The Welsh dragons: compare two tellings

Read two short adaptations. Look for shared details and changes in the names and hiding places.

These are short adaptations of two written accounts, not quotations. They focus on the discovery of the dragons.

A · Historia Brittonum

King Vortigern could not make his building stand. A boy revealed a pool beneath the ground. Inside it were two vessels containing a folded tent. When the tent was opened, two sleeping creatures appeared, one red and one white. The boy explained that they were dragons. When asked his name, he called himself Ambrose.

B · Geoffrey’s history

Vortigern’s building would not stand. Merlin, who was also called Ambrose, told the king that a pond lay beneath its foundations. When the water was drained, two hollow stones were found, with sleeping dragons inside them. The dragons came out, one red and one white. The king asked Merlin to explain them.

1. What is the boy called in A? Which names are used in B?

2. Where are the sleeping dragons hidden in each account?

3. Find two details shared by both accounts.

4. Do two written stories prove that dragons existed? Explain.

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1. The names

A calls the boy Ambrose, often given as Ambrosius in discussions of the Latin text. B calls him Merlin and explicitly says he is also called Ambrose. Avoid teaching a simple contrast in which Geoffrey never uses the earlier name.

2. The hiding places

A: a folded tent inside two vessels in a pool. B: two hollow stones beneath a pond. “Vases” is the word in Fordham’s translation; “vessels” is used in the adaptation.

3. Shared details

Accept any two supported details: Vortigern; an unstable building; a boy who explains the mystery; hidden water; two sleeping dragons; one red and one white. Learners can underline the evidence in each passage.

4. Stories and evidence

No. These texts show that the dragon story was written and retold. Repetition is not independent proof of a real creature. Geoffrey develops an earlier narrative tradition. The accounts can still tell us about storytelling and the meanings given to dragons.

Sources and scope

A adapts Historia Brittonum, traditionally attributed to Nennius, sections 40-42, using Fordham’s English text. B adapts Geoffrey of Monmouth’s History of the Kings of Britain, Book VI, chapter 19, and the opening of Book VII, chapter 3, as printed in Six Old English Chronicles. These original simplified passages omit the threat to kill the boy, the combat and the political prophecies.

Extend the comparison

Ask learners to choose one changed detail and explain how it changes their mental picture. Then use our Welsh dragons colouring sheet. Colours belong to the accounts; the precise shapes of a dragon’s wings, scales and horns are artistic choices.

Read Historia Brittonum · Read Geoffrey, Book VI · Book VII

Suggested for ages 9+, with reading support. Keep the comparison focused on what each passage actually says.