



Literacy

Coins in the Classroom

St George and the Dragon

Adapted from the William Caxton translation of Jacobus de Voragine's *The Golden Legend*

St George was a knight born in Cappadocia. One day he was travelling in Libya and came across a city called Silene. Near this city was a large lake, where a ferocious dragon lived. The dragon terrorised the city and when it was hungry it would leave the lake and breathe on the people with its poisonous breath. The people of the city wanted the dragon to leave but when they went to fight it they were afraid and fled. To protect the people (and stop them from being eaten), the king decided that every day they would take two of their sheep down to the lake for the dragon to eat. Desperate to keep the dragon away, the people of the city decided that to satisfy its hunger, they would now have to feed the dragon one sheep and one human every day. The name of the person to be fed to the dragon would be drawn out of a hat and this would mean that the choice would be fair. It didn't matter who you were, man or woman, rich or poor, you would still have the same chance of your name being called. One day the name of the king's daughter was drawn out of the hat. The king was very upset and asked the people to let the princess go free but the people refused as she had been chosen in a fair way. The king had to agree and a week later the princess left the city and went down to the place where the dragon lived. As she sat on a rock, waiting for the dragon to arrive, St George rode by on his horse. Seeing the beautiful princess crying, he stopped and asked her what was wrong.



St George and the dragon

“Go away young man, before you die too!” cried the princess.

“I am to be fed to the dragon.”



St George and the Dragon by Paolo Uccello

At that moment, the hungry dragon appeared from the lake and attacked St George. St George was quick and using his Christian cross and lance he pinned the dragon to the ground. The princess took the belt from her dress and made a collar and lead for the dragon, which she put around its neck so that it became timid and tame. St George then took the princess back to the city and slayed the dragon. The king was so impressed by St George's bravery that he was baptised a Christian, and the people of Silene lived in peace once more.

Fact File

Benedetto Pistrucci – St George and the Dragon

Benedetto Pistrucci was born in Rome in 1783 and built up a considerable reputation as a gem engraver. He was in France during the last few days of the Napoleonic regime and decided to come to England shortly after the Battle of Waterloo. He was commissioned to provide portrait models of George III for new gold and silver coinage, which were then cut directly into steel by The Royal Mint’s engravers to make the coin dies. Pistrucci, however, was unhappy with the result and decided he would master the technique of engraving himself. The new crown piece of 1818 which bore the St George design was described as ‘the handsomest coin in Europe’. As a foreigner, Pistrucci could not be appointed to the post of Chief Engraver but he did stay on at the mint to become Chief Medallist in 1828, a post which was created especially for him. He died at Englefield Green, near Windsor, in 1855.



An original drawing by Pistrucci and a gold Sovereign showing the St George and the dragon design.

St George and the Dragon

Take a look at this coin from The Royal Mint Museum's collection. It is a gold Sovereign.



1. How would you describe the image on this coin?

2. What overall impression does it give?

3. Who are the characters in the design and what can we tell about them from the way they are being shown?

St George and the Dragon

Coins tell us stories, through their designs and through their inscriptions. Use the table below to help you identify the characters, action, time and setting of the story.

Character	Action
Time	Setting

Can you describe the character of St George? What is he like?

St George and the Dragon

Look at the gold Sovereign again ...



1. Does this image tell you the whole story? If not, which part is it showing?

2. What has been added to the coin that might tell us a bit more about the story?

3. An **inscription** on a coin adds to the story that is already being told by the design. On your own or in pairs, come up with **your own inscription** to go with this design.

‘Standing on the Shoulders of Giants’

These words are taken from a letter written by Sir Isaac Newton to his fellow scientist Robert Hooke in 1676, acknowledging the debt he owed to others: ‘If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants’. They are used as the inscription on the £2 coin that we are familiar with today.

The new £2 coin was introduced on 15 June 1998. An open competition was launched to select a new design for the reverse of this coin and more than 1,200 drawings were received from more than 400 artists and members of the public. The design competition was won by Bruce Rushin, an art teacher who had heard about the competition whilst listening to the radio in his car.

Bruce Rushin’s design, in four concentric circles, tells the story of technological development from the Iron Age to the Industrial Revolution, and from the Computer Age to the Internet. The inscription ‘STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS’ matches the spirit of the design, with its message that the achievements of the present would not have been possible without the discoveries of the past.



A plaster model and a coin.

Standing on the Shoulders of Giants

Have you ever noticed the inscription around the edge of a £2 coin?



So far we have looked at how inscriptions add to the stories told by coin designs. Use the inscription 'STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS' as a starting point for your own creative writing.

Standing on the Shoulders of Giants

Use the table below to help you plan your creative writing.

Character	Action
Time	Setting

Standing on the Shoulders of Giants

The inscription on the £2 coin, ‘STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS’, is taken from a letter written by Sir Isaac Newton in 1676.

‘If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants’



1. What do you think Newton meant by this?

2. How well do you think it fits with Bruce Rushin’s design?

Something you may not know is that Newton, as well as being a great scientist, worked at The Royal Mint. First, he was appointed Warden and then he was made Master from 1696 until his death in 1727.

The content in this pack was developed by the team at The Royal Mint Museum. For more information on these resources, including additional teaching materials and in-depth teachers' notes, please visit royalmintmuseum.org.uk/learning

For a more immersive learning experience, online education sessions with The Royal Mint Museum are available upon request. Complete the online form at royalmintmuseum.org.uk/learning to request a booking and we will be in touch to confirm the details.



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