TALES OF THE TAY

INTRODUCTION

This unit presents a selection of folk tales, supernatural beings and legends from Perthshire. Most are linked with specific places along the river Tay; some are from the Gaelic tradition; some are rooted in reality while others feature mythical beings, such as urisks, brownies, kelpies and mermaids.

If you wish to explore the musical heritage of the area, we recommend an existing resource for schools: A Sense of Place: Discovering Perthshire through Music and Song http://www.pkc.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=28893&p=0
This includes links to recordings of all the songs featured: https://audioboom.com/playlists/1264880-a-sense-of-place-discovering-perthshire-through-music-song

We suggest some activities for stimulating interest in Perthshire's folk heritage and developing skills in writing and the expressive arts.

SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITIES

Read/listen to one or more of the stories, ideally one from your local area.

Research the mythical creature, if there is one.

Draw/model him/her.

Look at local place names: are there any (in English or in Gaelic) which suggest a story? (e.g. Wolfhill)

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SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES

CURRICULAR AREA	EXPERIENCES & OUTCOMES	KEY LEARNING ACTIVITIES
Literacy and English: Writing, Creating Texts	Having explored the elements which writers use in different genres, I can use what I learn to create stories, poems and plays with an interesting and appropriate structure, interesting characters and/or settings which come to life. ENG 2-31a	Pupils choose a local landmark and create a story based on this landscape feature. It could feature one of the mythical creatures.
	Having explored the elements which writers use in different genres, I can use what I learn to create my own stories, poems and plays with interesting structures, characters and/or settings. ENG 1-31a	

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SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES

CURRICULAR AREA	EXPERIENCES & OUTCOMES	KEY LEARNING ACTIVITIES
Expressive Arts: Drama	I enjoy creating, choosing and accepting roles, using movement, expression and voice. EXA 1-12a I have developed confidence and skills in creating and presenting drama which explores real and imaginary situations, using improvisation and script. EXA 1-14a	Using either the stories featured or stories pupils have created, pupils dramatise a story. This could be performed – possibly on location – and filmed/ photographed.

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SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES

CURRICULAR AREA	EXPERIENCES & OUTCOMES	KEY LEARNING ACTIVITIES
Expressive Arts: Drama	I can create, adapt and sustain different roles, experimenting with movement, expression and voice and using theatre arts technology. EXA 2-12a	The story could be recorded with sound effects/ music for a younger class to enjoy.
	I have created and presented scripted or improvised drama, beginning to take account of audience and atmosphere. EXA 2-14a	

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OVERVIEW OF STORIES

HOW LOCH TAY WAS CREATED
LOCH TAY, BEN LAWERS

Myth explaining how Loch Tay was created.

THE URISKS OF ABERFELDY
ABERFELDY

About the urisks – water sprites and brownies.

PUDDLEFOOT THE BROWNIE
CLOCHFOLDICH FARM, STRATHTAY

A helpful, but messy, Brownie.

THE COBLE OF CARGILL
CARGILL, STOBHALL, BALATHY; DOWNSTREAM OF THE CONFLUENCE WITH RIVER ISLA

A woman whose boyfriend cheats on her seeks a terrible revenge. This is also a ballad.

THE BELL O'FRIARTON ISLAND
FRIARTON/MONTCRIEFFE ISLAND, PERTH

A sunken bell is used as a kitchen utensil by the devil.

THE DRAGON HOLE
KINNOUILL HILL, PERTH

Legends associated with a cave on Kinnoull Hill.

THE MERMAID OF DALEALLY
DALEALLY, ERROL

A mermaid is caught at Daleally and how she escapes.
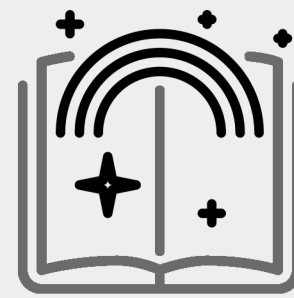
THE KELPIE OF ERROL
ERROL

A kelpie – an evil shape-shifting water beast – jams a mill lade, is punished, and takes revenge.

THE RIVER CHANGES ITS COURSE
ST MADOES, RHYND

An old legend tells that the River Tay used to have a different course.

TALES OF THE TAY

FURTHER RESOURCES

TALES FROM HIGHLAND PERTHSHIRE - Collected by Lady Evelyn Stewart Murray; translated and edited by Sylvia Robertson and Tony Dilworth.

