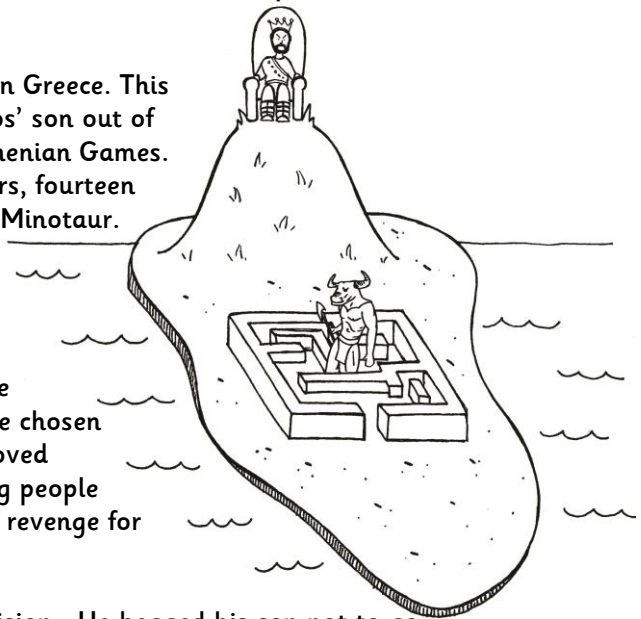


Theseus and the Minotaur

A long time ago, the island of Crete was ruled by a king called Minos. On this island too lived a terrifying monster, which was half-man and half bull, called the Minotaur. He lived in a complicated maze called a labyrinth.

King Minos disliked the people of Athens, which was a city in Greece. This was because many years ago, the Athenians had killed Minos' son out of jealousy because the prince had won lots of prizes at the Athenian Games. This made Minos furious. He demanded that every nine years, fourteen young Athenians would enter the maze and be killed by the Minotaur. If the Athenians failed to send these young people, Minos would go to war against them.

Another nine years had passed and it was time for the Athenians to send another fourteen boys and girls. This time the King of Athens' own son Theseus wanted to be one of the chosen ones. Theseus was a brave and confident young man who loved adventure. He really wanted to be one of the fourteen young people sent to Crete because he wanted to destroy the Minotaur in revenge for what King Minos was doing to the young Athenians.



The King of Athens, Aegeus, was very upset by Theseus' decision. He begged his son not to go. "No Theseus! Do not do this. You will be killed. Do not make the journey to Crete!"

But Theseus ignored his father. He told Aegeus with determination in his voice, "I know I can slay this monster. Do not worry. I shall win! When I return, I shall make sure the sail of the boat is white to show I have won and have returned home victorious."

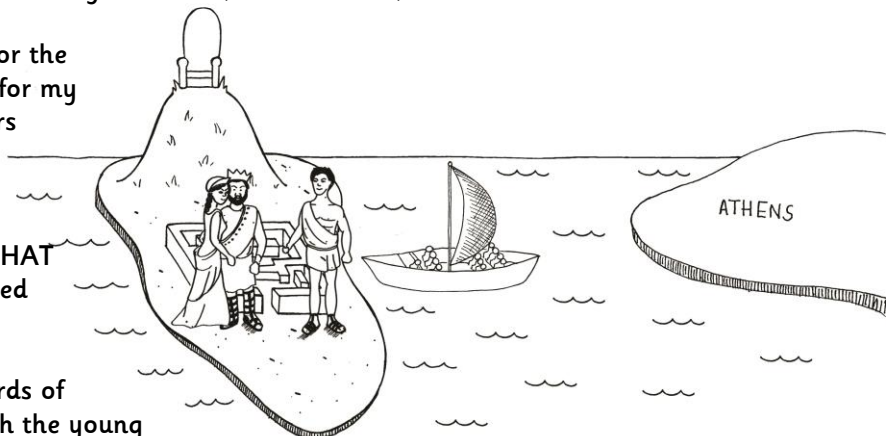
So, the day came and Theseus set sail with the thirteen other young Athenians. They raised a black sail to remember the young Athenians who had died before them at the hands of the Minotaur.

