

The Legend of the Phoenix

Have you ever heard the expression, “like a phoenix rising from the ashes”? What do you think it means? And where do you think it comes from? Maybe you’ve met phoenixes in books. Fawkes is pretty famous. But are phoenixes real?

No, sadly Phoenixes aren’t real. They are mythical birds that appear in the legends of ancient Greece, Egypt, Persia, Rome, and China. They are described a little bit differently in each mythology. Often they are said to be very colorful with red and gold tails. In all of the stories, they have a supernatural power that lets them come back to life. Because of this power, they are symbols of immortality and rebirth.

In Greek mythology, each phoenix lives for 500 years. When the phoenix is about die, it collects twigs and cinnamon to make a nest. The morning sun sets the nest, and the phoenix, on fire. The phoenix does not try to escape. It is turned into ash.

A worm crawls out of the ash of the phoenix and changes like a butterfly into a new phoenix. The new phoenix carries the ashes of its parent to the temple of the sun. The bird then lives for another 500 years before burning again.



This story explains where we get the phrase “like a phoenix rising from the ashes.” We use this expression to refer to someone who has a difficult time and then comes back to be successful. It’s too bad that phoenixes don’t exist in real life, but it’s cool to think that you could be a phoenix if you don’t give up.



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NAME: _____ DATE: _____

1. Which of the following mythologies does the author NOT mention?
 - a. Egyptian
 - b. Roman
 - c. Persian
 - d. Norse

2. What is common to all phoenix stories?
 - a. They are red and gold
 - b. They can come back to life
 - c. They are worms
 - d. They live in the temple of the sun

3. Why do you think phoenix's are often described as having red and gold tails?
 - a. Because red and gold are pretty colors
 - b. Because red and gold were common colors in mythology
 - c. Because red and gold are associated with fire
 - d. Because red and gold symbolize wealth

4. What does the author mean by the last line, "you could be a phoenix if you don't give up"?
 - a. If you keep trying you will succeed
 - b. If you keep looking you might find a phoenix
 - c. If you hatch a butterfly it might turn into a phoenix
 - d. If you wear red and gold you will live forever

Instructions for teachers:

These questions can be used to assess understanding of the reading passage.

The item in bold is the correct answer for each question.

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