



WORLD OF WONDER

Exploring the realms of history, science, nature and technology

By Laurie Triefeldt

GHOSTS

It's that spooky time of year again, when the veil between worlds is said to be thinner and the chances of experiencing supernatural events are statistically much higher than normal. Since ancient times, cultures around the world have believed that the human soul survives bodily death. Over the centuries, many a tale has been told of spirits who haunt the world they left behind.

What is a ghost?

No one has ever caught and examined a ghost, so what people think a ghost is can vary considerably. In general, a ghost is the spirit of a dead person or animal who is trapped between our world and the next.

A **paranormal investigator** might describe a ghost as a manifestation of the energy of a former being.

It should be noted that ghosts are not a scientific subject, but a **supernatural belief**.

In the eye of the beholder

Ghosts seem to come in many forms. Some ghosts appear as solid or transparent human figures. Others have a glowing, humanlike shape or a dark shadowy appearance. Orbs, blobs of light and misty, cloudlike forms have also been explained as ghosts.

Sometimes you don't see a ghost, but you sense it. It is common to experience a cold spot or breeze in the presence of a ghost. Sometimes a ghost is associated with a particular smell. The sensations of being touched, scratched, pushed or choked have been reported. Having one's hair or clothing pulled by an unseen force may also indicate that a spirit is trying to communicate. Feeling ill, nauseous or breathless has been attributed to ghostly encounters. Sometimes a ghost will make itself known through sounds: You might hear strange voices, crying, growling, moaning or bangs and squeaks of doors opening and closing.

Reasons why

There are many reasons why a spirit might not move to the next world. Perhaps the ghost doesn't realize that it is dead, or it has unfinished business in this world. Sometimes a ghost wants to offer guidance or a warning to a loved one.

SOURCES: World Book Encyclopedia, World Book Inc.; <http://www.history.com>; <http://www.ancient.eu/ghost>; <http://web.randi.org>; <http://www.angelsghosts.com>

Ghost sightings through the ages

Most cultures in the ancient world believed in an afterlife governed by the gods. Only on rare occasions was a spirit able to cross repeatedly between the realms of life and death. Ghosts often returned to the world of living seeking retribution for an improper burial or lack of a grave. In general, seeing a ghost was never a good thing, but sometimes, if the ghost was a relative and came in a dream, it could be considered beneficial.

The ancient Egyptians built elaborate tombs for the dead. They believed that a person's spirit would live on in its tomb. Food and other personal items were entombed with the body. In case something happened to the body, a statue was also included, providing a second body for the spirit to inhabit if needed.

The ancient Roman Pliny the Younger recorded one of the earliest ghost stories. He wrote that a house in Athens was being haunted by an old man with a long beard who wandered the halls and rattled chains.

In ancient Mesoamerica, the dead were remembered in celebration. Over the centuries, these early rituals became what is known today as The Day of the Dead (*El Día de los Muertos*).

One of the earliest poltergeist hauntings was recorded in A.D. 856 and took place at a small farmhouse in Germany. The family living there was tormented by stones flying through the air and fires erupting for no apparent reason.

The stereotypical image of a ghost in a white sheet is probably inspired by the tradition of placing a burial cloth around a dead body.



Types of ghosts

The **poltergeist** is a noisy, troublesome and disruptive entity. While most ghosts are considered harmless, the poltergeist is capable of moving objects and can throw something at you or even shove or push you.

An **intelligent haunting** might interact with people. These spirits seem to have an earthly purpose. They might want to say goodbye or tell someone that they are loved.

Residual hauntings are like a video replaying over and over again. This kind of spirit tends to repeat an action in a place that was important to the ghost in life.

Shadow people are said to be mobile black masses that emit an evil presence.

An **orb** is a ball of light that may be the essence of a ghost. Orbs are rarely observed with the naked eye but are often seen in photographs. They are often explained away as nothing more than light reflections and dust particles.

Did you know?

A **violent** or **emotional** death may trap the spirit in the world of the living.

Animals are said to be highly sensitive to the presence of spirits and paranormal energy.

Old **hospitals**, **asylums** and **prisons** are often haunted, possibly because they harbor painful emotional residue.

Most of what we believe about ghosts comes from **popular culture** like books, TV shows and movies.

A ghost that is seen by more than one person is known as a **collective apparition**.

Ectoplasm is a substance that is left behind by a ghost. It can vary in color, amount and texture. It is usually a liquid and has a distinct smell.

When a ghost is present, there is usually a **cold spot** or a shift in the **magnetic field**.

Ghosts tend to drain the batteries of any equipment being used on a ghost hunt.

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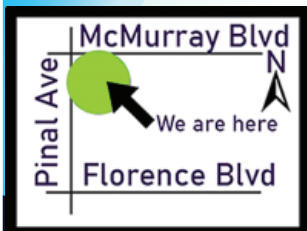
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