THE GUIDE TO MYSTERIOUS PERTHSHIRE - Geoff Holder, 2006.

NOT OF THIS WORLD: CREATURES OF THE SUPERNATURAL IN SCOTLAND - Maurice Fleming, 2002.

THE SIDLAWS: TALES, TRADITIONS AND BALLADS - Maurice Fleming, 2000.

KING O' THE BLACK ART AND OTHER FOLK TALES - ed. Sheila Douglas, 1987.

FAIR UPON TAY: A TAYSIDE ANALOGY - Sheila Douglas, 1993.

IN FAMED BREADALBANE: THE STORY OF ANTIQUITIES, LANDS AND PEOPLE OF THE HIGHLAND DISTRICT - William Gillies, 1980.

BREAKING THE SPELL: STORIES OF MAGIC AND AND MYSTERY FROM SCOTLAND - Lari Don, 2013 (for children).

THE COBLE OF CARGILL

At Cargill, the banks of the Tay are said to be haunted by the ghost of a woman called Jeanie Low.

Jeanie was a young woman who lived in Balathy. Her boyfriend, David Drummond was the butler at the house of Stobhall on the other side of the Tay. He used to row across the river at Cargill in his coble (boat) to visit her.

One day she discovered that her David had another sweetheart. Furious, she secretly drilled seven holes in his coble.

But as soon as he set off in his boat, she regretted what she had done. She ran to the river, with seven wooden pins to plug the holes. She was too late: by the time she got there the boat was going under. Her lover could not swim, and soon disappeared beneath the waters.

She could not get the memory of the drowning man's last cries out of her head and gradually lost her mind. She is said to haunt the banks of the Tay, endlessly making wooden pins.

This event was turned into a ballad:

The Coble of Cargill

1. DAVID DRUMMOND'S destinie,
Gude man o appearance o Cargill;
I wat his blude rins in the flude,
Sae sair against his parents' will.

2. She was the lass o Balathy toun,
And he the butler o Stobhall,
And mony a time she wauked late
To bore the coble o Cargill.

3. His bed was made in Kercock ha,
Of gude clean sheets and of the hay;
He wudna rest ae nicht therein,
But on the prude waters he wud gae.

4. His bed was made in Balathy toun,
Of the clean sheets and of the strae;
But I wat it was far better made
Into the bottom o bonnie Tay.

5. She bored the coble in seven pairts,
I wat her heart might hae been fu sair;
For there she got the bonnie lad lost
Wi the curly locks and the yellow hair.

6. He put his foot into the boat,
He little thocht o ony ill;
But before that he was mid-waters,
The weary coble began to fill.

7. `Woe be to the lass o Balathy toun,
I wat an ill death may she die!
For she bored the coble in seven pairts,
And let the waters perish me.

8. `Oh, help, oh help, I can get nane,
Nae help o man can to me come!'
This was about his dying words,
When he was choaked up to the chin.

9. `Gae tell my father and my mother
It was naebody did me this ill;
I was a-going my ain errands,
Lost at the coble o bonnie Cargill.'

10. She bored the boat in seven pairts,
I wat she bored it wi gude will;
And there they got the bonnie lad's corpse,
In the kirk-shot o bonnie Cargill.

11. Oh a' the keys o bonnie Stobha
I wat they at his belt did hing;
But a' the keys of bonnie Stobha'
They now ly low into the stream.

12. A braver page into his age
Neer set a foot upon the plain;
His father to his mother said,
`Oh, sae soon as we've wanted him!

13. `I wat they had mair luve than this
When they were young and at the scule;
But for his sake she wauked late,
And bored the coble o bonnie Cargill.'

14. `There's neer a clean sark gae on my back,
Nor yet a kame gae in my hair;
There's neither coal nor candle-licht
Shall shine in my bouir foe evir mair.

15. `At kirk nor market I'se neer be at,
Nor yet a blythe blink in my ee;
There's neer a ane shall say to anither,
That's the lassie gard the young man die.

16. `Between the yetts o bonnie Stobha
And the kirk-style o bonnie Cargill,
There is mony a man and mother's son
That was at my love's burial.'

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THE RIVER CHANGES IT COURSE

As the tide ebbs and flows, the River Tay grows deeper and shallower, spreading out and then shrinking again. But its course never changes – or does it?

