

Theseus, Ariadne, and the Minotaur



Characters:

Theseus - a Greek Hero
Ariadne - a Minoan Princess
Minos - King of Crete
Daedalus - a brilliant inventor
Minotaur - a Monster
Dionysus and Hera - an ancient Greek god and goddess

Word Bank:

Mythology - old stories or myths about gods and heroes
Athenians - people from the city of Athens, Greece
Reunion - to meet again, a meeting
Labyrinth - maze
Constructed - built
Inventor - someone who creates something
Swore - promised
Defeat- win, to beat
Freed - to let someone or something go
Instructions - how to do something
Thread - string
Entrance - opening
Constellation - collection of stars

The Story

Theseus is a popular hero in ancient Greece mythology. Theseus grew up in a small town outside of Athens where his mother was queen. His father, the king, had left for Athens before Theseus was born.

When Theseus grew up, he traveled to Athens to meet his father. Their reunion, however, was short. The Athenians were in trouble. Every year, Athens was forced to send 14 people to Minos, the King on the island of Crete, to be eaten by his monster, the Minotaur.

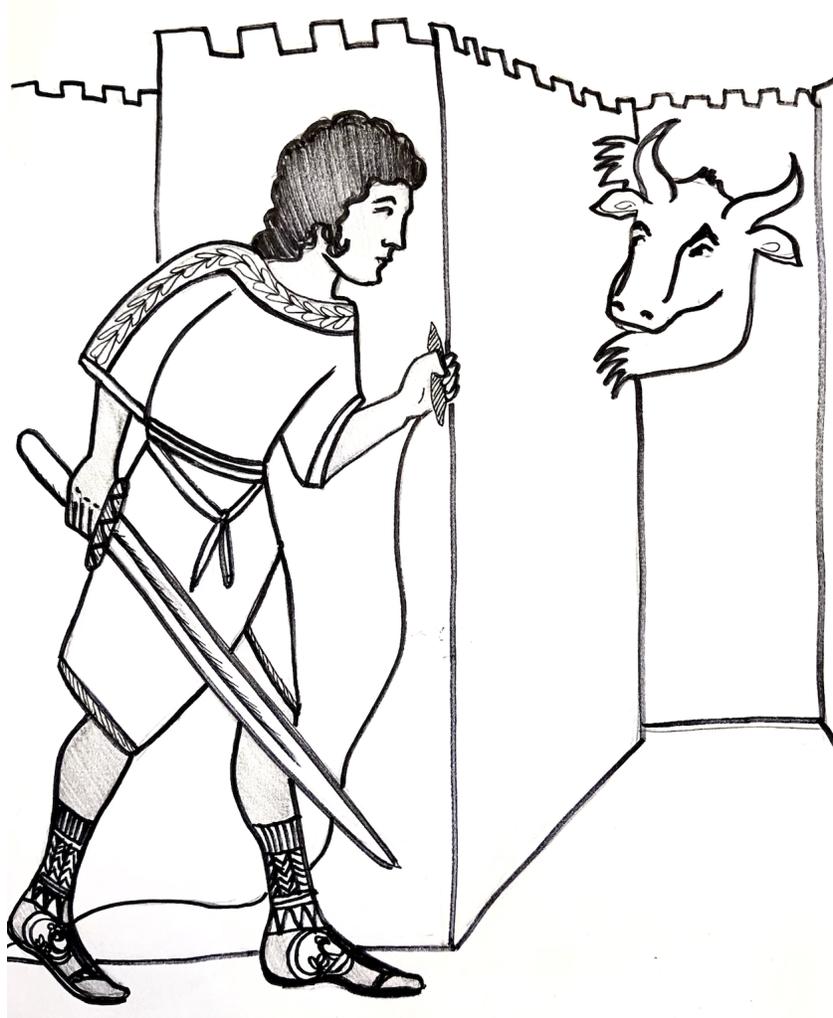
The Minotaur was a dangerous monster with the head of a bull and the body of a man. He was named after the King of Minos, while "Taurus" means bull in Greek. The Minotaur was locked in a labyrinth, or maze, constructed by Daedalus, a brilliant inventor. *(We will learn about Daedalus and his son Icarus in future stories)*



The labyrinth was said to be so difficult that anybody caught in it would never find an escape. The people would get lost, walking deeper and deeper into the maze until they were eventually caught and eaten by the Minotaur. Theseus, hearing the tale, swore to beat this monster and show himself a hero.

When Theseus arrived at Crete he was brought before King Minos and his daughter Ariadne. The young princess fell in love with Theseus and decided to help him. Ariadne freed Theseus from the prison and gave him a sword and a ball of thread, so that he might kill the minotaur and also escape the labyrinth.

Ariadne led Theseus to the entrance of the labyrinth, where he tied one end of the thread to the door. Daedalus, the inventor of the labyrinth, had told Ariadne how to get through the maze. Theseus followed these instructions, heading straight down and never left or right.



In the middle of the night, Theseus found the sleeping Minotaur. The beast woke up, a great battle took place and Theseus won. Following the thread, Theseus found his way back and escaped with the princess Ariadne.

Theseus had wanted to take Ariadne back to Athens with him, but the goddess Hera told Theseus in a dream to leave the young woman behind, and so he left Ariadne while she slept. When the god Dionysus saw her crying, he decided to marry her. Dionysus then threw Ariadne's crown into the sky to create a constellation, the Corona Borealis, or the "Northern Crown"... so in the end, Adriane became a 'queen' in the heavens.

Theseus became the king of Athens, returning home as a hero. The story of his victory over the Minotaur remains popular to this day.

Review:

- What is a Minotaur?
- Why was the Minotaur in a Labyrinth?
- How did Theseus find the Minotaur?
- How did Theseus know how to escape?

Discussion Points:

- All sorts of cultures have heroes in their myths or fairy tales, where one person saves another. In this story, is there only one hero? Who comes to the rescue?
 - What other ways could you find your way out of a maze?
 - One of the most famous Spanish speaking authors wrote a short story from the Minotaur's perspective. What do you think the life of the Minotaur was like?
 - What makes something a 'monster'? What makes someone a 'hero'?
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Activities:

Hards on! Can you make a maze in your house? Move furniture, use pillows, blankets, chairs, whatever you can easily arrange and see if you can make a Hero-Worthy Labyrinth in your own house! Added fun: Either have someone 'hide' as the minotaur, or take an object to be the minotaur and hide it somewhere in the maze. If a simple maze is too easy, make it an obstacle course... or blindfold "Theseus". Afterall, he did find the Minotaur in the middle of the night.

Follow the String! One person takes a string, ribbon, floss, or thread and creates a path. It can be either through a created maze, through the house, or in a small (more manageable) room. See if the other person can follow the string. You can also take it to a forest or a park. Play with other methods for creating a path to follow with rocks, chalk, cheerios...

To Print: Calm down with the attached mazes. There is a simple and hard version. You can also color in the characters above. Both Theseus and Adriadne have traditional Minoan clothing. What colors do you think their clothes would have been?

Write it out: See if you can follow Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges' example and write a short story from the perspective of any of the characters. It can be the Minotaur, Theseus or Ariadne... or maybe one of the gods!