

The Story of Theseus

and the Minotaur

King Minos was the king of Crete. He was angry and enjoyed attacking the city of Athens when they weren't expecting it. King Aegeus was the king of Athens. He wanted to stop the attacks so he struck a deal with Minos. In return for peace, Aegeus would send over seven girls and seven boys to be offered to King Minos's terrifying beast – the Minotaur.



Theseus was fed up. Minos has been telling Athens what to do for 9 years. Tomorrow, 14 more children would be shipped off to meet the Minotaur. He went over the plan in his head and knocked on the door of his father's study.

Before Aegeus could even stand up to meet his son, Theseus had started talking. "This deal with Minos has gone on for too long. Families are terrified that their children will be picked next. We should be protecting our people – not feeding them to the Minotaur! When the boat comes tomorrow, I am going to take the place of one of the boys. Then, I will defeat the Minotaur and we can live in peace," Theseus declared.

Aegeus was shocked. He knew that his son was strong and brave but the Minotaur was huge and fierce. In fact, it was so fierce that it had to be locked inside a complex maze. Aegeus begged Theseus to find another way but he had already made up his mind. Eventually, Aegeus had to agree.



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"I will not be happy until I know that you are safe," he told Theseus. "The moment that I can see your ship, I want to know that you have won. If you have defeated the beast, replace your ship's black sails with white ones. Then, I will know that you are coming home safely." Theseus nodded and promised his father that his sails would be white.

Later that day, Theseus climbed into the ship alongside 13 shivering children. When the boat arrived in Crete, they were met by Minos and his daughter, Ariadne. As Minos led the children to the palace, Ariadne pulled Theseus to one side. She explained that she wanted to escape from her father and his unfair laws. As a result, she told Theseus that she would help him if he promised to take her away from Crete.

Agreeing to help, Theseus and Ariadne went to see Daedalus. He had invented the labyrinth that the Minotaur was being kept in. Wanting to be a hero, Daedalus agreed to help. Later that night, the three met at the entrance to the labyrinth.



Holding out a ball of string, Daedalus explained his plan. "This labyrinth has been designed to be so complicated that I can't even escape it," he said. "However, if you unravel this string behind you, you will be able to use it to find the entrance again. Ariadne and I will stay here to make sure that nobody else comes in. Good luck."

With that, the doors to the labyrinth closed and Theseus set off to find the Minotaur. Leaving the string behind him, he searched through the narrow passages until he was face to face with the beast at last. The Minotaur was stronger but Theseus was quicker and smarter. After a long battle, Theseus emerged victorious. The Minotaur had been defeated.

Theseus immediately made his way to the ship with Ariadne. He had done it! No more children would ever have to meet the Minotaur. Feeling tired but happy, Theseus hoisted the black sails of his ship and headed for home, forgetting all about the promise that he had made to his father.



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Questions

1. Each year, how many girls were offered to the Minotaur? Tick one.

- ☐ 3
☐ 7
☐ 5
☐ 1

2. Number the events from 1–4 to show the order that they occurred.

- ☐ Theseus and Ariadne asked Daedalus for help.
☐ Theseus defeated the Minotaur.
☐ Theseus and the children set sail for Crete.
☐ Aegeus begged Theseus not to go.

3. Look at the paragraph beginning **Before Aegeus could even...**

Find and copy one word which means the same as 'beat'.

4. Who gave Theseus the ball of string?

5. Fill in the missing words.

On the way back from Crete, Theseus forgot to change his _____-coloured sails to
_____-coloured sails.

6. Imagine that you are Theseus about to fight the Minotaur.

Describe how you feel.

7. What do you think happened when Theseus arrived home? Explain your answer.

8. Describe King Minos's character using the text to help you.

Answers

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Find and copy one word which means the same as 'beat'.

defeat

4. Who gave Theseus the ball of string?

Daedalus gave Theseus the ball of string.

