

- Greek myths place a great importance on bulls and other bovines. Students can not only read other Greek myths about these animals and the famous heroes associated with them, but may also look at other cultures and find the reasons these animals were so valued throughout the ancient world.
- Students can show off their creativity in this letter-writing activity. Have them write letters from Ariadne to Theseus to ask and convince him to come to Crete to slay the Minotaur. Make sure their letters reflect the personalities and past histories of both characters.
- Why is King Aegeus always worried about traitors and spies in Athens? Do his feelings accurately reflect the political scene during ancient times? Have students research ancient Athenian politics and Greek government to discover the story behind the Greek leadership.
- Medea was an evil and powerful sorceress during mythological times. It might surprise students to learn that there were times when she did some good things for others. Have students read the myth of Jason and the Argonauts to learn more about this witch.
- Labyrinths and mazes have remained popular since Daedalus' time. Have students check out the history of mazes at: www.unmuseum.org/maze.htm Take special note of the "Cretan labyrinth" named after this famous myth. Students can have fun drawing or building their own labyrinths.
- The Aegean Sea is a Greek landform that was named after King Aegeus, who flung himself into its waters in grief. Using reference sources, students can locate other landforms such as mountains, islands, and waters in the Mediterranean region that have been named after characters in Greek myths. Encourage students to link these landforms to their corresponding myths.
- Daedalus was well-known as an inventor, creator, and problem-solver. Great works of art have also been inspired by his stories. Have students research Daedalus and the creations he designed for the Greek gods and mortals. Students can brainstorm and create other inventions for the Greek characters. What kind of invention could Theseus have used to aid him in his quest? What artwork would fascinate an evil sorceress like Medea?

Suggested Internet Resources

Periodically, Internet Resources are updated on our Web site at www.LibraryVideo.com

- web.ukonline.co.uk/conker/weird-beasts/minotaur.htm

Sponsored by Kids Ark, this site retells the story and gives instructions for drawing a labyrinth.

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- www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/smc/journey/
Allows you to create your own heroic adventure and explore classic mythological story structure.
- www.mythman.com
A humorous homework help site for students with classical myth retellings.

Suggested Print Resources

- Caselli, Giovanni. *In Search of Knossos: The Quest for the Minotaur's Labyrinth*. Peter Bedrick Books, New York, NY; 1999. Describes Minoan civilization and shows photos of restored sections of the palace of Knossos.
- D'Aulaire, Ingri and Edgar Parin D'Aulaire. *Ingri and Edgar Parin D'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths*. Doubleday, Garden City, NY; 1962. One of the best-loved classical collections of Greek mythology.
- Galloway, Priscilla. *Daedalus and the Minotaur*. Annick Press Limited, Toronto, Ontario; 2003.
- Kindl, Patricia. *Lost in the Labyrinth*. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, MA; 2002. Myth, archeology, and imagination are blended into this story based on the Minotaur's sister.
- McMullan, Kate. *Stop that Bull, Theseus! (Myth-o-Mania Series #5)*. Hyperion Press, New York, NY; 2003. In this hilarious version, Theseus forgets the string.

TEACHER'S GUIDE

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THESEUS & THE MINOTAUR

Grades 4–8

Thousands of years ago, the ancient Greeks created a galaxy of myths to explain the mysteries and complexities of the world around them — the seasons, stars and planets, human society, war and peace, feast and famine, good luck and bad — even the creation of the world itself. They believed gods and goddesses, each with special powers, controlled and protected all humans. Many colorful stories about heroes, gods and monsters were memorized and sung by traveling poets long before they were ever written down. As they were passed down from generation to generation, aspects of the stories sometimes changed. These myths provide insight into the history, legends and religion of an ancient civilization, but also highlight fundamental similarities between modern people and those who lived long ago.

This guide provides a summary of classical retellings of Greek and Roman mythology, vocabulary, discussion questions, activities, and print and Internet resources for students and teachers to explore.

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Program Summary

The ancient Greeks loved stories involving great heroes in pursuit of great adventures. And no other hero has a greater quest than Theseus, a young man who rises from obscurity in a remote country village to become the ruler of one of the greatest cities in Greece. What makes this hero so enthralling is that Theseus possesses no special powers and receives no special help from the Olympian gods, but uses his own resources to face impossible odds.

During childhood, Theseus dreams of becoming a hero and is especially inspired by Heracles, whom he idolizes. On his sixteenth birthday, his mother, Aethra, tells him about his real father, King Aegeus, who rules in a far-away kingdom called Athens. She explains to Theseus that now he can claim his right as heir to the throne. To do so, Theseus uses his great strength to lift a huge boulder and finds golden sandals and a sword which had been hidden there by his father.

Theseus puts on these special gifts and sets off towards Athens, encountering many adversaries along the way. As he gets rid of these villains, his fame spreads, and his father, King Aegeus, who at this point is unaware that Theseus is his only son, welcomes him to Athens. King Aegeus' wife, Medea, is an evil sorceress who wants to get rid of Theseus before the king discovers the truth. Medea convinces her husband that Theseus is a traitor and the king allows her to give Theseus poisonous wine to drink. Just before swallowing the toxic potion, King Aegeus realizes that Theseus is wearing the king's own sword and sandals and is therefore his son. He knocks the wine out of Theseus' hand and there is much rejoicing.

