



# Erasmus+



## *Our Local Heroes of Tales and Legends.*

*By Students from Primary School no. 1 in Bochnia*

*POLAND*



**Devil Boruta** is a fictional character from Polish mythology, folklore and literature, associated with the Polish town of Łęczyca.

The character is the transformation of the Slavic demon Boruta in post-Christianization times.



He was usually considered to be a nobleman, and accordingly, he was usually busy with corrupting nobles, leaving other social classes to other devils. Tales that do mention his coat of arms overwhelmingly say it's Nowina -- albeit, with Polish coat of arms being often shared among a number of unrelated families, this did not lay any shame upon its other users.



**Lech, Czech and Rus** are three legendary brothers who are said to have founded the three Slavic nations of the Poles (or Lechites), the Czechs, and the Rus' people (the modern Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians). Three brothers went hunting together but each of them followed a different prey and eventually they all traveled in different directions. Rus went to the east, Czech headed to the west to settle on the Říp Mountain rising up from the Bohemian hilly countryside, while Lech traveled north. There, while hunting, he followed his arrow and suddenly found himself face-to-face with a fierce, white eagle guarding its nest from intruders. Seeing the eagle against the red of the setting sun, Lech took this as a good omen and decided to settle there. He named his settlement Gniezno (Polish gniazdo - 'nest') in commemoration and adopted the White Eagle as his coat-of-arms. The white eagle remains a symbol of Poland to this day, and the colors of the eagle and the setting sun are depicted in Poland's flag.

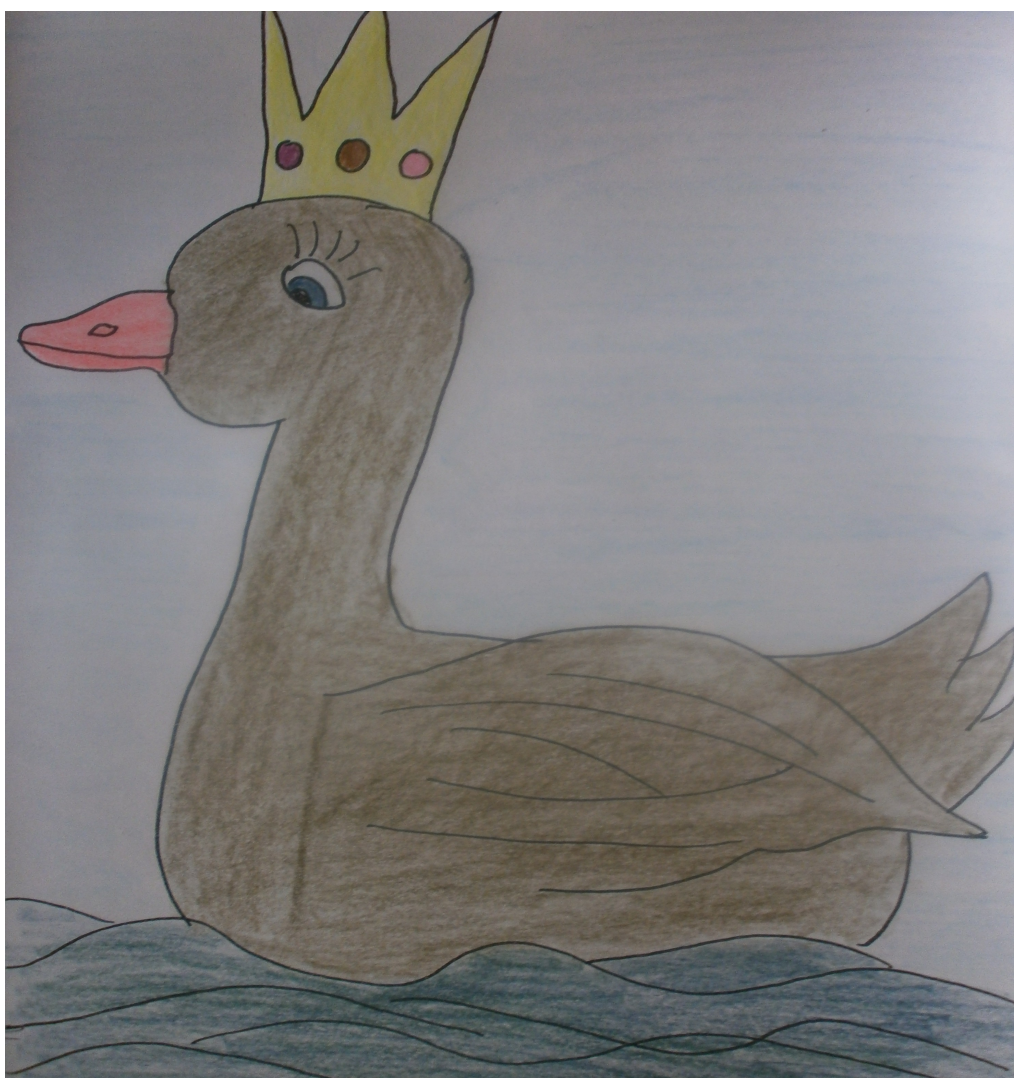
According to *Wielkopolska Chronicle* (13th century), Slavs are descendants of Javan, the son of Japheth, the son of Noah. He had three sons - the oldest Lech, the Rus and the youngest Czech, who have decided to settle west, north and east.