5. Fill in the missing words.

On the way back from Crete, Theseus forgot to change his **black**-coloured sails to **white**-coloured sails.

6. Imagine that you are Theseus about to fight the Minotaur.

Describe how you feel.

Pupils' own responses, such as: I am terrified because this beast is so vicious that it has to be locked away inside a huge maze. I hope that I am successful and that the string works. If it doesn't, I could be trapped here forever.

7. What do you think happened when Theseus arrived home? Explain your answer.

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that Theseus would have gone straight to his father who would be surprised to discover that Theseus had been successful. This is because he forgot to change the sails from black to white.

8. Describe King Minos's character using the text to help you.

Pupils' own responses, such as: King Minos is unfair because in the text, it says Ariadne '...wanted to escape from her father and his unfair laws.' He is also not a very nice person because it says that he enjoyed attacking Athens.

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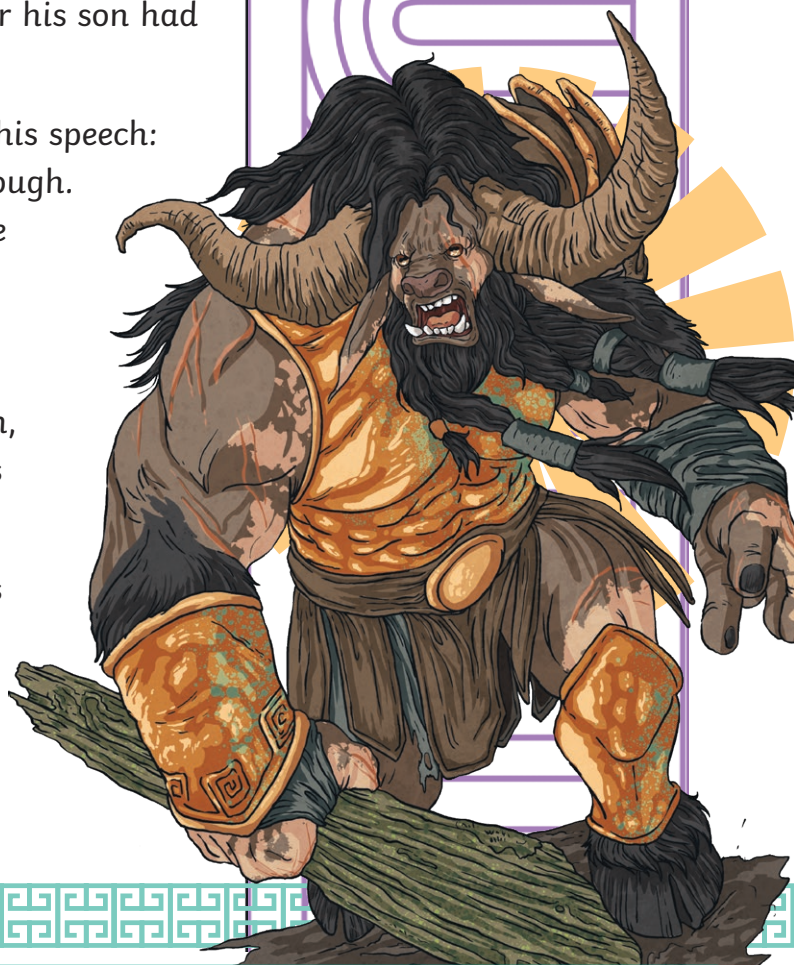
King Minos of Crete, who believed that Athens was responsible for the loss of his son, would periodically attack the city. Wanting to prevent the attacks, the King of Athens, Aegeus, struck a deal with King Minos. Each year, he would send over seven Athenian boys and seven Athenian girls as an offering to King Minos's bloodthirsty beast – the Minotaur. In return, Minos would leave Athens alone.



Hands shaking, Theseus walked towards the door and went over the speech in his head. The days of Minos telling Athens what to do had gone on for long enough; it was time to take a stand. Hesitantly, he knocked. Aegeus called him inside and looked up proudly at the tall, muscular warrior his son had become.

