

The Story of Icarus

King Minos was intrigued. He peered out of the window and watched as the boat drew closer. Ordinarily, he paid no attention to those entering or leaving Crete but the messenger had forewarned him: this man had been exiled from Athens yet all reports described him as a genius. It was rumoured that he had even fooled Hercules with his inventions. An idea sparked in the King's mind; maybe this man was the answer to all of his problems.



A short while after Daedalus had landed on the island of Crete, he was kneeling at the base of a large throne and vowing to become the King's master craftsman. "I require your skills," demanded the revered King. "There is a Minotaur who runs rampant around here. Despite our best efforts, we have been unable to contain it. I require you to build a maze that it will be unable to escape from."



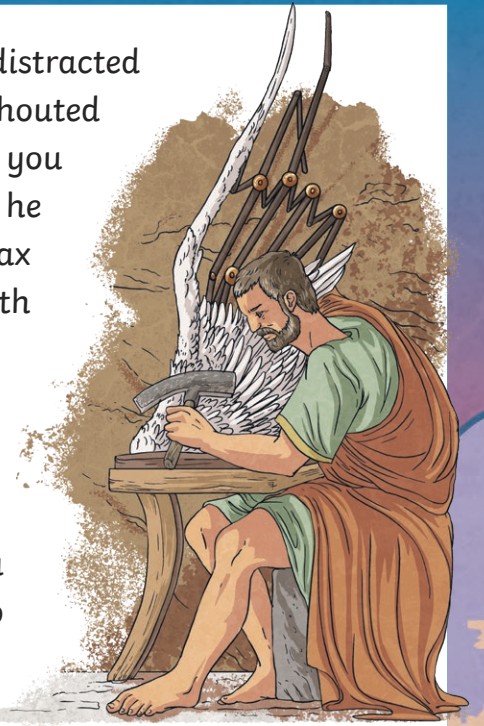
Pleased that his reputation as a skilled inventor had followed him, Daedalus set to work. Aided by his son, Icarus, the pair spent the next few months constructing an incredible and intricate labyrinth. When the time of its completion arrived, the Minotaur was captured and locked away. The people of Crete rejoiced and saw Daedalus and Icarus as heroes.



One day, Daedalus was approached by a man named Theseus. He explained to Daedalus that he planned to slay the Minotaur and needed his help to navigate the enormous maze. Unable to ignore the idea that this was a truly heroic feat which would cement his name firmly into Crete's history, Daedalus agreed. Joined by King Minos's daughter, the three completed their mission and escaped the labyrinth. However, instead of waiting to receive praise and glory, Theseus fled back to Athens with King Minos's daughter beside him. Daedalus was surprised by the hero's sudden departure and began to consider whether his actions were not heroic after all.

Less than an hour had passed before the King, furious about his lost daughter, had locked Daedalus and Icarus within the labyrinth. Without having plotted his route this time, Daedalus knew that there was no way out. Days went past and Daedalus crafted plot after plot. Icarus began to test each wall to see if they could be scaled but it was no use; the labyrinth had been too well designed and escape was surely impossible.

One day, as he was praying to the gods, Daedalus was distracted by a flock of birds flying high in the sky. "That's it!" he shouted to Icarus, "Go and collect every fallen feather that you can find." When Icarus had collected enough feathers, he carefully attached them to large wooden frames using wax from the candles which lit their prison. By sunrise, both Icarus and Daedalus had a pair of wings.



"Before we go," warned Daedalus, "I need you to listen carefully. While I'm sure that these wings will work, I have only been able to use the tools available within this labyrinth. Therefore, there are two rules which you must adhere to. The first is that you must not fly too close to the sea for the feathers will absorb the water and become too heavy to fly. The second is that you must not fly too close to the sun for, if you do, the wax which holds the feathers together will melt. Do you understand?"

Icarus nodded and the two began to beat their wings in unison. They rose higher and higher until the labyrinth was a mere speck below them. Daedalus looked at his son, who was soaring like an eagle, and felt proud. They had done it; they were free.



Looking upwards, Icarus realised that he was closer to the gods than any mortal had ever been.



Fascinated by this thought, he forgot his father's warning. He began to climb higher and higher until the heat became too much for the wax that held the feathers in place. With no feathers, Icarus began to spiral down towards the sea until he hit the surface with a crash and was never seen again.



Questions

1. Number the events from 1-4 to show the order that they happened in.

- Icarus thinks about how close he is to the gods.
- Theseus returns to Athens.
- King Minos hears news of Daedalus's arrival.
- Icarus and Daedalus begin to fly to freedom.

2. Which of the following does Daedalus **not use** when creating the wings? Tick one.

- wax
- feathers
- string
- wood

3. Look at the paragraph beginning **A short while after...** Find and copy one word which means the same as **respected**.

4. Why did Daedalus choose to help Theseus?

1. _____

2. _____

5. Explain what happened when Icarus flew too close to the sun.

1. _____

6. Argue that it was wrong of Daedalus to agree to help Theseus.

7. Imagine that you are Icarus. What is going through your mind as the feathers begin to drop from your wings? _____

8. Many Greek myths warn people not to think that they are gods. Do you think that this story is one of those myths? Tick one and give reasons for your answer.

Yes

No

Answers

- Number the events from 1-4 to show the order that they happened in.
 - 4** Icarus thinks about how close he is to the gods.
 - 2** Theseus returns to Athens.
 - 1** King Minos hears news of Daedalus's arrival.
 - 3** Icarus and Daedalus begin to fly to freedom.
- Which of the following does Daedalus **not use** when creating the wings? Tick one.
 - wax
 - feathers
 - string**
 - wood
- Look at the paragraph beginning **A short while after...** Find and copy one word which means the same as **respected**. **Revered**
- Why did Daedalus choose to help Theseus? **Daedalus chose to help Theseus because he was unable to ignore the idea that this was a truly heroic feat which would cement his name firmly into Crete's history.**
- Explain what happened when Icarus flew too close to the sun. **When Icarus flew too close to the sun, the heat melted the wax which held the feathers on his wings together and this meant that the feathers fell off.**
- Argue that it was wrong of Daedalus to agree to help Theseus. **Pupils' own responses, such as: It was wrong of Daedalus to agree to help Theseus because he did it behind the King's back. The King had been kind to Daedalus because he gave him work doing something that he loved despite having been exiled from Athens.**
- Imagine that you are Icarus. What is going through your mind as the feathers begin to drop from your wings? **Pupils' own responses, such as: Oh no! I forgot to listen to my father's warning. I got distracted and now I am too close to the sun. Surely, all of the feathers will fall off and I will plummet to the ground.**
- Many Greek myths warn people not to think that they are gods. Do you think that this story is one of those myths? Tick one.

Accept either 'yes' or 'no' providing that an explanation is also given, such as: Yes, I think that this story does warn people not to think that they are gods because Icarus starts to think that he is closer to the gods than any mortal has been. I think that he starts climbing higher in the sky because he believes that he can be a god.