**The Wawel Dragon** was a beast which lived in a den under Wawel Hill and terrorised all the inhabitants of King Krak's town. They had to feed to the monster by giving him offerings of cattles. No knight could vanquish the monster, until a young shoemaker Skuba outsmarted the Dragon. He stuffed a ram's hide with sulphur and pitch, and put the doctored ram in front of the Dragon's Den. The monster caught the bait and devoured the ram. Immediately, he felt a bad pain and burning in the throat. To quench his thirst, the Dragon started to drink from the Vistula River. However, as water cannot extinguish burning sulphur, the gases produced by the fires inside him made the beast explode. All the townsfolk revelled in the news and the heroic shoemaker was properly rewarded. To commemorate the vanquishing of the Dragon, Bronisław Chromy designed a sculpture of the beast which now stands by the river at the foot of Wawel.



**Golden Duck.** *A long, long time ago a princess who had been turned into a golden duck lived in the cellars of Ostrogski Castle. People said that anyone who found her would be rich beyond their wildest dreams. One year, on Kupala's Night, a young cobbler went down into the cellars – he was lucky and he met the golden duck, who promised him riches. However, she said there was only one condition: she gave him a bag full of golden coins and said he had to spend them all within one day and not share his riches with anyone. It was almost the end of the day, and the boy broke the condition: he gave the last coin to a poor soldier. In a blink of an eye, he lost everything he had purchased with the gold coins. And that's when he understood that money does not make you happy: true happiness comes from work and good health. From that time onwards, he lived the good life of a master cobbler and nobody ever heard about the Golden Duck again.*



**Warsaw Mermaid.** According to legend, a Mermaid swimming in the sea stopped on the riverbank near the Old Town to rest. She found the place so admirable that she decided to stay. Local fisherman living nearby noticed that something was creating waves, tangling nets, and releasing their fish. Although their original intention was to trap the offender, he fell in love with the Mermaid upon hearing her sing. Later, a rich merchant trapped the Mermaid and imprisoned her in a wooden hut. A young fisherman heard the Mermaid's cry and with the help of his mates, released her, whereupon she declared her readiness to offer fishermen her help whenever it would be needed. Ever since, the Mermaid, armed with sword and shield, has been ready to help protect the city and its residents.



***Wars and Sawa*** a long, long time ago there was a tiny hut standing at the shores of the Vistula River. Wars, a fisherman, and his wife Sawa lived there. One day a hunt was organized in the area and Prince Ziemomysł, the owner of the estate, got lost in the forest. He wandered around for many days and many nights and he finally reached the fisherman's hut. Wars and Sawa made the stranger welcome and in the morning the grateful prince said, 'You didn't hesitate to take in a stranger and save him from hunger, cold and wild animals. Therefore this land will forever be called Warsaw, so your kindness can never be forgotten'.