The next day, the king tells Theseus about the seven women and men who must leave the kingdom to be sacrificed to the Minotaur in Crete. The Minotaur is a half-bull, half-man monster that lives in the labyrinth, a confusing maze of passageways, at the palace of King Minos. Theseus bravely chooses to go in order to kill the Minotaur. As he departs in a ship hung with black sails, he tells his father that if he is successful, the ship's sails will be changed to white to signal his safe return.

In Crete, Ariadne, daughter of King Minos, spies Theseus and falls deeply in love with him. She decides to help him kill the Minotaur and receives magical thread from the inventor of the labyrinth, Daedalus. Theseus uses the thread to mark his path into the labyrinth, successfully kills the Minotaur, and follows the thread to safety.

Theseus sails home with Ariadne. Unfortunately, he forgets to change the ship's sails from black to white. King Aegeus spies the black sails, believes his son to be dead, and plunges into the sea. After grieving for his father, Theseus becomes a wise and just ruler of Athens and remains one of the greatest heroes in Greek history.

Vocabulary

Athens — Capital city of Greece and center of ancient Greek culture and myths.

Crete — Home to the Minoan civilization and the Minotaur; one of the greatest cities in ancient Greece.

labyrinth — A maze of intricate passageways and blind alleys designed by the talented architect, Daedalus; in mythological times it was home to the Minotaur; mortals were unable to find their way out of the maze and were sacrificed to this deadly monster.

Cast of Characters

Includes phonetic spelling in parentheses.

Aethra (EE-thra) — Mother of Theseus.

Aegeus (a-JEE-us) — King of Athens and father of Theseus; he is married to the sorceress Medea.

Ariadne (ar-ee-OD-nee) — Daughter of King Minos of Crete; her love for a hero saves many lives.

Daedalus (DED-uh-lus) — Gifted craftsman, architect, and inventor for King Minos of Crete; designs the labyrinth for the Minotaur.

Heracles (HAYR-a-kleez) — A demigod and son of Alcmena and Zeus; he is one of the most popular of the Greek and Roman heroes; he is best known for his incredible strength and for completing the twelve impossible labors for King Eurystheus.

Medea (meh-DEE-uh) — One of the great sorceresses of the ancient world; she is the wife of King Aegeus.

Minos (MY-nohs) — Son of Zeus and Europa, he is the king of Crete; he decrees that Athens must sacrifice seven girls and seven boys a year to the Minotaur in retribution for the death of his son, Androgeus.

Minotaur (MIN-uh-tor) — Means "Minos' bull;" a monster with the head and tail of a bull and a body of a man; this man-eating, savage creature lives in the labyrinth, a gigantic, intricate maze designed by Daedalus.

Theseus (THEE-see-uhs) — Son of Aegeus and Aethra, he is one of the very few mortal Greek heroes who is able to overcome great dangers without any help from the gods. He is best known for defeating the Minotaur in order to save the people of Athens.

Pre-viewing Discussion

- *Theseus & the Minotaur* centers on the ancient kingdoms of Athens and Crete. Brainstorm prior knowledge of these civilizations and ancient Greek life.
- What do you know about mythological monsters? What do you know about the Minotaur and the labyrinth?

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- What is a hero? What qualities do famous heroes possess? What qualities do common everyday heroes possess? What are the differences and similarities between them?

Focus Questions

1. Even as a young boy, Theseus wanted to follow his dream. What was it?
2. How does Heracles know that Theseus is a brave boy?
3. Explain what Aethra means when she tells Theseus that his future lies under the boulder.
4. How does Theseus become famous on the road to Athens?
5. Why does Medea want to trick her husband? Is she successful? Why or why not?
6. When does King Aegeus recognize Theseus as his son?
7. Why does King Aegeus despise King Minos?
8. What is the Minotaur? Where does he live?
9. How does Ariadne help Theseus?
10. What is the significance of the magic thread?
11. What tragic event happens on Theseus' return to Athens? How is Theseus responsible?
12. How does Theseus improve Athens after becoming ruler?

Discussion Questions

- Since childhood, Theseus has always dreamed of being a hero. What are your dreams? How do Theseus' dreams influence his life and the lives of the people of Athens?
- *Theseus & the Minotaur* does not explain why Athens had to sacrifice human lives to the Minotaur. Discuss everyday and political hardships that the ancient Greeks experienced and brainstorm reasons that would force King Aegeus to send these people to their death.
- Do you think the circumstance forced upon the Minotaur by man made him evil or was the Minotaur born that way? Why or why not? Give examples of modern-day animals or people who are affected by their environments. The Minotaur is half human. Do you think he has human qualities and thoughts?

Follow-up Activities

- Theseus has many adventures before and after slaying the Minotaur. Have students read more about this brave Greek hero. Use www.mythweb.com to see an animated version.
- King Minos ruled over Crete, one of the world's greatest ancient civilizations. Students can explore the archeology and view photos of an excavated palace at Knossos with www.daedalus.gr/DAEI/THEME/Knossos.htm

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