The journey was dramatic and the crew suffered terribly. Eventually they arrived in Crete where they were met by King Minos. With him was his daughter Ariadne. As the Athenians disembarked their ship, Minos immediately recognised Theseus.

"What are you doing here? The son of the King of Athens, a man I hate," Minos demanded.

"I have come to kill the Minotaur. You or the monster do not frighten me. I am here for my people who have suffered for many years because of what you demand!" declared Theseus boldly.

"HOW DARE YOU SAY THIS AFTER WHAT YOUR PEOPLE DID TO MY SON!" roared King Minos.



Ariadne, on hearing the courageous words of Theseus, fell head over heels in love with the young Athenian. Thinking to herself, she promised she would help him to kill the monster.

That night, Ariadne went to Theseus who was locked up in her father's prison in the palace. "Theseus. My name is Ariadne. I am the daughter of King Minos. Hearing your brave words today, I can see you are loyal to your people and I want to help you."

She gave Theseus a sword and a ball of golden thread. "Tie the thread to the maze's entrance and unwind the string as you travel through the maze. Be careful. The labyrinth has many twists and turns and is it dark and scary. When you eventually encounter the Minotaur, slay him with this sword and then follow the thread to guide you back out!"

Theseus was thankful for Ariadne's kindness and promised that he would marry her if he was victorious.

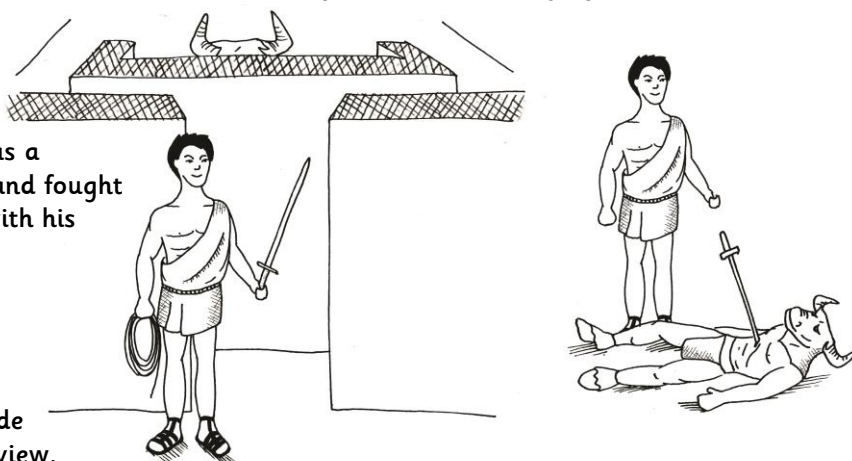
The very next day, Theseus, having listened to Ariadne's advice, took the sword and thread and went to the labyrinth. He entered the maze with the other young Athenians who were very nervous. Calmly, he followed Ariadne's instructions and tied the thread to the main door and told his friends to stay there.

Theseus then travelled through the dark, complicated maze in his quest to find the Minotaur, trailing the thread along as he went. As he got further in, he could hear the roars and growls of the terrifying beast.

Suddenly, he came face to face with the frightening monster. It was strong and fearsome; a mighty beast. He roared with anger and charged at Theseus. It was a difficult battle, the Minotaur was vicious and fought hard but Theseus would not give in and with his sword, he finally killed the monster.

Dead. Theseus had done it!

Exhausted but delighted, Theseus dashed through the maze, using the thread to guide him back to his friends. As he came into view, the Athenians gasped at their blood-soaked friend but ran to him, giving him hugs of celebration.



"We must leave at once," commanded Theseus, "before King Minos finds out what I have done."

So without a moment's thought, Theseus grabbed proud Ariadne's hand and with the other Athenians running behind them, went to the island's shore and boarded their boat, leaving Crete forever.