Before Aegeus could greet him, Theseus began his speech: "This pact with Minos has gone on for long enough. Families are terrified that their children will be picked next. It's no way to live! We should be protecting our people – not offering them to a beast! Tomorrow, when the boat comes, I am going to take the place of one of the boys. Then, I will slay the Minotaur and put an end to this nightmare," he declared.

Aegeus was shocked. He knew that his son was strong but the Minotaur was so fierce that it had to be guarded deep within a complex maze. Aegeus pleaded with Theseus to find another way but he had already made up his mind. Eventually, Aegeus had to admit defeat.



"I will not rest until I know that you are safe," he told Theseus. "The moment that your ship crosses the horizon, I want to know that you have won. If you are successful, replace your ship's black sails with white ones. Then, I will know that you are coming home safely. I shall watch the sea from now until the moment I see those sails heading home." Theseus nodded and promised that his sails would be white.

Later that day, Theseus climbed into the ship alongside 13 panic-stricken children. The journey to Crete was smooth and, before long, they had arrived. When the boat pulled up to the shore, they were greeted by Minos and his daughter, Ariadne. As Minos led the children to the palace to be prepared for the Minotaur, Ariadne pulled Theseus to one side. Desperate to escape from her father's anger, she told Theseus that she would help him if he promised to take her away from Crete.

Agreeing to help, Theseus and Ariadne approached Daedalus - the inventor of the labyrinth that the Minotaur was being kept in. Seeking a chance to be a hero, Daedalus agreed to help. Later that night, the three met at the entrance to the labyrinth.



Revealing a ball of string, Daedalus explained his plan. "This labyrinth has been designed to be so complicated that I can't even escape it," he said. "However, if you trail this string behind you, you will be able to use it to retrace your steps. Ariadne and I will stay here to secure it and ensure that nobody else enters. Good luck."

With that, the doors to the labyrinth closed and Theseus set off to find the Minotaur. Trailing the string behind him, he searched through the narrow, dim passages until, at last, he was face to face with the beast. The Minotaur was stronger but Theseus was quicker and smarter. After a mighty battle, Theseus emerged victorious: the Minotaur had been defeated.

Theseus immediately made his way to the shore with Ariadne. He had done it! No more children would ever have to meet the Minotaur. At last, Athens had been freed from Minos's deal. Feeling tired but content, Theseus hoisted the black sails of his ship and headed for home, forgetting all about the promise that he had made to his father.



Questions

1. Which word best describes Theseus's journey to Crete? Tick one.

- ☐ rough
- ☐ gentle
- ☐ unsettled
- ☐ rocky

2. Number the events from 1–4 to show the order that they occurred.

- ☐ Minos began attacking the city of Athens.
- ☐ Theseus promised to take Ariadne away from Crete.
- ☐ Theseus set sail for Athens.
- ☐ Aegeus struck a deal with Minos.

3. Look at the paragraph beginning **Aegeus was shocked**.

Find and copy one word or phrase which shows that Aegeus had given up.

4. Why did Ariadne help Theseus?

5. Name one way in which Theseus was better than the Minotaur.

6. Summarise Theseus's plan using 20 words or fewer.

7. Compare the characters of Theseus and Aegeus.

How are the two different?

8. ... **forgetting all about the promise that he had made to his father.**

Why do you think that the author has chosen to end the story like this? Explain your answer.

9. Do you think that Theseus was right to go and slay the Minotaur? Explain your answer fully.

Answers

1. Which word best describes Theseus's journey to Crete? Tick one.

- ☐ rough
- ☒ **gentle**
- ☐ unsettled
- ☐ rocky

2. Number the events from 1–4 to show the order that they occurred.

- 1** Minos began attacking the city of Athens.
- 3** Theseus promised to take Ariadne away from Crete.
- 4** Theseus set sail for Athens.
- 2** Aegeus struck a deal with Minos.