According to local tradition, the Tay used to flow to the north of the villages of St Madoes and Errol, with both villages connected by land to Rhynd, today on the south bank of the river. Locals used to believe that Tay used to flow by the foot of the hills to the north of Errol, and would point to the holes on rocks which is where they believed ships used to be tied up.

An old ballad claims that:

The stannin' stanes o' Semmiedores [St Madoes]
Be sou' the River Tay.

When the river changed its course, the people of Rhynd were forced to row across the river to St Madoes until one Sunday the boat overturned in a storm and everyone drowned.

Another story tells of an underground passage under the Tay between Seggieden near Kinfauns and the nunnery at Elcho.

Why did the river change its course? No one can tell. Did it really happen? Where did these stories come from? Who knows?

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THE DRAGON HOLE

On the steep cliffs of Kinnoull Hill lies a cave, known as the Dragon Hole. Was there ever a dragon here? Who knows? But there are many stories connected with the cave.

The cave was meant to be the hiding place of a magic stone: the Stone of Invisibility. If you held the stone, you became invisible in an instant. But there was one catch – the stone itself was invisible too.

There was at the time a tailor in Perth, called James Keddie. He was determined to find the stone, invisible or not. He grabbed handfuls of air, and any pebbles he could see. Each time, he cried out: "Can you see me? Can you see me?"

Eventually, a man from Dundee got tired of his shouting. Jamie picked up a pebble, and, as usual, shouted: " Can you see me?"

For a joke, the Dundee man said "Where are you sir? I can no' see you!"

In delight, Jamie called out: " I've found the stone of invisibility! I've found it!"

He decided to walk naked through Perth. Everyone mocked him: children threw stones and adults chased after him.

So the moral of this story is: don't believe everything you are told!

Another story tells how robbers would hide in the cave to wait for unwary travellers. One dark night a robber pounced on a traveller who fought back fiercely, killing the robber. Then, lighting a candle, he discovered to his horror that the robber was his long-lost brother. He fell down the steep sides of the slope in shock, lived long enough to confess what had happened, and then died.

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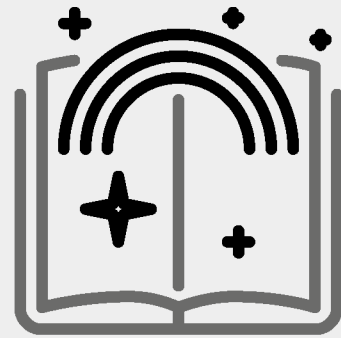
THE BELL O'FRIARTON ISLAND

On the Tay about a mile below Perth is Friarton Island. Not far from the island lies the Friarton Hole, a part of the river which is very deep.

A long, long time ago a very large church bell was carried to Perth on a boat, ready for St John's Kirk. But as they were unloading it at Friarton Pier, the bell slipped and fell into the deep waters of Friarton Hole.

Many years later, a diver decided to dive down and see if he could discover the bell and bring it to the surface again. He disappeared into the waters.

Minutes later, he reappeared in a panic — and without the bell. In terror he said that he had found the bell — with the devil and his wife using it to make their porridge!

And as far as we know, it lies there still.

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THE KELPIE OF ERROL

Have you ever heard of a kelpie? A kelpie was a spirit who lived in water and who could take on many different shapes, most often that of a horse. If you were unlucky enough to come close to a kelpie, then beware! Kelpies dragged their victims back underwater to devour them.

This is a story about a kelpie seen at Errol. One morning Robert Curr, the miller of Trotack was helping out at Mill of Errol. Something was holding up the water in the lade. What could it be? Robert went to investigate.

To his surprise, he found a kelpie, whose seaweed-like hair and cloak were damming the water. In terror, he picked up a large stone and hit the kelpie as hard as he could.

As it plunged back into the water, the kelpie cried out this curse:

'Auld man Madison
This you shall rue
Some misty morning
I'll meet with you'.

Old man Madison? Robert realised the kelpie had mistaken him for Madison, the man who usually worked at Mill of Errol.

And sure enough, the next Sunday, a very misty day, poor Madison disappeared as he walked by the Tay, and was never seen again.

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HOW LOCH TAY WAS CREATED

Long ago there was a cool, fresh, spring on the south-west slopes of Ben Lawers. It was kept secure by a strong door, and under lock and key.

Near the spring, on the hillocks was a great herd of dun cows. Every evening a dairymaid came to the spring, unlocked the door, and gave the cows water to drink.

