

Stranger than fiction

WORKSHEET 1

Work in pairs or small groups. Discuss the possible reasons for these mysterious happenings and then compare your ideas with the Commentary on Worksheet 2.

Red Rain

1. On December 28th, 1860, residents of Siena, Italy watched as red rain fell for two hours in the north-western part of the city.
2. On August 1st, 1869, a three-minute shower of flesh and blood fell from the sky covering several hectares of land on the farm of J. Hudson in Los Nietos Township, California, U.S.A.
3. On May 15th, 1890, red rain poured down on the town of Messignadi, Calabria, Italy. The Italian Meteorological Bureau identified the rain as blood.

Gambian Sea Monster

On June 12th, 1983, wildlife enthusiast Owen Burnham discovered the dead body of a sea creature on Bungalow Beach, Gambia. It measured 4.8 metres, was black on top and pale underneath, had a long pair of jaws containing 80 teeth, had a pair of nostrils at the end of the upper jaw and had two pairs of flippers.

Giant in the Sky

On July 6th, 1995, the *Denver Post* published a photograph of what appeared to be a giant jellyfish dancing above the clouds of Colorado. The photograph had been taken by a pilot flying above the black clouds just two days earlier.

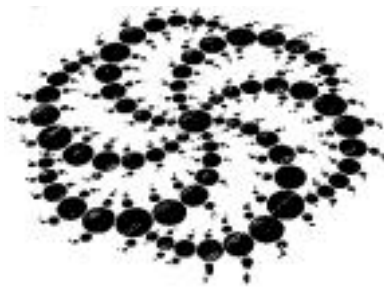
Monkey Business

In 1967, a man named Patterson was out walking with his cine-camera in the hills of Burbank, California, U.S.A., when he spotted a creature which looked like a cross between a man and a gorilla. As the creature walked away from him, he filmed it. Experts say this proves the existence of the legendary North American creature *Bigfoot*.

Butterfly Return

On March 25th, 1995, the *Yorkshire Post* reported that two varieties of butterfly, The Large Copper and The Chequered Skipper, have returned after 75 years of extinction.

Mystery Circles



On August 13th, 2001, an awe-inspiring formation of circles was discovered on top of Milk Hill, Wiltshire, U.K. With a diameter of nearly 460 metres and containing over 400 circles, this is truly the most extraordinary crop circle ever seen.

Commentary

Match a comment below with each of the eight stories on Worksheet 1.

- a. Although many people have insisted this was an authentic sighting, it is widely believed to have been a hoax. The man rumoured to be behind the hoax is Hollywood special effects make-up artist John Chambers. Chambers has never admitted to being responsible for the hoax, but he is known to have been working on the film *Planet of the Apes* at the time and could have used one of the costumes he was working on.
- b. When analysed, it was found to be bird blood. The authorities claimed at the time that it was due to a large group of migrating birds having been torn apart in a terrible storm. However, there was no evidence of a storm having occurred at the time and no bird, or even part of a bird, seen to have fallen – only blood.
- c. Scientists have taken DNA samples from dead examples of the insects which were mounted in museums. They have matched the DNA from the dead insects with the DNA of a similar variety still in existence and now we can see these insects gracing our countryside again after such a long absence.
- d. Deposits were analysed and found to contain red sand and dust most probably carried from the Sahara, and deposited in rain.
- e. As whales and dolphins have dorsal blowholes rather than nostrils and only a front pair of flippers (the back pair were lost during evolution), it could not have been any modern-day creature. Only two types of animal fit the description of this particular body; the *pliosaur* and the *thallatosuchian* (sea crocodile). However, both of these officially died out more than 60 million years ago.
- f. Although they are generally accepted as being made by humans, there are many people who say this particular feat was beyond human ability. The average time available to make one of these formations (in secret under the cover of darkness) is four hours. Bearing in mind the complexity and number of individual patterns in this case, a human would have had 30 seconds to create each circle. Impossible, perhaps, if we consider that some of the circles measured more than 21 metres in diameter.
- g. It was actually a sprite. A sprite is a gigantic lightning bolt that is positively charged. Most lightning bolts (95%), on the other hand, are negatively charged. Sprites occur above thunderstorms and have been spotted above North American mountain ranges.
- h. The conventional explanation was that messy buzzards flying overhead dropped most of their meal over the farmland.