



THE CRYPTID FILES: PACIFIC GIANTS **BY JEAN FLITCROFT**

ABOUT THE SERIES

This is the third book in a series about the adventures of Vanessa Day, a young girl with an interest in cryptozoology.

The first book in the Cryptid Files series explores the famous Loch Ness monster in Scotland. The second book is set in Mexico and delves into the mystery of a strange, blood-sucking creature called the Chupacabra – a well-known myth in the Latin American world.

Even though the books are all related, mostly through their heroine Vanessa Day, they can each be read as a standalone text, and it's not necessary to have read other books in the series to follow any of them.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Pacific Giants, the third book in the series, is an adventure story in which Vanessa finds herself on a remote island with Lee Cook, who is her father's girlfriend and a Greenpeace scientist who is visiting a research centre for humpback whales off the coast of Canada.

It should be a great trip, but Vanessa finds herself having to cope with Wayne, the annoying and manipulative son of the guesthouse owner, who seems to be deliberately trying to spoil her stay. But why? It's not until Vanessa stumbles into a dangerous world of illegal whale hunters that she begins to unravel what is going on.

Vanessa is a feisty and independent girl who is good at solving mysteries. When she's forced to jump from a moving boat to avoid being discovered by illegal whale hunters and comes face to face with another strange marine creature that the locals call a Cadborosaurus, her whole world is turned on its head. Vanessa has always had the ability to see and understand things that others don't, but this time she may have gone too far.

Although this is a fictional story, the book is infused with non-fictional elements. At the start of each chapter is a fact about the well-documented sightings of the strange creature called Cadborosaurus (or Caddy, by the locals) in British Columbia (Canada) over the last century as well as some of the research done by cryptozoologists.

The word 'cryptid' comes from the Greek *kryptos*, meaning hidden, and zoology refers to the study of animals. So a 'cryptozoologist' is someone who studies creatures (like the Loch Ness Monster and Cadborosaurus) whose existence has never been proved and so exist in a world between science and mythology.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jean Flitcroft is a scientist by training (she has a doctorate in physiology from Oxford University), a travel writer for the magazine *International Living* and the author of the Cryptid Files series. She lives near Dublin with her husband and sons.

TEACHERS' NOTES

This book, which is suitable for children in fourth, fifth or sixth class of primary school, can be used to engage children with various areas of the curriculum, especially environmental studies.

GEOGRAPHY

Pacific Giants is set in the Gulf Islands, off the west coast of Canada in the Pacific. Get the children to find these islands on a map and explore this part of British Columbia. It is a famous conservation area and is important for whale research centres.

SCIENCE: WHALES

Watch some of *Ocean Giants*, a 2011 British nature documentary series narrated by presenter and actor Stephen Fry. You can find clips on www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00jpvlp

Some extreme facts about whales

The BIGGEST animal ever to have lived on the earth is a blue whale – bigger than any of the dinosaurs – up to 110 feet long.

The LOUDEST animal is the blue whale – its call can reach up to 188 decibels.

The DEADLIEST is the killer whale or orca – each day it eats hundreds of pounds of fish and sea mammals, which they swallow whole rather than chew.

The DEEPEST DIVER is the sperm whale, which dives to 10,500 feet to hunt for giant squid.

Whale games

There are many free online games about whales. Try a few at http://www.learninggamesforkids.com/animal_and_nature_games/ocean-animal-games/whale-games

Myths about whales

Do some research with your class on the topics below. Are these statements myths, or fact?

- Whales are fish
- Whales can breathe underwater
- All whales are filter feeders
- Whales are protected by the world whaling commission

Evolution of whales

It has long been known that whales are mammals that moved to the sea about 50 million years ago. Fossils indicate that they evolved from land animals with hooves – perhaps some sort of seashore-dwelling animal like a hyena. These animals started to return to the sea bit by bit. At some point, their nostrils began moving from the front of the head to the top, becoming blowholes. Toothed whales evolved first, and the baleen or filter feeders evolved from them. They are the only mammals today, other than the manatee, that live their entire lives in the sea.

Politics of conservation

Get the children to find out about Greenpeace and the issues they are currently involved in.

The Greenpeace website has a fun game called Whaleflip. You can play it on <http://activism.greenpeace.org/whaleflip/>

Film

Older children (sixth class) could watch the film *Eco Pirate*, which tells the story of Paul Watson. He is a fugitive from the law in three continents because of his interference in illegal whaling and sharking practices.

Afterwards, discuss these questions

- Who is in the right?
- Is it right to use force?
- Greenpeace was started by the Quaker movement, so it believes in only observing and reporting rather than in active interference. Do you think this is a good approach?

SCIENCE: CRYPTOZOOLOGY

Watch the National Geographic series called *Cryptid Hunter* and discuss the idea that these creatures live in a space between fact and fiction. What do the children believe?

The cryptid in *Pacific Giants* is called *Cadborosaurus willsi*, or Caddy for short. There are short extracts in the book about some of the sightings of this creature reported in newspapers. You can find some of these online also.

Find out about the cryptozoologist Dr Paul LeBlond, a real Canadian scientist who has published a lot about this strange creature. (His book is mentioned in *Pacific Giants*.)

Most people think that all species of animals have been discovered already. But scientists believe that there may be as many as fifteen marine mammals that await discovery. What do the children think?

