to ensure that they understand them and know how the words are used in other contexts.

Key:

1. credible
2. poignant
3. uncannily
4. aura
5. absurd
6. blob
7. wholesome
8. feral

3. Comprehension check

Students should answer the questions using information from the article.

Key:

1. in the wilderness on New Zealand's South Island
2. It's been called a 'great, big, huge, black cat' and a 'monstrous cat, about the size of a puma', but also 'about knee-height' and 'very strong and quite stocky'. It's dark-coloured or black, and 'has an aura'.
3. It isn't eating farm animals. Investigators haven't found any droppings, footprints or hair that could belong to it. New Zealand has strict border controls.
4. a feral cat
5. He says that we shouldn't state that things don't exist just because we find them hard to believe.
6. She says there is a pleasure in not truly knowing. She sees it as a coded message from nature to humanity. She says that nothing unites a people like a long-running monster mystery, and in these difficult times, there is something almost wholesome about the idea of the big cat wandering around.

'Big cat' country? New Zealand's obsession with giant feline sightings

Level: Advanced

4. Using key language

- a. First ask students to find and underline the five phrases in the article.

Key:

1. *close to you; readily accessible*
2. *make radical changes to*
3. *having continued for a long time*
4. *sound false or not sincere*
5. *an example or instance of*

- b. Tell students to carefully read the sentences in which the phrases appear and notice how they are used. This should enable them to deduce what the phrases mean and share their ideas with a partner or the class. If they are unsure about any of the phrases or would like to confirm their answers, they can look up the meanings online.
- c. Then they should use the phrases to complete sentences that are not related to the article.

Key:

1. *shake up*
2. *ring hollow*
3. *at hand*
4. *a case of*
5. *long-running*

- d. Finally, tell the students to choose the three phrases that they would most like to be able to use well and to write a personalized sentence for each.

- b. Ask students to share their lists with other students, giving reasons and justifications for the inclusion of each of the items. Ask for feedback – which expedition did each group choose and why, and what did they include on their lists?
- c. As a creative writing project, ask students to write a fictional account of a sighting of the creature on their chosen expedition. This task can be completed for homework.

5. Discussion

Pair students or form small groups to discuss questions that are directly related to the topic of the article.

6. In your own words

- a. Get students to do this task in pairs or small groups to encourage speaking. Set a time limit of approximately 15 minutes for task a. Remind them that they must be able to carry or transport the items on their list and that there must be a good reason for the inclusion of each item.