



# WORLD JOURNAL FOR SAND THERAPY PRACTICE

PROMOTING THE ETHICAL PRACTICE OF SAND THERAPY

## Focus on Miniatures

### Dragon

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The very word dragon comes from the Greek word drakōn, which describes a sea serpent.

Historically, dragons would be depicted as creatures with large wings and a tail that is barbed. Other cultures looked at dragons as evil snakes. Throughout history, dragons have changed form. They usually have four legs but may have more than one head,

Dragons are referenced in history during various time periods as early as 2700 BC in Chinese and Indigenous legends. There was one referenced in Inuit stories in 1887, known as Kikituk. This dragon hunted humans and caribou on land before going back into the water (McNeil Jr., 2003).

In 315 AD, a well-referenced dragon was one that St. George (patron saint of England and also the country Georgia) fought with while rescuing a princess, but the battle didn't happen on British soil. Instead, the soldier was Roman and fought the dragon in Libya. The contract was that if the princess was saved and the dragon was slain, then all the king's subjects could be baptized as Christians.

A Welsh story documents King Vortigern (5th century) witnessing the battle between a white and red dragon. The red dragon won this battle, interpreted as foreshadowing a battle between the Saxons and the Welsh. The red Welsh dragon won and is pictured on the Welsh flag today.

Dragons are very much a part of Chinese culture. The Emperor of China (founder of the Han Dynasty) was said to be conceived after his mother had a dream about a dragon. The depiction of specific types of dragons could indicate if you were an Emperor or prince/princess.

If you were a princess, you could use a four-clawed dragon on your clothing; if you were the Emperor, the five-clawed dragon was reserved for your use. Dragons also protected the four seas of the world at a time when there was belief that only four seas covered the earth's surface (Cartwright, 2017).

A dragon also appeared on the first Chinese National Flag. The dragon continued to be utilized on state symbols when the Republic of China used it on the twelve-symbol national emblem from 1913 to 1928 (The Met, 2023). Chinese New Year parades around the world

continue to celebrate dragons. So ultimately, the dragon was and is viewed in this culture as a just, kind, and protective creature that is powerful, strong, and perhaps even brings good luck.

In modern times, dragons have been depicted in movies as often loveable creatures that follow humans around, almost like protective pets. In the Harry Potter series of books (1990 - 2007), dragon lore was further expanded to include how dragon eggs were protected, what to feed baby dragons, what types of dragons were considered purebred, and even what to do with dragon dung. Of course, the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry is *Draco dormiens numquam titillandus*, Latin for *Never tickle a sleeping dragon*.

Dragons for the sandtray room can be purchased at specialty miniature sites, department stores, and online. They come in various sizes and colors and are chosen for various reasons by

Figure 1: *Dragon drawing in the sand.*



sandtray builders to take on the role of various people in the builders' lives. This writer has one client who likes to create dragons in the sandtray by just drawing them in the sand. (Dragon in the sand – credited to Krysten Munroe, used with permission.)

Sandtray therapists from the US and Canada shared their experiences of dragons in the playroom. Two identified as licensed practicing counselors, and one as a

psychologist. Their theoretical orientations are humanist, Rogerian, and Adlerian. As a group, their client base ranged from builders who ranged from under 10 years of age to over 65. One clinician uses sandtray in their work with families.

These clinicians indicated themes that arose in the sandtray with dragons included the dichotomy of anger and aggression or protection and safety. Dragons are used as fantasy depicting emotions/feelings or even threats. One clinician talked about these emotions and feelings showing up in battles between dragons and unicorns. Another clinician indicated that dragons have helped a builder to process adjustment issues and even the experience of anxiety. Dragons also helped their clients play out family issues such as separation and divorce.

For the new sandtray therapist, having more than one dragon in their sandtray collection would be important, given dragons sometimes win or die or, in other cases, their battles just rage on. Having two equally strong dragons can help these battles play out. Having dragons of various sizes can depict the power imbalance that can be experienced between a child and an adult or a

victim and perpetrator. They have multiple uses and are seen differently from one culture to another.

One question that still remains, however, is: What really happens if we tickle the sleeping dragon?

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