

# The Story of Theseus and the Minotaur



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."



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

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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. 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.

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4. Why did Ariadne help Theseus?

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

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

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7. Compare the characters of Theseus and Aegeus.  
How are the two different?

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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.

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

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# Answers

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

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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.**

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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.**