

Daedalus and Icarus

On the island of Crete there lived a Minotaur, a ferocious creature that was half man and half bull. The people of the island of Crete were terrified of the Minotaur; it loved nothing more than to feast on human flesh. They begged their ruler, King Minos, to order that the creature be killed, but the King decided against this. Instead, he constructed a plan to imprison the Minotaur. To die at the hands of the Minotaur would be one of the most terrible deaths imaginable, and King Minos believed that his enemies deserved to meet such a fate. He enlisted the help of Daedalus, a talented architect, inventor and craftsman, and asked him to build a labyrinth – a maze of passages that would be so complex that it would be virtually impossible for anyone (or anything) to ever find a way out.

Daedalus did as King Minos requested and then, following the King's instructions, he enticed the Minotaur into the labyrinth by leaving a huge pile of fresh meat in its centre. Once the Minotaur was in the labyrinth the creature was unable to escape. King Minos was delighted. Anyone who was sent to the labyrinth would be trapped and eventually they would be found by the Minotaur who would eat them alive. Now he had the perfect punishment for his enemies! Deciding he had no further use for Daedalus, the King threw him into the labyrinth along with his son Icarus. The King expected that the inventor and his son would be found by the Minotaur and eaten. Instead, unknown to the king, they escaped. After all, Daedalus had built the labyrinth and knew his way around!

Once out of the labyrinth Daedalus and Icarus carefully made their way to the shore of the island and pondered on what to do next. The trees and bushes surrounding the beach would provide an ideal sanctuary for the time being. They could possibly survive for months or years without being seen. But who would want to live like that – hiding away hoping they would not be captured? They needed to find a way to leave the island, but how? They could not swim, the nearest land was too far away, and they would never make it. They could not leave by ship; all vessels were controlled by King Minos. Daedalus stared up at the sky and the seagulls that circled overhead. If only he was as free as a bird. If only he and his son could just fly away ... and then he had an idea which was both brilliant and ambitious. He would build a pair of wings! It would take some time, days, weeks even, but he would build a pair of wings for his son and himself –



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exactly the same as the wings of a seagull but on a much larger scale.

Scattered around the beach were seagull feathers. Daedalus instructed his son to collect as many as he could find. He worked carefully to build the wings, studying the exact angle and shape of the seagulls and examining how the birds flew. At last, six weeks after they had escaped from the labyrinth, the wings were ready.

‘With these wings you will fly like a bird,’ Daedalus told his son, ‘but be careful. Make sure you do not fly too close to the Sun. If you do, the wax that holds the feathers together will melt.’

Icarus nodded quickly. In truth he was barely listening. Hiding on the shore of the island of Crete had been boring. He had spent weeks doing nothing more exciting with his days than collecting feathers and catching fish for his father and himself to eat. And now at last they had the chance to escape. He shuffled impatiently as his father attached the wings to his arms, then helped his father to position his own wings.

‘We are ready,’ his father told him, ‘follow me!’

Daedalus ran forwards towards the ocean, sweeping his arms up and down as he did so. With a whoosh he zoomed forward, rising into the air. Icarus copied his father; suddenly he found his feet were no longer on the ground...he was in the air... he was flying! He couldn’t believe it! As he looked down at the sea

below, his heart fluttered with excitement. It was as though his body was weightless. The wind whistled against his ears. He felt like a bird! Higher and higher, faster and faster he flew!

Suddenly, Icarus realized he could hardly see his father. He had flown so high his father resembled a small dot below him. At the same time he noticed a feather drift past and float downwards towards the sea. And then another ... and then another. Too late Icarus realized his wings were melting. He had flown too close to the Sun. With every desperate swoop of his arms, more feathers fell and soon his arms were almost bare. Down and down and down went Icarus...

‘Father!’ he shouted before falling with a heavy splash into the sea. His few remaining feathers floated on the surface of the water as he sank.

Daedalus could only watch helplessly and his heart felt as heavy as a stone as he flew onwards, leaving his son behind.



Teacher's notes: Daedalus and Icarus

Background Information

The story of Daedalus and Icarus is one of the most well-known Greek Myths. The Ancient Greeks believed that Daedalus was an exceptionally skilled craftsman who was responsible for inventing several carpentry tools (including the saw, the axe and the drill). In most versions of this story, Daedalus arrives safely in Sicily and mourns the loss of his child. In memory of his son, he names the spot where Icarus plunged to his death the Icarian Sea.

Speaking and Listening Activity

After reading the story, ask pupils to think of a range of questions they would like to ask Daedalus. Encourage them to think of open questions which would require detailed answers, for example questions beginning with 'How did you feel when ...?' 'Why did you....?' They could also think about how they could use the instruction 'Tell me more about ...'. Following this, the children could 'hot seat' the character of Daedalus. This would involve the teacher or a pupil pretending to be Daedalus whilst the class/group asks the character questions.

Follow-up Activities

- ◆ Another Greek myth details how the Minotaur mentioned at the beginning of the story was eventually defeated. Ask the children to find out about the story of Theseus and the Minotaur. Encourage them to retell the story.
- ◆ The story of The Flight of Icarus has been the subject of many paintings. Show the children examples of some of this art work (easily found on the Internet). Ask the children to sketch and paint their own picture inspired by the story.
- ◆ People have always been fascinated with flying. Ask the children to find out about the history of flight.

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Reading Task **A** True or False?

1. Daedalus was an inventor.
True / False
2. King Minos wanted to kill the Minotaur.
True / False
3. It would be easy to find your way out of a labyrinth.
True / False
4. Icarus decided to make some wings.
True / False
5. The wings were made from chicken feathers.
True / False
6. It took two hours to build the wings.
True / False
7. Icarus flew too close to the Sun.
True / False
8. The story has a happy ending.
True / False

Reading Task **B** Use information from the text in the story to sketch a picture of either the Labyrinth or the hiding place of Deaedalus and Icarus.

Describe your settings. _____

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Reading Task C

Put the events in the story in the correct order by numbering them 1–6.

- Icarus flew too close to the Sun.
- Daedalus made a labyrinth.
- Daedalus and Icarus escaped from the labyrinth.
- King Minos threw Daedalus and his son into the labyrinth.
- Daedalus made some wings.
- Daedalus and Icarus flew away.

Reading Task D

State whether you agree or disagree and find evidence from the text to support your opinion.

1. King Minos was cruel.

4. Daedalus and Icarus should have remained on the island after escaping from the labyrinth.

2. Daedalus was talented.

5. Daedalus is responsible for his son's death.

3. Icarus was foolish.

6. This is a true story.
