



## Selkies, Underwater Worlds and Irish Ocean Mythology

### Global Citizenship Marine Environment Lesson Plan

#### Introduction

This lesson is divided into three parts. The first part outlines what mythology is. The second part describes selkies and the third talks about mythological islands and underwater worlds. There are lots of interesting legends and ancient tales about our oceans. These can capture children's attention, creating curiosity about our marine environments.

**Curriculum Links:** Social, environmental and scientific education

**Learning Methodology:** Art, visual media, discussions, idea-storming

**Preparation:** Print wordsearch in Appendix 2

**Materials:** Prepared activity sheets, colouring utensils, glue/tape, scissors, clean colourful recyclables

**Time:** 1.5 hours

**Learning Objective:** To understand what mythology is and to become familiar with some Irish mythological tales

**Target Age:** 3rd-6th Class

#### Warm Up Activity: Captains Coming

This is a great energizer activity to get the students moving and to help children practice listening carefully to instructions. The teacher takes on the role of the caller, and will call out the actions that the sailors (i.e. the students). Once the caller calls an action, each player has to start performing the action as quick as possible.

1. At the start of the activity, explain to the group that you are all on a ship and that there are certain instructions which everyone will need to learn before you can head out to sea.
2. Show your students the boundary area that makes up the ship. You can mark this out with chalk/tape or just use the whole classroom/P.E. Hall.
3. Demonstrate each of the actions below and point out the areas of the ship (the stern, the bow, etc.).
4. When the caller calls an action, each player has to quickly start performing the action (e.g. within 3-4 seconds). If they don't perform the right action in time, they are out of the game. When there is one player left, the game is over.

**Actions to be called out by teacher:**

Bow – Go to the front of the “ship”

Stern – Go to the back of the “ship”

Port – Go to the left side of the “ship”

Starboard – Go to the right side of the “ship”

Rowboat – Sit on the ground and “row”

Seasick – Head to the side of the “ship” and do your duty overboard

Captain’s Coming – Stand at attention, saluting, in a ‘freeze’

At Ease – Relax (this is only said when players are at attention because “Captain’s Coming” has been said)

## Part 1- What is Mythology

Mythology is the study and understanding of ancient stories from cultures all over the world. They are stories about how the world was created and why certain things happen. Today the word myth is often used to describe something that is not true. But a myth is not just a made-up story. Myths tell of gods, heroes, and events that a group believes, or at one time believed, to be real. They are epic stories passed down from generation to generation. A culture’s myths are often closely tied to its religion.

Some of the most famous mythology comes from Greece. Created thousands of years ago, Greek myths often included Greek gods, heroic battles and terrible creatures. These stories taught the importance of bravery, intelligence, and right and wrong. Details of the ancient tales have been found on everything from pottery to temples to stone statues!

Irish Mythology is full of amazing tales. You may have heard of some, and if you havnt, your parents definitely have. There is the Salmon of Knowledge, the mighty warrior Cuchulainn or the giant Finn McCool who made the Giant’s Causeway. These ancient stories were passed down by word of mouth through our ancestors, eventually being written down so that we can enjoy them today.

**Activity:**

- Read the story of The Salmon of Knowledge to the class, <https://www.librariesireland.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/2018-10/The-Salmon-of-Knowledge-eng-sen.pdf>
- or watch it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQ1Yjekv6Cg&t=187s>

**Discussion points:**

- Ask students to retell the story in their own words. Each child can give one sentence.
- Ask students what question they would ask Fionn if they met him?
- Ask students if they know anything about Salmon. Salmon is a fish found in Irish rivers and seas. Each fish is born in a little stream, it then travels out to sea, and when it is ready to reproduce, it returns back to the same place it was born!

## Part 2- The Selkie

A Selkie is an Irish marine legend- a being that is half fish or seal, and half human. Selkie is an Irish and Scottish name, but these creatures have been known around the world as mermaids, seal people or sea people. The legend is that Selkies are like seals when in water, but on land, they shed their tail and take on human form. What's more is that the Selkie is irresistible to regular people, with many falling in love with them. The legend is that if you take a Selkies tail away from them when they are on land (as they shed it when on land), they cannot return to the sea. Without their fish tail, the Selkie will have no choice to stay on land, and marry the person that has their tail.

**Art Activity: Selkie Tail**

1. Print the outline of the selkie tail for each student in the class on card (see Appendix One). Alternatively, ask student to draw an outline of a Selkie tail on an A4 piece of card.
2. Provide the class with scissors, glue and clean waste from the recycling bin (e.g. sweet wrappers, foil wrappers, small plastics like straws/lids, crisp packets etc.)
3. Ask the students to cut out their Selkie tail.
4. Create a colorful mosaic to fill the Selkies tail by sticking small pieces of litter onto the card.