**Basilisk.** *A legend says that in the basements of the buildings located at the Old Town lives a Basilisk. It guarded the treasures once stored there, and every man who tried to reach them was killed by the gaze of the Basilisk, which turns men to stone. He was defeated in the end by a wandering tailor who showed the monster a mirror. The Basilisk was petrified by its own appearance, and hid away; from then on, he was no longer a threat to residents. Today on the façade of the building there is a sign of the Basilisk, which is the symbol of the renowned Warsaw restaurant of the same name.*





**Janosik** was a famous Polish highwayman. Janosik has been the main character of many Polish legends, novels, poems and films. He is a semi-legendary character in East-Central Europe. According to the legend, he robbed nobles and gave the loot to the poor, a deed often attributed to the famous Robin Hood.



## *The legend of Wanda who didn't want to marry a German*

*Legends about Wanda, the beautiful young ruler of Kraków, frequently thought to be the daughter of King Krak himself, are associated with the mound in Mogiła. According to one of the versions of the legends, Wanda, famous for her fairness and wisdom, aroused love in the heart of the German prince, Rydygier (Rittiger). The haughty youth announced that unless Wanda takes his hand, he will attack Kraków. Unwilling to put the city in jeopardy, the princess chose death instead of marrying the Prince. (Another version claims that on Rydygier's change of heart, Wanda had to make a thanksgiving offering to the gods of her own life.) All in all, she plunged into the waves of the Vistula, and her dead body was found nowhere else but in Mogiła. To honour the brave deed of their monarch, her people built a high kurgan to her memory. In 1890, a monument designed by Jan Matejko himself was placed on its summit.*



## *The legend of Mr Twardowski*

*The most famous magician in Kraków, Mr Twardowski – so mysterious that the dispute as to whether he was a historical or fictitious person continues to this day – worked on the invention of the philosopher's stone, which would allow the transmutation of any metal into gold, the rejuvenation of people, and the curing of all illnesses. In return for having all his wishes granted, the magician signed a pact with the devil, to whom he was to offer his soul when in Rome. One of the feats that Twardowski achieved thanks to the devil's assistance was the building of the Błędowska Desert. Trying to outsmart the devil, Twardowski carefully avoided going to Rome. Nevertheless, one day he guided his steps to a tavern, not knowing that "Rome is the name of that tavern", and soon saw the devil coming to claim his soul. Not losing his wit, Twardowski quickly jumped on to the back of a rooster, and soared high into the sky. He is rumoured to still be living on the Moon and avoiding Kraków, so that his manservant – disguised as a spider – must spin a silver thread once a month and lower himself down to Kraków, to gather the latest gossip.*



## *The bugle call from St Mary's*

*Centuries ago, there was a watcher in the tower who played the bugle call at sunrise and sunset, thus giving the signal to open and close the city gates. Played at other times, the bugle call would act as a warning signal. A Mongol army arrived at the gates in 1241. The watchful guard noticed the enemy and warned the townspeople in good time, so that the gates were shut before they arrived, yet before he finished the melody, he was lethally hit by a Tartar arrow. To commemorate the event, the melody always breaks in mid-note where the brave watcher finished many centuries ago. The bugle call from St Mary's is played every hour to the four winds. From 13th February 1838, its sound is used to denote noon, and from 16th April 1927, every day at noon sharp the First Programme of the Polish Radio broadcasts the bugle call from St Mary's Tower.*



**Lajkonik** — also known as the Tartar rider or the hobby-horse of Kraków (or Zwierzyniec) is one of the main symbols of Kraków. Lajkonik's cortege marching along the streets of the city represents a custom that has been practised for centuries on the first Thursday following Corpus Christi. The legend itself dates back to 1287. Tartar armies crept forward without being seen to arrive close by the city. Here they decided to spend the night in the bulrushes by the Vistula, close to the village of Zwierzyniec, and to attack the city in the morning mists. They were discovered there by raftsmen, who without hesitation overpowered the sleeping army, thus saving the city from ruin and plunder. They soon changed into Asian costume and rode into the city on the horses they had seized as trophy. They inspired all the city with fear, yet soon the townsfolk came to rejoice. On the same day the Mayor of Kraków announced that to commemorate the event, a raftsman dressed as the Tartar Khan will enter the city once a year. Today, during the traditional procession from Zwierzyniec to the Main Square, Lajkonik deals out good luck blows with his mace.



