The Story of Theseus and the Minotaur

After the loss of his son, King Minos of Crete waged war against Athens. Periodically, he would use his large army to storm the city and wreak havoc. Wanting to prevent the attacks, King Aegeus of Athens eventually 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 cease the attacks.

Theseus was ready: he had rehearsed the lines in his head a thousand times. He could almost feel the fate of Athens and the fate of defenceless children in his hands. The tyranny of Minos had gone on for long enough; it was time to take a stand. Gingerly, he knocked on the door of his father's study. Aegeus called him inside and looked up at the tall, muscular warrior his son had become. To say that he was proud of Theseus would have been an understatement.

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 sending them off like lambs to the slaughter! Tomorrow, when the boat comes, I will take the place of one of the boys. Then, I will slay the Minotaur and put an end to this living nightmare."

Aegeus was aghast. He knew that his son was a fierce protector but to fight the Minotaur – a beast so fierce that it had to be guarded deep within a complex labyrinth – this was something else. Aegeus pleaded with Theseus to find another way; he couldn't bear to think of his son willingly throwing himself at such danger. Eventually, when his arguments had run dry, Aegeus relented.

"I will await the news of your success with bated breath," he told Theseus. "The moment that your ship materialises on the horizon, I want to know that you have won. Should you have been successful, replace your ship's black sails with white ones. I shall watch the sea from now until the moment I see those sails heading home." Theseus nodded and vowed that his sails would be white.

visit twinkl.com

Later that day, the two embraced before Theseus climbed into the ship alongside 13 panic-stricken children. The journey to Crete was a smooth one and, before long, they had arrived. When the boat pulled up to the shore, they were met by Minos and his daughter, Ariadne. As Minos led the children to the palace to be cleaned and prepared, Ariadne pulled Theseus to one side. Desperate to escape from the world that her father had built, she offered to aid him in his quest in exchange for safe passage to Athens.

After promising her safe passage away from Crete, Theseus and Ariadne approached Daedalus – the inventor of the complex labyrinth which contained the Minotaur. Desperate to be a part of the heroic feat, Daedalus agreed to help. Later that night, the three met at the entrance to the labyrinth.

Revealing a ball of tightly-wound string, Daedalus explained his plan. "This labyrinth has been designed to be so complex that not even I can escape it. However, should you trail this string behind you, you will be able to retrace your steps. Ariadne and I will stay here to ensure that it stays secure and that nobody else enters. Good luck."

With that, the doors to the labyrinth slammed shut and Theseus set off to find the Minotaur. String trailing behind him, he searched the many lamp-lit passages until, at last, he was face to face with the beast. The Minotaur was stronger but Theseus was quicker and, in the low light of the maze, this proved to be more beneficial. After a mighty battle, Theseus emerged victorious: the Minotaur had been defeated.

Wanting to put as much distance between himself and King Minos as possible, Theseus made his way to shore with Ariadne. He had done it! No more children would have to cower in fear at the idea of meeting the Minotaur. At last, Athens had been freed from Minos's grasp. Tired from the fight and feeling the contentment of a job well done, Theseus hoisted the black sails of his ship and headed for home, forgetting all about the promise that he had made to his father.

visit twinkl.com

Questions

1. Who did Theseus promise to take away from Crete? Tick one.

   - ○ King Minos
   - ○ King Aegeus
   - ○ Ariadne
   - ○ Daedalus

2. Draw **four** lines and complete each sentence.

King Minos...	was worried about what their father might say.
Ariadne...	wanted to be a hero.
Daedalus...	was angry at the loss of their son.
Theseus...	was desperate to escape from their father.

3. Why did Aegeus eventually give in to Theseus?

   _____

4. **...forgetting all about the promise that he had made to his father.**
   What promise had Theseus made?

   _____

5. Look at the paragraph beginning **"I will await the news..."**
   Find and copy one word which means the same as appears.

   _____

visit twinkl.com

6. Argue that Theseus was foolish to defeat the Minotaur.

7. Imagine that you are Aegeus watching Theseus's ship appear over the horizon. Describe how you feel, using the text to support your answer.

8. Using 25 words or fewer, write a suitable next sentence for the text.

9. Do you think that Aegeus was right to strike a deal with Minos? Tick one.

   ○ yes
   ○ no

   Fully explain your answer.

visit twinkl.com

10. Which of the following words do you think best describes King Minos? Tick one.

- ○ furious
- ○ cruel
- ○ relentless
- ○ cowardly

Fully explain your answer.

_____

_____

_____

_____

visit twinkl.com