

# Black Dog Mythology

Black dogs have appeared in myths and legends for hundreds of years. However, their meaning and significance has not always been clear. Whether a positive or negative symbol, the black dog can be found in different cultures and communities across the world.

On the Suffolk Coast, there is a well-known legend of a black dog, named Black Shuck, who roams the countryside. This name could perhaps have come from an old English word 'succa' meaning 'devil'. Black Shuck is said to be large in size, dark in colour and has 'malevolent flaming eyes the size of saucers' ([www.thesuffolkcoast.co.uk](http://www.thesuffolkcoast.co.uk), n.d.). The stories of this beast have been told since the initial reported sighting in 1577, when the creature allegedly burst into a church in Bungay one evening and killed two people. Scorch marks on the door of the church can be seen to this day and are referred to as 'devil's fingerprints' by the locals, providing evidence of the attack for those who believe in the legend.

On the Isle of Mann, a local legend has been shared for years about a black dog who haunted Peel Castle. The dog, named either Moddey Dhoo or Mauthe Dog, was said to be a black spaniel with curly hair who wandered the castle – specifically along a passage near the entrance. Each night, as the candles were lit, the dog would appear and

curl up near a fire and then by morning, it would be gone. The soldiers gradually got used to the dog's presence but would still ensure that they locked up the castle in pairs each night, just in case. However, one night, a soldier who had drunk too much chose to lock up the castle alone. Strange sounds were heard from the passage and the soldier emerged later on, unharmed but filled with terror. He did not speak of what happened... but then, three days later, he died. The dog was not seen again.

In Somerset, in contrast to the previous tales, a more positive story of a black dog is shared. It is said that the Gurt Dog is a protector and that children would be allowed to play in the Quantock Hills because the dog would keep them safe.

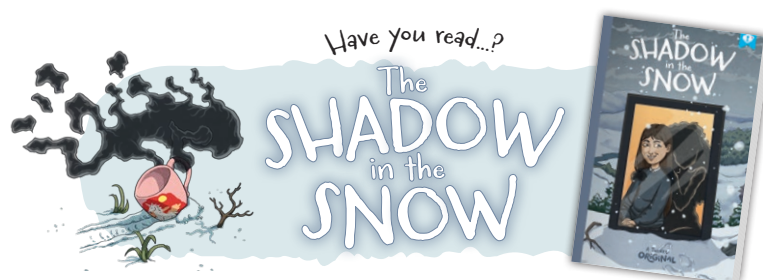
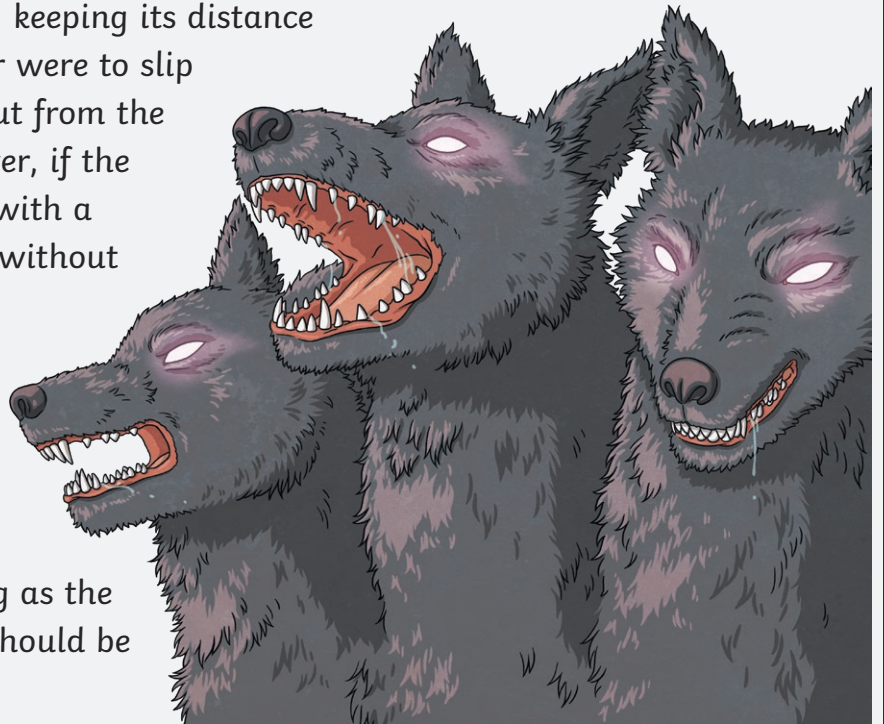


[www.thesuffolkcoast.co.uk](http://www.thesuffolkcoast.co.uk). (n.d.). The Legend of the Bungay Black Dog. [online] Available at: <https://www.thesuffolkcoast.co.uk/articles/the-legend-of-the-bungay-black-dog>.

In folklore in the UK, the term 'barghest' has often been used to describe a mysterious, black dog, with many towns having their own version of the legend. In each tale, the creature seems to have the following similarities: a dark colour, a large size, blazing eyes and a habit of bringing about bad luck to any who encounter it. Some of these legends passed down in England

are Padfoot of Wakefield, the Barghest of Burnley and the Demon of Tidworth. These stories are so ingrained in local culture that many films, books and television series have taken inspiration from them, most notably 'The Hound of the Baskervilles' by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, although the true source is disputed.