## *St Kinga's ring*

*The legend speaks of Bolesław Prince of Poland going to Hungary to ask for the hand of the royal daughter, Kinga.. Having been accepted, he saw his betrothed turn to her father, asking him to give no gold or jewels in the dowry. All she desired was one treasure: salt – which at the time was precious and sought after – so that she could give it to her future subjects. Her father, King Bela IV of Hungary, gave her the richest salt mine in his kingdom, and Kinga cast her engagement ring into its shaft. As soon as she arrived in Poland, she had prospectors looking for salt. When it was found in Bochnia and Wieliczka, the miners came to the Queen with the first lump of salt mined from the Polish mines. She found in the lump of salt the engagement ring she dropped into the Marmarosz Sziget mine in Hungary.*

*The two sister salt mines now appear together in the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites as the*  
***"Wieliczka and Bochnia Royal Salt Mines"***



## *The sleeping knights in the Tatra mountains*

*Giewont mountain lies in the area of the Polish Tatra National Park. In Polish folklore it is associated with a legend about oversleeping knights, who will awake when Poland is in danger. The profile of the mountains is similar to a lying knight, wherein the Long Giewont is the knight's torso, and the Great Giewont is the knight's face as viewed from the side (the three 'peaks' being the chin, the nose, and the eyebrow). The image of Giewont as viewed from the south (see below) makes the profile easy to discern.*



***The fern flower*** – an extraordinary flower that blooms for a short while in the longest night of the year – in the Midsummer Eve. The flower brings fortune to the person who finds it. In various versions of the tale, the fern flower brings luck, wealth, or the ability to understand animal speech. However, the flower is closely guarded by evil spirits and anyone who finds the flower will have access to earthly riches, which have never benefited anyone, so the decision to pick the flower or leave it alone is left up to the individual.





## *The legend of the enchanted pigeons*

*This legend holds that the pigeons of Kraków are enchanted. When the Kraków throne was assumed by Prince Henryk IV Probus in the 13th century, the Piast monarch greatly desired to unite all the Polish lands and crown himself king. Yet he had no money. A witch came and offered him assistance: she transmuted the Prince's warriors into pigeons. They flew up to St Mary's Church and began to peck out little pebbles which, falling to the ground, were turning into gold coins. The Prince collected the gold and went to Rome to acquire the Pope's support in obtaining the Crown. Yet on his way he indulged in feasting, merrymaking, and... lost all the money. He never ever returned to Kraków again, while his retainers remain enchanted and still waiting for their Prince.*



