

A sphinx is an **imaginary creature** of old myths. The Egyptian , Greeks and other **peoples** of the Middle East had stories about such **creatures**. Sometimes a sphinx was used to **guard sacred** places.

Egyptian sphinxes had the head of a man and the body , feet and tail of a lion . Others had heads of **rams** or **falcons**. Egyptians often made statues of sphinxes to **honour** kings and queens. Paintings showed kings as lions who **conquered** their enemies and sphinxes became symbols of royal **protection**. Statues of sphinxes often **lined** roads that led to temples, like those near the great temple at Karnak.



The Great Sphinx is the largest, oldest and most famous sphinx statue. It lies in the desert near the Egyptian pyramids at Giza. The monument is 73 metres long and 20 metres high. The face is 4 metres wide. The Great Sphinx was built about 4,500 years ago. The **shape** of the sphinx was **carved** out of big blocks of **limestone** , which was an important building material of that time. **Historians** believe that the sphinx's face is a portrait of Khafre , a king of **ancient** Egypt.

During the course of history sand often **buried** the Great Sphinx up to its neck, but it was always cleared away. Through the years desert sand ,wind and rain have **worn away** parts of the **sculpture**. In the 1970s scientists have started to **preserve** it with special chemicals.



The ancient Greeks took their idea of the sphinx from the Egyptians . The Greek sphinx had the head of a woman, the body of a lion, a **serpent** tail and wings. The most famous Sphinx lived on a high rock outside Thebes. Legends tell us that she terrorized **passers-by** by asking them the answer to a **riddle**. What walks on four legs in the morning, on two at noon and on three at night ? The sphinx killed everyone who could not answer the riddle correctly.

When Oedipus passed on his way to Thebes, the Sphinx asked him the riddle. Oedipus gave the answer . The **creature** was a **human** , who **crawls** on all four legs as a baby, then walks on two legs and finally needs a **cane** when he is old. The Sphinx became mad , killed herself and Oedipus became king of Thebes.

## WORDS

**ancient** = old

**bury** = to put someone who has died into a grave

**cane** = a long thin stick that helps you walk

**carve** = cut out of ...

**conquer** = to get control of a country by fighting

**crawl** = to move with your hands and knees on the ground

**creature** = a living thing

**falcon** = a bird that kills and eats other animals

**guard** = to protect a place by staying near it and watching it

**historian** = someone who studies history

**honour** = respect, admire

**human** = a person

**imaginary** = something that doesn't exist

**limestone** = a kind of rock that contains calcium

**line** = to form a row of things

**passers-by** = someone who is walking past a place

**peoples** = people who live in a together group

**preserve** = to save something from damage

**protection** = defence, safety

**ram** = an adult male sheep

**riddle** = a question that is very difficult to solve

**sacred** = holy

**sculpture** = an object made of stone, wood or metal

**serpent** = snake

**shape** = form

**wear away** = to do damage to something