Outside the UK, another dog can be found in Greek mythology, in the form of Cerberus, a three-headed beast from the underworld. This beast would guard the kingdom of Hades and eat anyone who would try to escape. In Japanese mythology, stories of Okuri Inu are told – another dog-like figure whose ghostly image only comes out at night. It is said to follow lone walkers along roads, keeping its distance but always watching. If the walker were to slip up, then Okuri Inu would spring out from the darkness and capture them. However, if the walker continues on their journey with a sure footing and makes it through without any issues, they should thank the beast for granting them safe passage and then they will no longer be followed in the future. When the Okuri Inu does follow a traveller, it is said to ward off any other dangerous beasts – so as long as the traveller does not fall down, they should be able to survive until morning!



# Questions

1. Draw four lines to match the creature to its description.

|             |                                      |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|
| Black Shuck | follows walkers along roads at night |
| Gurt Dog    | has three heads                      |
| Okuri Inu   | killed two people                    |
| Cerberus    | protects children in the hills       |

2. In what year was Black Shuck allegedly spotted in a church in Bungay?

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3. Describe the incident that happened in Peel Castle.

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4. Find and copy one word from the Black Shuck legend that means 'first'.

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5. What does the term 'barghest' mean?

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6. Underline the word in the quotation below that means the same as 'around for a long time and believed in deeply'.

*These stories are so ingrained in local culture that many films, books and television series have taken inspiration from them.*

7. What is it said that the Okuri Inu would do when it spotted a traveller walking along a road alone at night?

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8. Which of the stories and legends shared in the text above is most convincing, in your opinion? Explain your choice.

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9. Do you think black dogs are generally a positive or negative symbol? Give reasons for your answer.

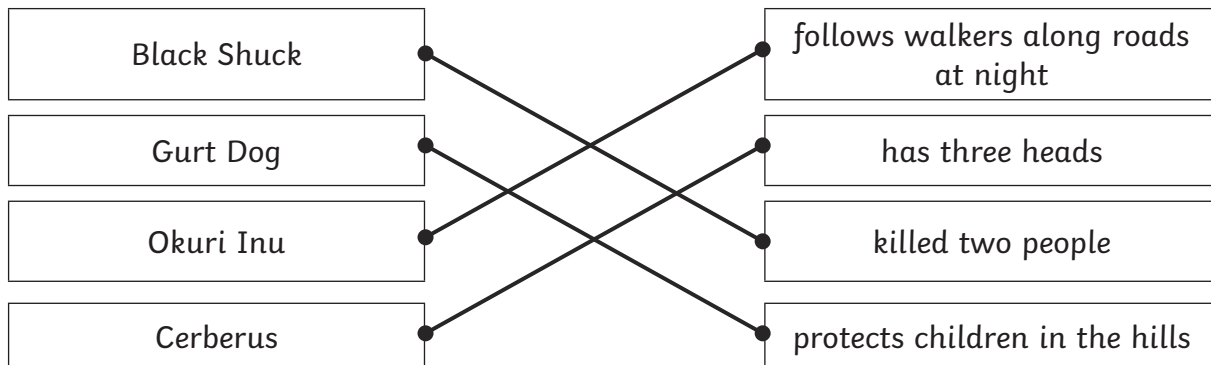
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# Answers

1. Draw four lines to match the creature to its description.



2. In what year was Black Shuck allegedly spotted in a church in Bungay?

**1577**

3. Describe the incident that happened in Peel Castle.

**A dog was said to haunt a passageway in the castle, appearing only at night and lying by a fire. The soldiers would lock up the castle in pairs to ensure they kept safe. One night, a drunken soldier decided to lock up the castle alone. In the passageway, strange noises were heard and although he eventually emerged unharmed, the soldier then died three days later.**

4. Find and copy one word from the Black Shuck legend that means 'first'.

**initial**

5. What does the term 'barghest' mean?

**It can be used to describe a mysterious, black dog.**

6. Underline the word in the quotation below that means the same as 'around for a long time and believed in deeply'.

*These stories are so ingrained in local culture that many films, books and television series have taken inspiration from them.*

7. What is it said that the Okuri Inu would do when it spotted a traveller walking along a road alone at night?

**The Okuri Inu would follow a traveller walking alone, keeping its distance but always watching. It would only attack if the walker it was following slipped over. If the walker did not slip over, it would not attack. If the walker thanked the creature for a safe journey, then the Okuri Inu would not follow them in the future.**

8. Which of the stories and legends shared in the text above is most convincing, in your opinion? Explain your choice.

**Children's responses may vary, e.g. 'The legend of Black Shuck is the most convincing because there are still marks on the church door that can be seen today.' Or 'The story about Cerberus is the most convincing because I have heard of it before.'**

9. Do you think black dogs are generally a positive or negative symbol? Give reasons for your answer.

**Children's responses may vary, e.g. 'I think black dogs are a positive symbol because both the Gurt Dog and the Okuri Inu would protect you in some circumstances.' Or 'I think black dogs are a negative symbol because many of the legends suggest that something bad would happen to you if you saw one of the black dogs.'**