

Theseus and the Minotaur

Length

11 min 58 sec

Summary

Minos' monstrous son, the Minotaur, lives in a labyrinth beneath the palace. The Minotaur will only eat human flesh and every year is fed seven young men from different kingdoms in Greece. When it is Athens' turn, Minos insists that Theseus, King Aegeus' son, be one of the seven victims.

Once in Crete, although the seven young Athenians are royally entertained in Minos' palace, gradually their number diminishes until only Theseus is left alive. He charms Minos' daughter, Ariadne, into helping him face the Minotaur. With the aid of Ariadne's crown of light, a ball of thread and a sword, he kills the Minotaur and finds his way out of the labyrinth.

After setting fire to Minos' fleet, Theseus flees Crete with Ariadne, but when they reach the island of Naxos, he abandons her. Dionysos takes pity on Ariadne, however, and takes her as his consort.

Starting-points

Although Theseus is commonly referred to as a hero, on some occasions his behaviour seems far from heroic. You could think about what makes a hero or heroine. What qualities do they need? (*Patriotism, courage, loyalty, honesty, strength?*) Who do the children consider modern-day heroes and heroines?

Pause points

5 min 33 sec: *That night she ... placed, just inside the maze, the things Theseus would need to kill her monstrous brother.*

- Why do you think Ariadne cries when Theseus tells her he loves her? Is she upset at the thought that someone who loved her is soon going to die? Is she torn between love for Theseus and love for the Minotaur, her brother?
- What things do you think Ariadne is going to leave out for Theseus?

9 min 33 sec: *Then they slept in the warmth of the embers.*

- How do you think the story will end?

Questions for discussion

- You might ask why the children think Minos keeps the Minotaur locked up in the labyrinth.
- What do you think the Minotaur's life was like in the labyrinth? What would it have felt like to be the Minotaur?
- Did you think that Theseus was only pretending to love Ariadne? Were there any clues in the story?
- Is Theseus a hero or a villain? Is Ariadne a heroine or a villain? Does she deserve what Theseus does to her? Does she deserve to be rescued by Dionysos?

- 'The end justifies the means': is Theseus justified in making promises to Ariadne which he has no intention of keeping in order to kill the Minotaur?
- Who is more of a hero, Theseus, Ariadne or Daedalus?

Suggested activities

- You could read the description of Theseus' killing of the Minotaur. Do you think the storyteller wants the listener to feel more sympathy for Theseus or the Minotaur? Try encouraging the children to identify particular details in the transcript to support their answers.
- Imagine you are Ariadne waking up to find that Theseus is abandoning you. How would you respond to his claim that he never loved you?
- Theseus' ship has vanished over the horizon and Ariadne has been left, alone on the island. What thoughts do you think would be going through her head? What might she be thinking about her own behaviour? What will she do now? Try expressing these feelings through mime or dance without using words — start your dance/mime from the moment she wakes up.