One evening, after watering the cows, she was late, and forgot to lock the door of the fountain. The spring started flowing out of the door and down the hill. It flowed all night, and when the people looked out the next morning, the whole valley was filled with water.

"Loch Tatha!" they called – 'it is a loch'. And that is the story about how Loch Tay was formed.

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THE MERMAID OF DALEALLY

Did you know that there were mermaids in the River Tay? Or one, at least.

A long time ago a mermaid was often seen as she combed her golden hair on the banks of the Tay at Daleally, near Errol. Locals left her alone, but then a stranger named Jock Jouthers came to the district. He decided to catch her.

He watched her carefully and noticed she often sat under a certain tree. He took a rope and tied it to the tree, coiling it up at the foot and fastened the other end round his waist.

As usual, the mermaid swam ashore, and sat under the tree. Jock crept up on her, and then suddenly pulled the rope. The coils slipped tightly around the mermaid and Jock ran forward and held tight to his prisoner.

He took her to the nearest house and told May, the servant girl to make sure she didn't escape. The next day was a Sunday and everyone went off to church. May was left to cook the kale, rock the baby in its cradle - and mind the mermaid.

The mermaid sat still, watching May as she went about her cooking. Then she started to sing a sweet, gentle song:
'Skim the kale
Bonny May
Skim aye the kale'.

May was delighted – and who wouldn't be? A mermaid singing a song specially for her! But she didn't notice that as she was stirring, the mermaid was gradually loosening the knots and coils which held her fast. When the last one was loose, she slipped free and was out of the house. She disappeared straight back into the Tay.

As she swam, she was heard singing again:
'Never, never mair
Will I kame my yellow hair
On the bonny flowery banks
O the Tay'.

And since that day, no mermaids have been seen on the Tay.

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PUDDLEFOOT THE BROWNIE

In the burn of Allt Mor near Clochfoldich lived a brownie, a mischievous water sprite. He used to frighten people returning from ceilidhs by chasing them and making gurgling sounds.

At night he would splash and paddle about in the water until everyone at Clochfoldich Farm had gone to bed. Then he would go into the house, leaving a trail of wet footprints, and would clear away all the dirty dishes. If any had been cleaned already, he would get angry and would throw them on the floor. The people of the farm would leave out milk for him but he would not accept any other kind of thanks.

One night, a man returning from the market heard him splashing about in the burn.

"Well, Puddlefoot, how is it with you the night?" he called.

"Oh!" cried the Brownie. " I've got a name! Tis Puddlefoot they call me!"

And with that he vanished, never to haunt the place again.

THE URISKS OF ABERFELDY

Have you ever heard of an *urisk* or a brownie? These were shaggy water sprites who lurked among the rocks of remote waterfalls. People travelling by could sometimes hear their loud voices, mingling with the water's roar.

The king of the urisks lived in Aberfeldy. He was called *Peallaidh*, the Shaggy One. People say that's how Aberfeldy got its name, from *Obar Pheallaidh*, which means '*the mouth of the stream of Peallaidh*'.

Peallaidh had flowing yellow hair, a blue bonnet and a long walking staff. He was known as *Peallaidh an Spuit* – Peallaidh of the spout - and he lived around the Upper fall in Moness Den, today known as the Birks of Aberfeldy. He had a friend who lived by the lower waterfall, and his name was *Brunaidh an Easain*.

These two urisks used to enter the houses of Aberfeldy at night time, and play tricks on the people who lived there. At harvest time, the urisks lurked around farm buildings. If milk was left out for them, they might perform heavy tasks around the farm. To prevent cats and dogs from stealing the milk, people would chalk a ring of magical designs around the bowl.

This Gaelic rhyme lists all the main urisks of Breadalbane:

Peallaidh an Spuit
Is Brunaidh an Easain
Babh an Lochain
Is Brunaidh an Eilein;
Paderlan a Fearnan,
Peadragan, Patragan
Triubhas-dubh a Farthairchill,
Futh Coire Ghamhnain
Cas-Luath Leitir,
Amhlagan – dugh
Is Catan Cean-liath,
Is Uruisg dubh more Eas-amhlagan.

Brunaidh an Eilein lived on an island in Loch Tay, while *Paderlan* had his home in the deep ravines of the burn to the west of Fearnan, which still bears his name: *Allt Phaderleigh*. *Triubhas-Dubh*, 'black breeks' lived near Fortingall.