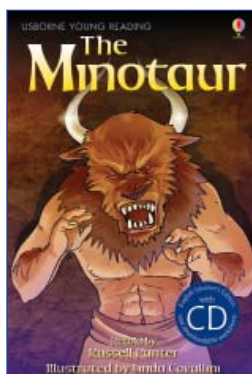


The Minotaur • Teacher's notes



Author: Traditional, retold by Russell Punter

Reader level: Upper Intermediate

Word count: 1108

Lexile level: 380L

Text type: Myth

About the story

This famous myth unfolds thousands of years ago in Ancient Greece. Every nine years, King Minos of Crete demands that King Aegeus of Athens send 14 young men and girls – to go into a labyrinth and be devoured by a terrible monster, the Minotaur (half man, half bull). This time, Aegeus' son Theseus insists on going too and killing the Minotaur. Aegeus can do nothing to dissuade him, and sees him aboard a black-sailed ship but asks the sailors to fly white sails on their return if by some miracle Theseus survives.

In Crete, Minos's daughter Ariadne falls in love with Theseus. She gives him a ball of magic string to find his way out of the labyrinth, in return for his promise of marriage. Theseus kills the Minotaur and follows the string to lead his people to safety, and they all escape by ship. Ariadne comes too, but Theseus is already regretting his promise to marry her, so one night he leaves her sleeping on an island and sails off.

Ariadne is furious. She calls on the gods to punish Theseus, and the god Dionysus casts a spell making the sailors forget about the white sails. Theseus returns triumphant, only to find that his father took one look at the returning black sails and leapt to his death, believing his dear son had been killed.

About the author

Russell Punter was born in Bedfordshire, England. When he was young, he enjoyed making up and illustrating his own stories. His ambition as a boy was to become a cartoonist. After studying art at college he became a graphic designer and writer. He has written over 40 children's books.

Key words

Your students might not be familiar with some of these words in the story.

p3 demand	p16 whispered	p30 dodged	revenge	p44 feeling
p4 sighed	p17 promise	blow	deserting	p45 cliffs
moaned	agreed	tripped	p40 tale	returned
p6 maze	p18 entrance	looming	punish	sobbed
p7 spluttered	p23 wound	grab	declared	p46 dreadful
creature	p24 cave	p31 thrust	p41 forget	p47 beaten
shivered	roar	plunged	boomed	
p9 crazy	echoed	chest		
p10 confidently	p26 mighty	p32 hero		
begged	stormed	puffed		
p11 boarded	p27 scariest	p34 trail		
p13 docked	gripped	p35 crept		
p14 dawn	p28 snort	swiftly		
guards	nostrils	p37 voyage		
dank	swung	p38 ordered		
dungeon	p29 wounded	p39 heartbroken		



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Key phrases

p10	Even if it was no use	p23	this way and that	p40	breaking his promise
p12	on their way	p28	an ear-splitting roar	p41	cast a spell
p15	fell madly in love	p29	it didn't give up	p42	I can't wait
p17	Very well	p31	gave a blood-chilling cry fell to the ground	p43	supposed to do something
p20	One by one	p32	It's not over yet a way out	p44	That's funny [as in odd]
p21	couldn't believe his eyes by itself	p37	spend the night	p45	must be [supposition]
				p46	never seen again

Before reading

Write the word MONSTER on the board. Ask the students which examples come to mind; you could make a list of names and types (they might also include characters from comic books or movies). What's monstrous about these characters? What do they do, and what strengths do they have? Now show the book cover, hiding the title. Does anyone know what this monster is? Can they describe it, e.g. head of a bull and body of a man. See if anyone knows where it lived, and the name of the hero who defeated it.

Reading or listening

You can listen to the story on CD or read it aloud to the students, take turns to read or read together silently. Each double page spread in the book is one track on the CD, so that you can pause between tracks or repeat tracks if your students need it. The first reading is in a British English accent, and it is followed by an American English reading. The words are exactly the same. After the story, there is a short selection of key phrases that can be used for pronunciation practice.

During reading: you might like to ask some of these questions.

- | | | | |
|-----|---|---------|--|
| p3 | Where is Athens? How long ago do you think this story is set? | pp22-23 | What can you see in the maze, apart from Theseus and the Athenians? |
| p5 | What sort of trouble might King Minos be talking about? | p27 | Does Theseus look scared? |
| p7 | Why does Theseus say "Sounds fun"? Do you like mazes? | p33 | How might the string help? Without the string, what could happen? [They could be lost forever in the labyrinth.] |
| p10 | How would you describe Theseus? [brave, over-confident...] | p38 | Why doesn't Theseus want to marry her? [Doesn't love her, or maybe doesn't want King Minos as a father-in-law?] |
| p12 | How is the ship powered? [By both oars – rowing – and sails.] | p40 | Do you like the idea of being able to call gods to your aid? |
| p17 | Do you think Theseus wants to marry her? | p44 | What have the sailors forgotten? |
| p21 | How do you think the string might help? | | |

After reading

Ask the class what they thought of the ending. Would they want to change it?

Was it wrong of Theseus to leave Ariadne on the island? Why did he promise to marry her if he didn't really mean it? [He was in prison, facing a horrible death at the time.] Did he deserve Dionysus' punishment? Did Aegeus deserve to die in order to punish Theseus?

Do you think Theseus wishes he'd never gone to Crete? He killed the Minotaur and saved many of his people's lives, but he lost his own father...



Did you know?

The word Minotaur comes from two words – 'Minos' the king of Crete, and 'tauros' the Greek for bull.