After a few days of travel, Theseus decided that rest was required so the boat docked at an island. The crew relaxed and Ariadne was delighted to be with her love. She had never been happier. However, her dreams were soon crushed. Theseus realised that he did not truly love her and decided to leave her on the island and return home to Athens. Ariadne was heartbroken.

The final journey however was full of excitement and happiness. The Athenians had defeated the Minotaur.

Unfortunately, in the excitement of the victory, Theseus forgot one very important thing as the ship made its final voyage towards Athens – to change the sail to white! As the ship came into view, King Aegeus saw the black sail and thought his son had been killed by the Minotaur.

"Theseus! My son!" cried Aegeus. So distraught was the king on seeing the doomed black sail, he threw himself off the rocks into the sea and to his death.

On landing, Theseus was told of this terrible tragedy. He wailed with unhappiness, realising the huge mistake he had made.

And so it was with sadness in his heart, that Theseus became the next King of Athens.

Jenny Turner

Theseus and the Minotaur

1. Why does King Minos not like the people of Athens? (AF2)
2. What adjectives are used to describe Theseus? Can you think of any of your own? (AF4/AF3)
3. Why does Theseus want to go to Crete? (AF2)
4. Why do you think Aegeus is upset? (AF3)
5. Why is a black sail raised at the beginning of the journey? (AF2)
6. Describe the journey to Crete in your own words. (AF3)
7. What does “disembarked” mean? (AF4)
8. Why are some of King Minos’ words in capital letters? (AF5)
9. In your own words, what does Ariadne think of Theseus? (AF3)
10. How might Theseus be feeling as he travels through the maze? (AF3)
11. Why do you think the author writes a very short paragraph that only says, “Dead. Theseus had done it!”? (AF5)
12. Why would Ariadne be proud of Theseus as they escape from the island? (AF3)
13. What huge mistake does Theseus make? How do you think he feels at the end of the story? (AF2/AF6)

Theseus and the Minotaur

1. Why does King Minos not like the people of Athens? (AF2) **They had killed his son because the prince had won lots of prizes at the Athenian Games and they were jealous.**
2. What adjectives are used to describe Theseus? Can you think of any of your own? (AF4/AF3) **Brave, confident, adventurous, young. Determined, loyal, heroic, daring, fearless.**
3. Why does Theseus want to go to Crete? (AF2) **To avenge the deaths of previous young Athenians who had been killed by the Minotaur.**
4. Why do you think Aegeus is upset? (AF3) **He does not want his precious son, the next King of Athens, to venture on this journey and be killed by the Minotaur.**
5. Why is a black sail raised at the beginning of the journey? (AF2) **It is raised as a sign of respect, in memory of those young Athenians who had previously gone to their death at the hands of the Minotaur.**
6. Describe the journey to Crete in your own words. (AF3) **It is unpleasant and scary. There are storms and the journey is dangerous. The crew who are already suffering with nerves and fear are only made to feel worse.**
7. What does “disembarked” mean? (AF4) **To get off/alight from a ship.**
8. Why are some of King Minos’ words in capital letters? (AF5) **To make it clear that King Minos is shouting the words very loudly in anger.**
9. In your own words, what does Ariadne think of Theseus? (AF3) **She admires him for his bravery and courage. She completely falls in love with him and is so devoted to him she decides she will go against her own father and help Theseus kill the Minotaur.**
10. How might Theseus be feeling as he travels through the maze? (AF3) **Anxious and tense although perhaps a nervous excitement too.**
11. Why do you think the author writes a very short paragraph that only says, “Dead. Theseus had done it!”? (AF5) **To emphasis the importance of what Theseus has achieved.**
12. Why would Ariadne be proud of Theseus as they escape from the island? (AF3) **She has complete admiration for the bravery and skill Theseus has shown in killing such a terrifying beast.**
13. What huge mistake does Theseus make? How do you think he feels at the end of the story? (AF2/AF6) **He forgets to change the sail from black to white and so his father thinks he has been killed by the Minotaur and so jumps off the rocks because he is so upset. Theseus would have been deeply upset and felt guilty that he is the cause of his father’s death, despite his great victory in Crete.**