**Additional Activities:**

- Read the story of Thady Rua O'Dowd and the Mermaid Rocks of Enniscrone, Sligo.
- Complete the Selkie Wordsearch (See Appendix Two)

## Part 3- Underwater Worlds

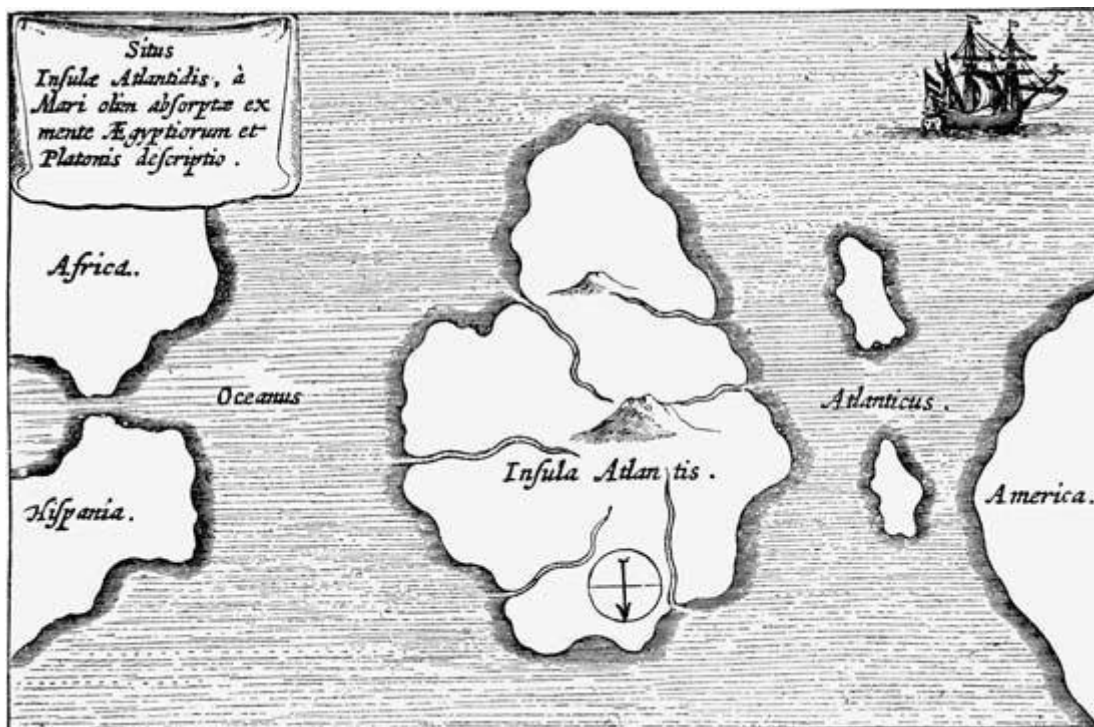
**Hy-brasil**

Hy-Brasil was an island that was often shown on maps as a very small island west of Ireland. According to Irish folklore this island was visible from the west coast of Ireland for only one day every seven years. The rest of the time it was impossible to see due to fog. It was known as a strange

island, that floated in the sea and disappeared when people came close to it. Another unusual feature of the island was that it was perfectly circular in shape. The island had many names including Breasal, Brazil, The Enchanted Island and The Isle of the Blessed. The island appeared on maps until about 1873, and it is still unknown if the island ever actually existed!

## Atlantis

Atlantis is a legendary island believed to have existed in the Atlantic Ocean. It was a beautiful city that apparently disappeared overnight! The Greek Philosopher Plato was the first person to mention the island, about 2,500 years ago. Plato said the ancient Egyptians passed down information on Atlantis and described it as an island the size of Turkey and Libya combined, and near the gate of Hercules (which is believed to mean the Strait of Gibraltar at the south of Spain). Because of its name, many believed the island was in the Atlantic Ocean.



Atlantis was a rich island whose powerful princes conquered many of the lands of the Mediterranean. However, they were eventually defeated and the people of Atlantis grew wicked and disrespectful. Soon after a series of earthquakes struck, and huge tsunami waves caused the island to fall into the sea.

It is quite likely that Atlantis did exist at some time. Many other "lost" cities (Like Pompeii) have been rediscovered. Earthquakes, volcanoes and tsunamis can have great destructive power and can wipe out a whole city in a matter of minutes.

