



Theseus and the Minotaur

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Summary

This is an adaptation of a Greek myth. Theseus, a strong and clever young man, finds out that King Aegeus is his father when he moves a rock and finds the king's sword. He goes to Athens to meet him. There, he also meets the king's new wife, Medea, and their son. She is angry because she wants her own son to be king.

King Aegeus is worried. The Athenians killed the son of Minos, king of Crete, in battle and then lost. Now, fourteen young Athenians have to go to Crete and become food for the Minotaur, the king's other son. He is half bull and half man and lives in a maze. Theseus promises to kill the Minotaur and come back soon. The sails in his boat will be white to show he is back safely.

When Theseus gets to Crete he meets Minos and his daughter, Ariadne, who immediately likes Theseus and helps him. She gives him a knife to kill the Minotaur, and some string to help him find his way back out of the maze. In return, she wants him to take her to Athens and marry her. Theseus kills the Minotaur, escapes from the maze and takes Ariadne with him, but only to Naxos. She is angry and promises he will be very unhappy. Everybody is happy on the boat but they forget to put up the white sails. Aegeus thinks his son was killed and dies before Theseus' return. Theseus becomes the new king, yet he is very unhappy.

Background and themes

Greek mythology: Greek myths are tales about the gods and their origins, the creation of the world etc (divine myths). They can also be tales related to kingdoms on earth, heroes and heroines, such as Theseus and the Minotaur (heroic myths). In Greek tragedy, the hero is extraordinary but always makes a mistake, as all human beings do.

Heroism: What are the qualities of a hero nowadays? What were the qualities of a hero in Ancient Greece?

Promises: Is it important to keep a promise? Why?

Forgetfulness: How do we try to remember important things? Through association? Tying a piece of string round one of our fingers etc? What are the consequences of not remembering something important?

Discussion activities

Pages 1–5

Before reading

- Discuss:** Have students look at the covers in pairs and do the following.
 - Make a file card: Have students identify title, author, publisher and ISBN and write a file card for the book.
 - Describe the picture: Have students point to Theseus and to the Minotaur and to compare them. Teach 'half man/bull'.

While reading

- Role play:** Have students act the conversation between Theseus and his mother in the garden (pages 1–2).

After reading

- Guess:** Have students answer the following questions.
What is Theseus going to do in Crete? Is it going to be difficult to kill the Minotaur? Is he going to make friends?

Pages 8–11

Before reading

- Guess:** Have students look at the titles of Chapters 3–4.
A Lost Ring: Who lost this ring? Who found it? Where was it?
A Woman's Help: Who is this woman? Why does she help Theseus? How can she help him?

After reading

- Discuss:** Have students talk about the two promises in this section.
What do the people in the story promise? Do you usually make promises? Is it difficult to remember promises?

Pages 14–19

Before reading

- Guess:** Have students look at the picture on page 14.
Where is Theseus? Is he going to get out of the maze? How?

After reading

- Role play:** Have students act the conversation between two people in Crete the day after Theseus goes away.
- Write:** Have students add a short comment on the story to their file cards.

Vocabulary activities

For the Word list and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.