

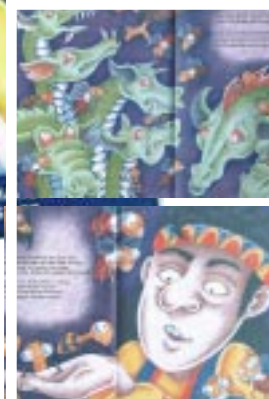
## TEACHER'S RESOURCE BOX

# La-On and the Seven-Headed Dragon

*La-on and the Seven-Headed Dragon* is an adaptation of a myth that explains the origin of the volcano Mount Kanlaon. This interdisciplinary teacher's guide will help you discuss the scientific origins of volcanoes, while at the same time tackling the role of folk tales in building a national identity. **BY CHRISTINE LAO**



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**A**re myths, legends and folk tales such as *La-on and the Seven-Headed Dragon* nothing more than light entertainment? Although some people may think that such stories don't have much use in today's world, they in fact serve an important role: they help us understand ourselves and our culture.

## What are myths?

A myth is a story that may not be factual, but reveals truths and insights about human nature. Even if the myth is untrue, it holds meaning for the people who tell, hear and delight in it. Most myths are stories based on oral tradition (stories that are told from generation to generation), and are created to explain things for which there is no simple explanation—the origin of things, natural phenomena, and cultural practices.

Hundreds, even thousands of years ago, myths and folk tales were created to answer cultural needs. For example, some myths explain why a tribe of people occupy a certain land—thus providing the tribe with the authority to peacefully live in the area or perhaps to claim a river or a lake as their own. Myths can also represent the beliefs of a people. This is why mythology plays a large part in many religions, such as Greek and Norse mythology, which tells the story of the lives and loves of gods and goddesses.

## How myths build a nation

When a society makes up and passes on its myths to its children, it defines and passes on its values to future generations. For example, the tale of *La-on* emphasizes the value of self-sacrifice. Both *La-on* and the women who were sacrificed to the dragon gave up their personal safety and lives for the benefit of their community.

Myths tell children that there is more to the world than their individual lives. They are part of a community with shared values. They are part of a world filled with things and experiences that human beings cannot fully understand. Myths make children respect the world and creation better. In other words, myths integrate individuals with society and define their place under the sun.

## Malakas and Maganda

Myths play a role different from that performed by science or history. They don't give explanations about the real origins of things. They are not an accurate record of past events. Instead, myths offer insights into a deeper reality. They invite us to see the true relations that exist between people within a certain culture.

An ancient Filipino creation myth, for example, tells the story of how the first man and woman (*Malakas* and

*Maganda*) lay inside a single bamboo. Each occupied half of the bamboo. This tells us that, as far as the early Filipinos were concerned, both male and female were created equal, and therefore occupied equal positions in society. By offering explanations for why things are the way they are, myths like this story tell us how we view the world and who we think we are.

## A common identity

Many sociologists believe that the first step towards national development is a common identity. We first need to see ourselves as one—as Filipino. Ancient myths, legends and folk tales help us to understand who we are, what we believe in, and where we came from as a people, and should continue to be passed on to future generations.

### DID YOU KNOW?

The word "volcano" actually comes from Roman mythology! There is a little island called Vulcano in the Mediterranean Sea, off Sicily, Italy. Centuries ago, the people living in this area believed that Vulcano was the chimney of Vulcan, the blacksmith of the Roman gods. They thought that the hot lava fragments and clouds of dust erupting from Vulcano came from Vulcan's forge as he beat out thunderbolts for Jupiter, king of the gods, and weapons for Mars, the god of war.  
(from [www.crystalinks.com/volcanomyth.html](http://www.crystalinks.com/volcanomyth.html))

### In the classroom:

Here are some questions that can help your discussion about La-on the Seven-Headed Dragon:

1. Can you identify some beliefs and values in the story that are important to you? To the Filipino community?

2. Read aloud “Kang Laun, the Volcano at the Heart of Negros Island” by Regina B. Quiambao (from [www.fineartforum.org/Gallery/2001/geocentricity/myths2.html](http://www.fineartforum.org/Gallery/2001/geocentricity/myths2.html)), another story that retells a different myth about the same volcano, Mount Kanlaon. How different is this story from the story of La-on?