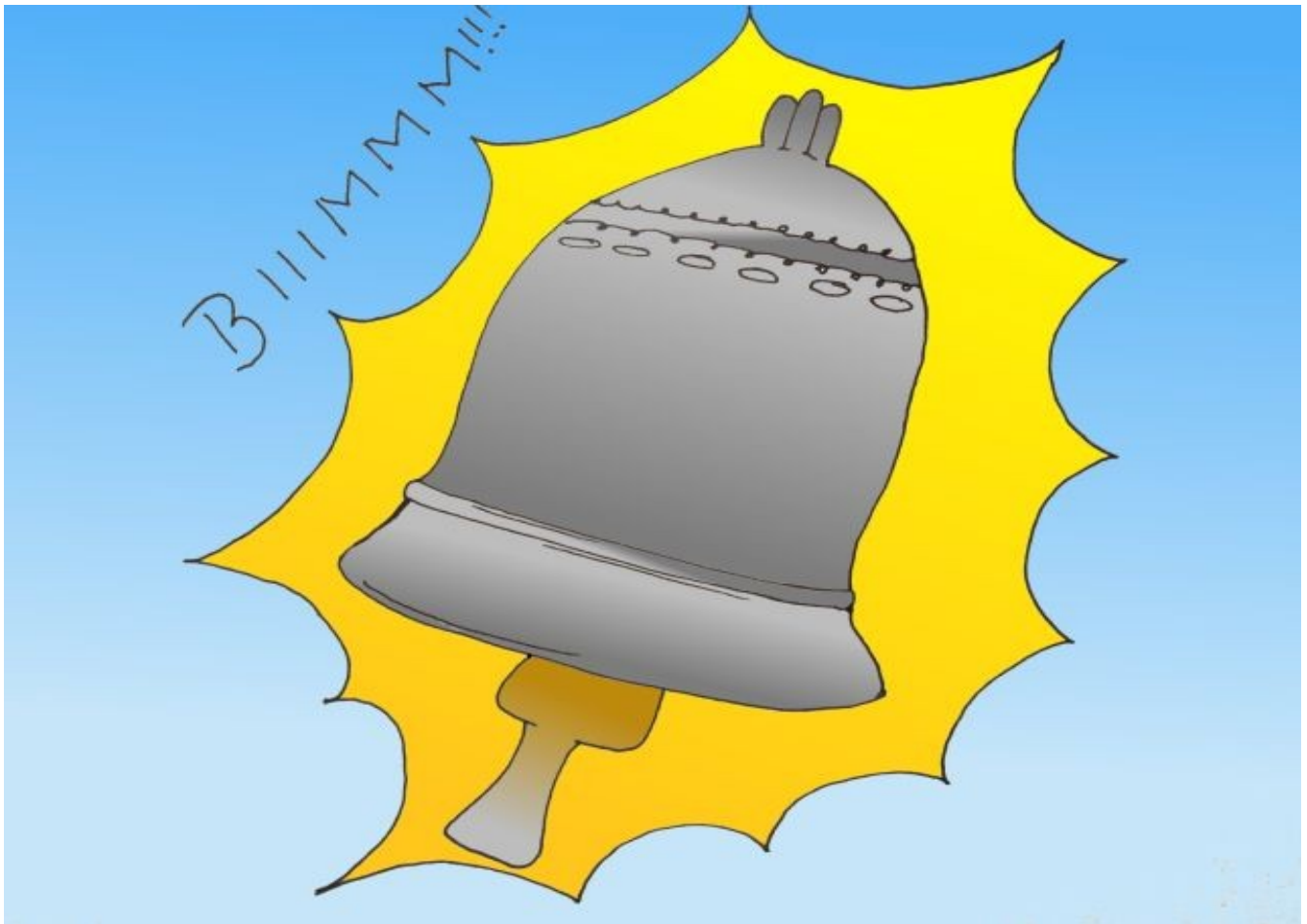
## *Legend of the two towers of St Mary's*

*The two towers of St Mary's are of different height, which everyone can see. The bugle call is played from the taller tower – Hejnalica, while the church bell known as Półzygmunt hangs in the lower tower. There are however no architectural plans that would explain the different heights of the towers. Ask for an explanation and you are likely to hear the following legend. Under the reign of King Boleslaus the Modest (Bolesław Wstydlivy, 1243-1279) a decision was made to add two towers to the body of the church standing by the Main Square. Soon two brothers embarked on the task. When the elder realised that his tower was much shorter, he murdered his brother out of envy, and the construction stopped. One version speaks of secret forces that completed the construction of the tower in the name of the murdered brother. Whatever came to pass, the murderer was wracked with remorse: on the day when the church was to be consecrated, he pierced his heart with the same knife he used to kill his brother, and dropped dead from the top of his tower to the ground below.*



## *Sigismund Bell*

*Known as the bell of kings and the king of bells, the Sigismund is the most famous and until recently the largest Polish bell. It was founded for King Sigismund the Old (Zygmunt Stary) to hang in Wawel Cathedral. The tale has it that it was cast from two cannon captured in war. Even though its clapper, called in Polish "heart", has cracked three times so far: in 1860, at Easter 1939, and on Christmas Eve 2000, each time it had a new one cast in a foundry in no time at all, as the legend tells us that the breaking of the "heart" is a bad omen for Poland, while the popular superstition suggests that touching it brings you luck.*



Sources:

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