3. Look at the paragraph beginning **Aegeus was shocked**.

Find and copy one word or phrase which shows that Aegeus had given up.

Aegeus had to admit defeat.

4. Why did Ariadne help Theseus?

Ariadne helped Theseus because she wanted him to take her away from Crete.

5. Name one way in which Theseus was better than the Minotaur.

Accept either Theseus was quicker than the Minotaur or Theseus was smarter than the Minotaur.

6. Summarise Theseus's plan using 20 words or fewer.

Pupils' own responses, such as: Theseus planned on replacing one of the seven boys so that he could go to Crete and defeat the Minotaur.

7. Compare the characters of Theseus and Aegeus.

How are the two different?

Pupils' own responses, such as: Theseus is brave but Aegeus is a coward. I think this because Aegeus chose to make a deal with King Minos that put children in danger whereas Theseus chose to put his own life in danger to save those children.

8. ... **forgetting all about the promise that he had made to his father.**

Why do you think that the author has chosen to end the story like this? Explain your answer.

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that the author has chosen to end the story like this to make you wonder what happened next. This is because Theseus had promised that he would display white sails if he had been successful but he forgot about this and sailed with black sails instead.

9. Do you think that Theseus was right to go and slay the Minotaur? Explain your answer fully.

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that Theseus was right to slay the Minotaur because it stopped defenceless children from getting hurt. It wasn't fair for the kings to make a deal like that and Theseus stopped it from happening any more.

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After the loss of his son, King Minos of Crete waged war against Athens. Periodically, he would use his large army to storm the city and wreak havoc. Wanting to prevent the attacks, King Aegeus of Athens eventually struck a deal with King Minos. Each year, he would send over seven Athenian boys and seven Athenian girls as an offering to King Minos's bloodthirsty beast – the Minotaur. In return, Minos would cease the attacks.

Theseus was ready: he had rehearsed the lines in his head a thousand times. He could almost feel the fate of Athens and the fate of defenceless children in his hands. The tyranny of Minos had gone on for long enough; it was time to take a stand. Gingerly, he knocked on the door of his father's study. Aegeus called him inside and looked up at the tall, muscular warrior his son had become. To say that he was proud of Theseus would have been an understatement.

Before Aegeus could greet him, Theseus began his speech: "This pact with Minos has gone on for long enough. Families are terrified that their children will be picked next. It's no way to live! We should be protecting our people – not sending them off like lambs to the slaughter! Tomorrow, when the boat comes, I will take the place of one of the boys. Then, I will slay the Minotaur and put an end to this living nightmare," he declared.

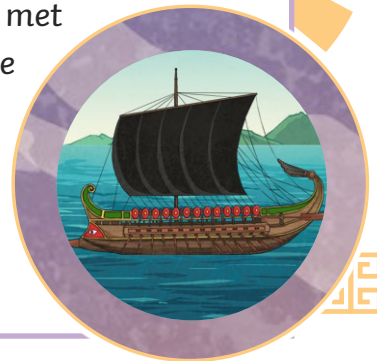
Aegeus was aghast. He knew that his son was a fierce protector but to fight the Minotaur – a beast so fierce that it had to be guarded deep within a complex labyrinth – this was something else. Aegeus pleaded with Theseus to find another way; he couldn't bear to think of his son willingly throwing himself at such danger. Eventually, when his arguments had run dry, Aegeus relented.



"I will await the news of your success with bated breath," he told Theseus. "The moment that your ship materialises on the horizon, I want to know that you have won. Should you have been successful, replace your ship's black sails with white ones. I shall watch the sea from now until the moment I see those sails heading home." Theseus nodded and vowed that his sails would be white.