3. Why do you think our ancestors created and then passed on myths, legends and folktales to their children and grandchildren? Was it just to entertain each other?

4. Why do we no longer gather around to listen to a storyteller entertain us with folk tales? What things have replaced myths, folk tales and legends in entertaining us and helping us understand our values and beliefs? How do you feel about this change?

### Kang Laun, the Volcano at the Heart of Negros Island by Regina B. Quiambao

(from [www.fineartforum.org/Gallery/2001/geocentricity/myths2.html](http://www.fineartforum.org/Gallery/2001/geocentricity/myths2.html))

The volcano in Negros Island is “Kang Laun,” which means “it belongs to the Ancient One.” At the peak of Mt. Kanlaon, there lived Magkupo, a huge serpent with a rooster’s crown and a rooster’s powerful crow, who stayed under the Kamandag tree near the crater of the volcano. Magkupo had fins on its sides. It did not crawl on the ground like other snakes but would move from tree to tree by coiling its long body around trunks and branches. Thus it was called Magkupo, which in Visayan means “to embrace.” The Atis living near the volcano claimed they could hear the serpent Magkupo roaring at times. They believe that this explains the rumbling sound the volcano creates when it is near eruption.

ILLUSTRATION BY: RICUS AFABLE

## Useful facts about volcanoes

### How are volcanoes formed?

A volcano is formed when melted rock from within the earth called magma blasts through the earth’s surface.

Magma is formed when rocks inside the earth are melted by the great heat of the earth’s interior. Scientists believe this heat is generated when the earth’s outer shell, which is divided into sections of rock called plates, move, and the plates collide against each other and one plate sinks under the other. Heat may also be generated when the plates move apart and magma from below the earth’s crust moves between the plates, pours onto the surface, and builds up on the ocean floor.

When magma melts the rocks inside the earth, gas is produced. Gas-filled magma rises toward the earth’s surface. As it rises, the magma melts gaps in the surrounding rock and eventually forms a large chamber close to the surface. The weight of the rock surrounding the magma exerts great pressure, and the pressure causes the magma to blast through a channel in a

weakened part of the rock. When the magma reaches the surface, the gas in the magma is released and both the gas and magma blast out a vent through which the magma and other volcanic materials erupt. The materials pile up around the vent and form a volcanic mountain.



### What good are volcanoes?

Although volcanoes are among the most destructive natural forces on earth, they produce materials that have important uses. Rock formed from lava can be used in building roads. Pumice, a natural glass formed from lava, can be used to grind and polish stones and metals. A volcano’s sulfur deposits can be used to make chemicals. Volcanic ash is a natural fertilizer of the soil. Finally, geothermal energy, or energy sourced from volcanic hot springs, can be used to produce electricity.

### ABOUT THE WRITER

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## LANGUAGE BOOSTER

### At? In? On? BY: MA. LUZ C. VILCHES

Prepositions indicate relationships between words and thus facilitate the expression of different meanings. Let’s have a look at some rules for IN, ON, and AT when referring to time and place.

When referring to these types of dates and times:	You use:	For example:
A non-specific time	IN	Can we meet in the evening?
A more qualified but still non-specific time	ON	Can we meet on Monday afternoon?
A specific time	AT	Can we meet at 12 noon? <small>*Exception: always use at with the word night, even though this is a non-specific time. Example: Can we meet at night?</small>
The month OR year only	IN	Classes begin in June. I will graduate in 2005.
The month and day OR the complete date	ON	Classes begin on June 14. Classes begin on June 14, 2005.

Now, do you ride *on* a bus or *in* a bus? My grade school teacher once shared this secret with me: if you can stand and walk while inside the vehicle, use ON; if you can’t, use IN! Here are a few examples:

- You ride ON a bus.
- You ride IN a jeepney (unless you are on top of the jeepney!)
- You ride ON the LRT.
- You ride IN a car or taxi.
- You ride ON a plane.
- You ride ON a boat.

English prepositions can be quite troublesome. But, given the above examples, they don’t have to be—try them out yourself!

### ABOUT THE WRITER

Ma. Luz C. Vilches holds a PH D. in Applied Linguistics from Lancaster University, UK. She is the chair of the English Department at Ateneo de Manila University. Before this, she was Executive of the Ateneo Center for English Language Teaching.