

Theseus and the Minotaur

Ancient Greek

The Minotaur, a terrible monster, half man and half bull, lived in a maze of tunnels, known as the Labyrinth, which ran underneath the Palace of Knossos, home of the King of Crete. The Cretans were the enemies of the Athenians and, each year, the King of Crete commanded that seven Athenian boys and seven Athenian girls were fed to the Minotaur. Theseus, an Athenian prince, decided to avenge the Athenians by killing the Minotaur as it lurked underneath the palace of his enemy.

Theseus sailed to Crete and volunteered himself as an offering to the monster. Fortune smiled on him, for soon after he arrived, Ariadne fell in love with him, and vowed to help him in his quest, even though she was the daughter of his enemy, the King of Crete.

Ariadne gave Theseus a dagger and a ball of string, the dagger to kill the monster, and the string to help him find his way out again once it was dead. Theseus found his way through the tunnels, unwinding the string as he went. He found the Minotaur in the centre, lying in wait for him. A terrible battle followed, but finally, raising his dagger high, Theseus struck the monster a fatal blow and it fell to the ground, dead, in front of him.

Following the string back through the tunnels, Theseus found Ariadne waiting for him at the entrance. They quickly made their way down to the sea, where they climbed aboard Theseus's boat before the King of Crete had time to discover what had happened and come after them.

1. What would have made the Minotaur a difficult enemy to fight? Think of several different things.

2. Where did the Minotaur live, what did it eat and why was it given this unusual food?

3. What did Theseus hope to achieve by going into the Labyrinth and why did Ariadne help him?

4. How did the gifts Ariadne gave to Theseus help him to succeed?

5. Why was Theseus still in danger after he had killed the Minotaur and what did he do as a result?
