

Lake legend

Every lake, it seems, has a story to tell of mysterious creatures living in its deep, dark waters. The well-known legend of the Loch Ness monster in Scotland, which dates back to the sixth century, is just one such example. Another is the Old English poem, *Beowulf*, in which the hero battles a terrible undersea monster. Similar tales are told by the Tonga people of Southern Africa of a snake-like creature which turns the water blood-red as it swims through Lake Kariba. And in New Zealand, even today, road projects are sometimes diverted away from lakes out of respect for the Taniwha, or sea-creatures, traditionally believed by the Maori people to dwell in their depths.

So, what are we to think when we hear about the giant turtle of Hoan Kiem Lake near Hanoi in Vietnam? The story goes that long ago, this turtle snatched a sword from the hands of a king and returned it to the gods who live beneath the waters. This heroic deed brought peace to the country and gave the lake its name – ‘The Returned Sword’. It is widely believed in the community that as long as the giant turtle lives in the lake, the people will be safe. You might be tempted to add the giant turtle to the Loch Ness Monster in the list of legendary creatures.

But you would be wrong. The legend lives. This beautiful Vietnamese lake conceals a remarkable treasure: a rare and endangered giant turtle, which weighs about 200 kg, with a shell measuring 1.8 m long and 1.2 m wide. As for its age, all we can say is that it has been there longer than anyone can remember. But if its history is as dark and mysterious as the lake itself, its future is even less certain. The increasing population has meant the turtle is no longer alone. Its watery world is now home to discarded objects that can pierce its skin and pollution to infect the resulting wounds.

Perhaps the local legend holds a deeper truth. For while such unique and vulnerable creatures are able to live among us, we are indeed safe; and should they sicken, it will be a warning for us all. Recently, thousands of Vietnamese volunteers have heeded this warning, clearing rubbish from the lake and supporting efforts to restore to health both their lake and its living legend.

1 Which paragraph of the text best matches the title below?

- 1 The truth about Hoan Kiem _____
- 2 The legend of Hoan Kiem _____
- 3 The future of Hoan Kiem _____
- 4 Lake legends from around the world _____

2 Decide if the sentences are true (T) or false (F). Circle the correct statements and correct those that are false.

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 1 <i>Beowulf</i> is a Scottish legend about a lake monster. | T / F |
| 2 Legends about lake creatures can affect transport plans in New Zealand. | T / F |
| 3 Hoan Kiem Lake gets its name from the legend of the turtle and the sword. | T / F |
| 4 The turtle has cultural importance for many local people. | T / F |
| 5 Both the weight and the age of the turtle are uncertain. | T / F |
| 6 The health of the turtle shows us how healthy the lake is. | T / F |
| 7 Local people feel unable to do anything to help the turtle. | T / F |

3 The words *this*, *such*, *it* and *its* are ways of referring to ideas expressed earlier in a text, which help the text to flow and avoids repetition. Find the words or phrases which the following examples refer back to:

- 1 one *such* example _____
- 2 as *it* swims through Lake Kariba _____
- 3 *This* heroic deed _____
- 4 *This* beautiful Vietnamese lake _____
- 5 But if *its* history ... _____
- 6 *such* unique and vulnerable creatures _____
- 7 have heeded *this* warning _____
- 8 *its* living legend _____

4 In the sentence *should they sicken, it will be a warning for us all*, *should* means 'if'. Match up the correct first and second halves of these sentences with the same grammar.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 Should the people fail to clean up the lake | a could you ask him to give me a call? |
| 2 Should the giant turtle die | b you must visit Hoan Kiem. |
| 3 Should you see Karim at the meeting | c the turtle could die. |
| 4 Should interest rates continue to rise | d the local people will feel a great loss. |
| 5 Should you ever find yourself in Hanoi | e imports will become more expensive. |

5 Which nouns go with the following verbs in the text?

- 1 battle _____
- 2 _____ are diverted
- 3 snatch _____
- 4 conceal _____
- 5 pierce _____
- 6 infect _____
- 7 heed _____
- 8 clear _____

6 Discuss these questions with your partner(s).

- Have you heard any legends of sea or lake creatures?
- Have you taken part in any project to clean up your local environment?
- Are there any creatures which are highly valued in your culture?

Glossary

- mysterious** (*adjective*) - strange and interesting
creature (*noun*) - anything that lives and moves (ie not a plant)
legend (*noun*) - an old story about incredible events
 dwell (*verb*) - live
 deed (*noun*) - action
 conceal (*verb*) - hide
 treasure (*noun*) - something of great value
 discard (*verb*) - throw away
 pierce (*verb*) - make a hole in something
 wound (*noun*) - deep and serious cut in someone's body
 vulnerable (*adjective*) - easily harmed
 sicken (*verb*) - become sick
 heed (*verb*) - pay attention to