Later that day, the two embraced before Theseus climbed into the ship alongside 13 panic-stricken children. The journey to Crete was a smooth one and, before long, they had arrived. When the boat pulled up to the shore, they were met by Minos and his daughter, Ariadne. As Minos led the children to the palace to be cleaned and prepared, Ariadne pulled Theseus to one side. Desperate to escape from the world that her father had built, she offered to aid him in his quest in exchange for safe passage to Athens.

After promising her safe passage away from Crete, Theseus and Ariadne approached Daedalus – the inventor of the complex labyrinth which contained the Minotaur. Desperate to be a part of the heroic feat, Daedalus agreed to help. Later that night, the three met at the entrance to the labyrinth.



Revealing a ball of tightly wound string, Daedalus explained his plan. "This labyrinth has been designed to be so complex that not even I can escape it," he said. "However, should you trail this string behind you, you will be able to retrace your steps. Ariadne and I will stay here to ensure that it stays secure and that nobody else enters. Good luck."

With that, the doors to the labyrinth slammed shut and Theseus set off to find the Minotaur. String trailing behind him, he searched the many lamp-lit passages until, at last, he was face to face with the beast. The Minotaur was stronger but Theseus was quicker and, in the low light of the maze, this proved to be more beneficial. After a mighty battle, Theseus emerged victorious: the Minotaur had been defeated.

Wanting to put as much distance between himself and King Minos as possible, Theseus made his way to shore with Ariadne. He had done it! No more children would have to cower in fear at the idea of meeting the Minotaur. At last, Athens had been freed from Minos's grasp. Tired from the fight and feeling the contentment of a job well done, Theseus hoisted the black sails of his ship and headed for home, forgetting all about the promise that he had made to his father.

Questions

1. Who did Theseus promise to take away from Crete? Tick one.

- ☐ King Minos
- ☐ King Aegeus
- ☐ Ariadne
- ☐ Daedalus

2. Draw **four** lines and complete each sentence.

King Minos...	was worried about what their father might say.
Ariadne...	wanted to be a hero.
Daedalus...	was angry at the loss of their son.
Theseus...	was desperate to escape from their father.

3. Why did Aegeus eventually give in to Theseus?

4. ... **forgetting all about the promise that he had made to his father.**

What promise had Theseus made?

5. Look at the paragraph beginning "**I will await the news...**"

Find and copy one word which means the same as 'appears'.

6. Argue that Theseus was foolish to defeat the Minotaur.

7. Imagine that you are Aegeus watching Theseus's ship appear over the horizon. Describe how you feel using the text to support your answer.

8. Using 25 words or fewer, write a suitable next sentence for the text.

9. Do you think that Aegeus was right to strike a deal with Minos? Tick one.

- ☐ yes
☐ no

Fully explain your answer.

