

Name_____ Date_____

Gargoyles of the Washington National Cathedral

Many old castles and churches have stone carvings on corners and edges called gargoyles. Gargoyles can be of people, animals, and even monsters! But these stone creatures, whether they're cute, funny, or weird, actually serve a very important purpose. They have holes carved through their mouths that extend all the way back through their bodies into the wall. This tube helps rainwater to drain off of the roof and away from the walls, protecting the building from damage. That way, the stone cats and dogs help drain the fast-falling water when it's raining cats and dogs!

Sometimes people get gargoyles confused with grotesques (gro-TESKS). The difference is that grotesques have no holes; they are simply for decoration. Most of the stone creatures you would see today are gargoyles because the buildings need their helping hand. It gives a whole new meaning to the phrase "hard worker"!

In Washington, DC, there is a very large old church known as the Washington National Cathedral. A cathedral is the central church of a group of churches, where a bishop¹ lives. Most cathedrals are very large, and very beautiful with carved stone and stained glass. Many have gargoyles on them and beautiful gardens around them.

The Washington National Cathedral has a total of 112 gargoyles around the church. That's a lot of statues to see! People can wander the church grounds or go to the seventh floor in order to view the gargoyles by themselves. If they want some help finding certain ones, people can go on a special tour that shows people exactly where each gargoyle rests.

There are around ten different dragons scattered around the towers, along with some random, odd creatures that are simply described by their basic form. These have names like "Bellyache," "Fat Fingers," "Decay," "Pure Fantasy," and "Happy Face." Other fun, larger-than-life beasts include:

¹**bishop:** a person who leads a group of churches

- a unicorn, which is a horse with a horn coming out of its head

- a griffin, which has the head and wings of an eagle, with the body of a lion
- a minotaur, which has the head of a bull, with the body of a man
- a three-headed dog
- an avian² lioness
- a feline³ eagle
- a rabbit-snake

There are several gargoyles that represent people, as well. Two are called the "Grandsons." One is called "Angelic," which means he is sweet and gentle. The other is known as "Mischievous," which means he likes to play tricks. It seems to be true that opposites attract! There is also a lawyer, a mysterious carver, a dentist, a corrupt⁴ politician, and a thief.

Simple animals are also represented. Visitors can see a dolphin, an owl, a caterpillar, a wolf, a pig, a frog, a bat, and a seal. There are even two animals named for individual states: the Wisconsin badger and the Missouri bear.

There is just one grotesque on the Washington National Cathedral. It was placed there in the 1980s after a boy named Christopher Rader won a sculpture drawing competition. He won by drawing the bad guy from the *Star Wars* movies, Darth Vader. So sculptors created the head of Darth Vader and placed him high on the northwest tower. Darth Vader is the needle in the haystack of the figures. His face is very hard to see from the ground, but it can be done with help. If you visit, just ask someone who works at the cathedral to show you.

²**avian:** having to do with birds ³**feline:** having to do with cats ⁴**corrupt:** dishonest

1. In paragraph 1, what is the meaning of "it's raining cats and dogs"?
 - A. It is raining lightly.
 - B. It is raining quietly.
 - C. It is raining heavily.
 - D. It is raining musically.
2. What is the meaning of "helping hand" in paragraph 2?
 - A. Aid
 - B. Color

- C. beauty
- D. decoration

3. What is the meaning of "hard worker" as it is used in paragraph 2?

- A. a person who works all day without breaks
- B. a statue made of stone that helps drain water
- C. a person who has special skill in science or math
- D. a machine that can work for hours without stopping

4. What is the meaning of "larger-than-life" in paragraph 5?

- A. forgotten
- B. average
- C. exciting
- D. plain

5. In paragraph 8, what is the meaning of "needle in the haystack"?

- A. easy to find
- B. helpful to find
- C. alarming to find
- D. difficult to find