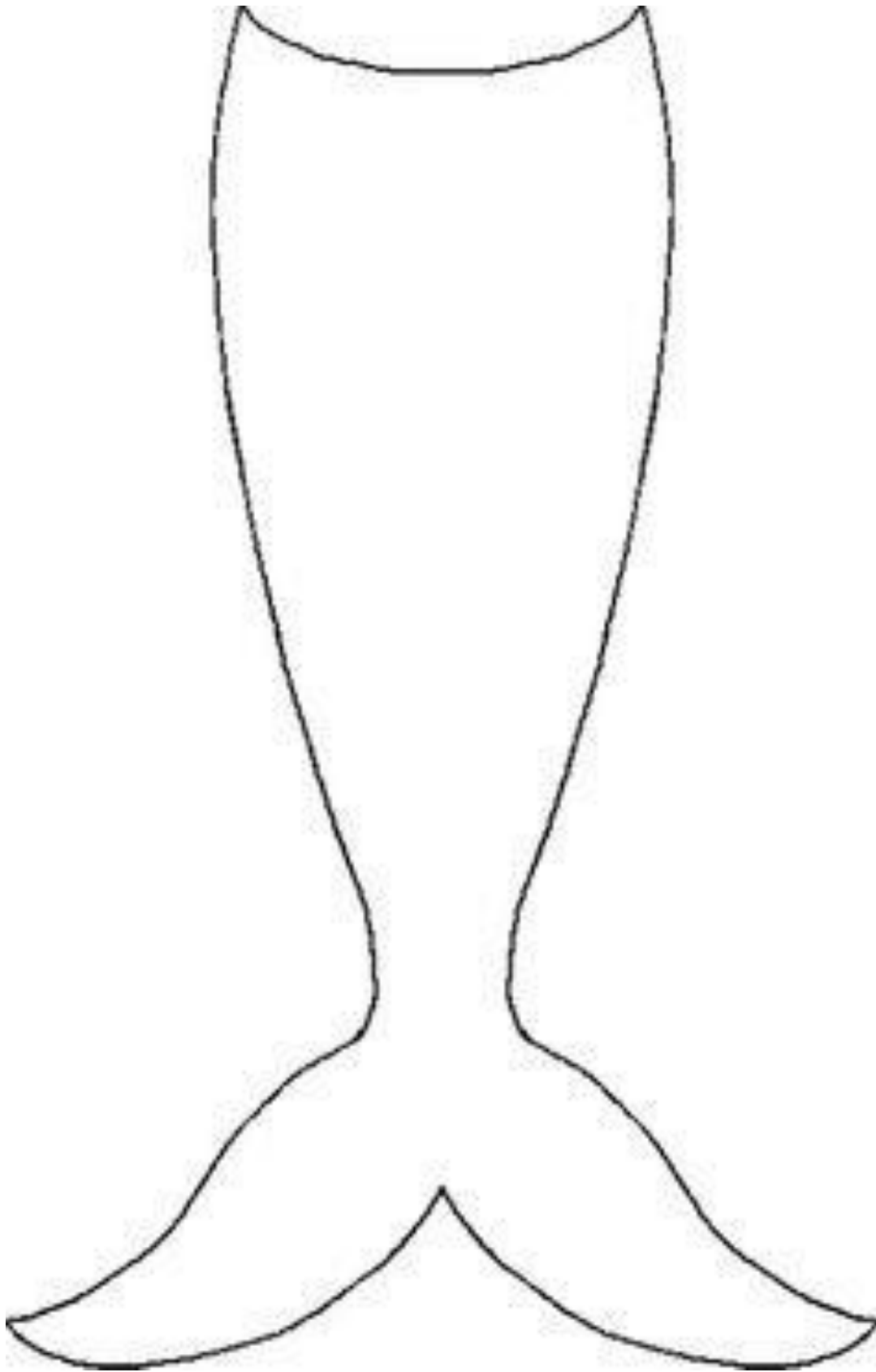
People are still searching for Atlantis. In 2011, a team of scientists found evidence of a lost city found under mud flats in Andalusia, at the South of Spain. They were working off another study from just four years earlier and believed this was evidence of Atlantis.

The story of Atlantis is one that captures the imagination and is still popular to this day. Atlantis even features in the Marvel Comic and Film Universe where blue-skinned, water-breathing people from the original Atlantis island now live in the sunken underwater ruins of Atlantis. Namor and his Atlantean people featured in the 2022 film *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*.

**Activity:**

Ask the students to draw a picture of what they think Hy-Brasil or Atlantis may have looked like. Using their imagination, students might include drawings of the island, coastline, temples, palaces, waterways, trees and animals. Ask student to share their drawing and a brief description with the class at the end of the activity.

## Appendix 1



## Appendix 2



Find the following words in the puzzle.

Words are hidden → ↓ and ↘ .

MYTHOLOGY

MERMAID

SELKIE

SCALES

LEGEND

OCEAN

BEACH

WATER

HUMAN

SEAL

FISH

TAIL

ROCK

SEA