10. Tick one box in each row to show whether each statement is **true** or **false**.

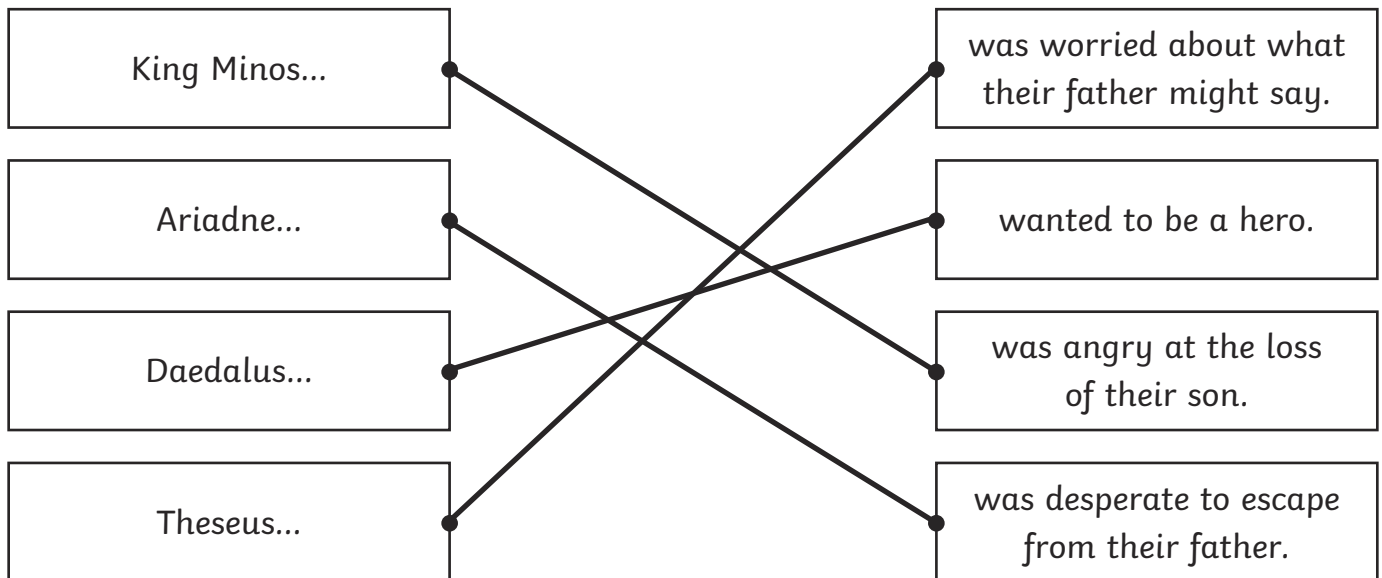
	True	False
Theseus hoisted the white sails of his ship for the journey home.		
Daedalus gave Theseus a ball of string so that he could retrace his steps in the labyrinth.		
The journey to Crete was treacherous.		
King Minos waged war with Athens after the loss of his son.		
Theseus sailed with 12 other boys and girls.		

Answers

1. Who did Theseus promise to take away from Crete? Tick one.

- ☐ King Minos
- ☐ King Aegeus
- ☒ Ariadne
- ☐ Daedalus

2. Draw **four** lines and complete each sentence.



3. Why did Aegeus eventually give in to Theseus?

Aegeus eventually gave in to Theseus because his arguments had run dry.

4. ... **forgetting all about the promise that he had made to his father.**

What promise had Theseus made?

Theseus had promised to change his sails to white if he was successful.

5. Look at the paragraph beginning "**I will await the news...**"

Find and copy one word which means the same as 'appears'.

materialises

6. Argue that Theseus was foolish to defeat the Minotaur.

Pupils' own responses, such as: Theseus was foolish to defeat the Minotaur because now King Minos is likely to start waging war against Athens again. Defeating the Minotaur has probably made Minos angrier and more likely to hurt innocent citizens.

7. Imagine that you are Aegeus watching Theseus's ship appear over the horizon. Describe how you feel using the text to support your answer.

Pupils' own responses, such as: I feel so sad. When the ship came over the horizon, I was excited but then I saw that the sails were black and now I am devastated because this means that Theseus has been defeated by the Minotaur.

8. Using 25 words or fewer, write a suitable next sentence for the text.

Pupils' own responses, such as: Aegeus stood on the cliff and peered at the boat in the distance; a tear rolled down his face as he recognised the black sails.

9. Do you think that Aegeus was right to strike a deal with Minos? Tick one.

Accept either a 'yes' or a 'no' response provided that a full explanation is given below.

Fully explain your answer.

Pupils' own responses, such as: Yes, I think that Aegeus was right to strike a deal with Minos because he was able to prevent lots of people from being injured when the city was being stormed.

10. Tick one box in each row to show whether each statement is **true** or **false**.

	True	False
Theseus hoisted the white sails of his ship for the journey home.		✓
Daedalus gave Theseus a ball of string so that he could retrace his steps in the labyrinth.	✓	
The journey to Crete was treacherous.		✓
King Minos waged war with Athens after the loss of his son.	✓	
Theseus sailed with 12 other boys and girls.		✓

Award 2 marks for all five correct.

Award 1 mark for four correct.