Suggestions for research projects

Find out as much as you can about the following creatures:

- The megamouth shark was only discovered in 1976. It's a rare deep-sea creature that is almost never seen. How did it stay hidden that long?
- The ginkgo-toothed beaked whale is known to exist, but scientists have only ever found a few stranded on a beach and have never examined one live. There is not sufficient data to say how they live, their expected lifespan or whether they are close to extinction.
- The coelacanth is a fish that was thought to be extinct for 65 million years – until 1938, when Marjorie Courtenay-Latimer spotted the first live specimen on the deck of a fishing boat, caught off the coast of East London, South Africa. The next time it was seen was in 1997, when a marine biologist was on a honeymoon and discovered the second live species in an Indonesian market. We now know that there are a few populations of this deep sea fish which have survived the last 65 million years without us knowing about it until recently.

HISTORY OF SCIENCE: IDEAS AND DISCOVERIES

Most scientific discovery started out as unbelievable ideas. In the days before the advent of flight, the Wright brothers had the faith that it could be done, even though it seemed impossible. Copernicus was ridiculed for claiming that the earth rotates around the sun.

Research task

Ask the children to find out about Copernicus or about the Wright brothers. Ask the children to concentrate especially on what people thought about them before they were proved right.

Belief versus evidence

This book is useful as a way into thinking about the nature of belief and how belief differs from scientific evidence. Discuss the fact that beliefs differ depending on where you are born and how you are raised and educated.

MYTHS AND LEGENDS

How many monsters?

You could ask your class to identify other monsters from books that they know. Pool your information and see how long a list you can make as a group.

Research and creative work

Ask the children if they can name (or find out about) a strange creature from Irish mythology. (In Irish stories, animals are often people in disguise, not unlike the naguals for the Nahuatl and shape-shifters in Native American Indian stories. You can find lots of Irish myths online, or check out a book such as *Spellbound* by Siobhán Parkinson and Olwyn Whelan (which has some great pictures of strange animals).

Ask the children to write a paragraph about their chosen creature, or to make a picture of the beast. The children could also make their own story featuring the creature.

ANTHROPOLOGY: SHRUNKEN HEADS

When you read the book you will discover that Vanessa always travels with a shrunken head. This was something that belonged to her grandfather, Todd, which she found in the attic along with her mother's cryptid files. She calls the shrunken head Toddy and as the book series progresses, Toddy is seen to have an increasingly important role in guiding Vanessa.

Have you ever seen a real shrunken head in Ripley's Museum? Find out all you can about the Jivaro – the tribe in the jungles of Ecuador who were head-shrinkers, how they did it and what their beliefs were. It was not only for tribal trophy reasons, but also because they believed they were trapping the spirit in the head (mainly so that the enemy cannot take revenge). As Toddy's spirit is trapped, discuss the idea of it becoming more and more alive and starting to influence the physical reality of Vanessa's world. Research other examples of where belief in a spiritual world guides our own lives.

MAGIC

Vanessa, the heroine of this book, has a kind of sixth sense. She tends to ‘see’ things that may not really be there – or are they? Ask the children to find two or three examples of this in the story, e.g where she sees the ghost of a dead fisherman but doesn’t know it straight away, or her sightings of the cadborosaurus.

Class discussion and creativity

Do the children know any stories from their own locality about people who can ‘see’ things – people who can tell fortunes or see ghosts or whose dreams come true?

Discuss with the class whether or not these stories could be true or partly true. How do we know what is real and what is imaginary anyway?

The children could write a short story about a person who has this kind of psychic gift. The story could explore the idea whether they *really* see things or whether they have an overactive imagination.

HUMAN GEOGRAPHY: FIRST NATIONS

One of the main characters in this story is a scientist called Professor Jack Noire. He is a Native Indian or a member of the First Nations, as they are now called in Canada. The following topics can be researched by your class:

- What can you find out about First Nations culture? How they were colonised by Europeans?
- When you read the book, discuss what you think of Vanessa’s opinion about this history. What do you think of Mr Fox’s views?
- Find out about the myths and legends of Canadian First Nations. Can you find one that has to do with sea-serpents? Could this have something to do the modern day stories of Cadborosaurus?
- Use the website <http://www.apples4theteacher.com/native-american/games> to find out about the games that children of First Nations have traditionally played and what they still play.
- Make up a board game or a new sport that you would have if your class was a tribe.

WRITING

Prologue – questions for the class

Discuss the use of the prologue in this book. Why do you think the author put this piece from later in the story in at the beginning?

Does it affect you as a reader?

Does it make you want to read more?

Which other short extract from the book do you think would work well as a prologue?

In this book the prologue is really an extract taken from later in the book and used as a kind of introduction. Have you ever read a book with a different kind of prologue? Can you describe it? Can you think of another way of using a prologue?

Class discussion: how does fiction work?

Discuss the difference between fact and fiction.

How do you know if a book is factual or is ‘just a story’? What kind of hints do you get from the cover, for example?

If you know a book is fiction (a made-up story), do you read it in a different frame of mind from when you read a book you know is full of facts (like a school book or an encyclopedia)?

Writing task

Suppose you wanted to write a story about some mythical person or beast or place. How can you make your readers ‘believe’ it, even though it is just a story?

Try writing a paragraph about a non-existent place or person, describing it as if it really existed. Could you use this paragraph in a story? If so, how would you use it? If not, why do you think it wouldn’t work in a story? Is there anything you could do to change it so that it was believable?

Now try to build that paragraph into a whole story. You could do this as a group with some of your classmates. Talk about it first and work the story out, then get one person to write it down. (If you can do it on a computer, that’s best, because then you can make changes very easily.) Then read it back and see how you can improve it. (This is how real writers work. They write, they read, they rewrite, they get it right!)