

11+ ENGLISH

READING COMPREHENSION

PRACTICE PAPER

THEASEUS & THE

MINOTAUR



Instructions

There are 10 questions in this paper. If you are practising this under timed conditions, we recommend 40 minutes for the whole paper. If you are finding one of the questions tricky, just move on to the next one and come back to it at the end if you have time.

You can make as many notes and jottings as you need – feel free to highlight the text too.

If you are finding a certain question difficult, don't forget to put star next to it and you can ask your tutor about it during the next session.



Extract taken from Theseus and the Minotaur

Minos, king of Crete, had a monstrous son with the body of a man and the head of a bull. He was called the Minotaur. He was kept in a maze of tunnels, a twisting labyrinth underneath the king's palace.

The creature would only eat human flesh. The king knew that, if he were to feed the monster with his own people, they would rise up against him. But the creature was his own son, of royal blood. He couldn't let him starve to death. What was he to do?

One of his advisers said, 'Many nations fear you, your majesty. You must demand that each kingdom send seven young men a year.' And so it was. Each kingdom of Greece was forced to send seven young men, seven young men who would never be heard of again.

Rumours travelled from Crete with trading ships, rumours of a flesh-eating beast beneath Minos' palace.

When the turn of Athens came, the city's king couldn't bring himself to send seven young Athenians to a horrible death. He delayed and delayed. Eventually King Minos, furious, set sail himself with a fleet of ships and, when the people of Athens saw the ships of King Minos slicing through the waves, every man woman and child shuddered.

They'd heard stories about Minos' monstrous son and the word 'Minotaur' had been whispered from mouth to ear. What was more, the last time Minos had visited the city he had taken the inventor, Daedalus, and the boy, Icarus. Father and son had never been seen again.

As soon as the ships reached the quayside, King Minos and his soldiers leapt ashore. They marched through the streets and, wherever the king saw a young man of noble bearing, he would shout 'Seize him!'

Six young men had been taken when they reached the palace of King Aegeus, the king of Athens. Standing behind the king's throne there was a beautiful young man with a crown of laurel leaves on his head. He looked like a god. He could almost have been Ares, the beautiful god of war.

King Minos lifted his arm and pointed: 'He will be the seventh.'
King Aegeus fell to the ground at Minos' feet. 'Please, he is my own son, my only son, Theseus. I beg you, spare his life!'
Minos kicked the king aside. 'Seize him.'

The seven Athenian youths were bundled aboard a Cretan ship. For three days and nights they sailed.

When they reached the island of Crete, they were led to the king's palace by a glittering procession. They were invited to sit down to a feast. But as they tasted the savoury meats and sipped the sweet wines, they could hear the sound of keys turning in locks and they knew they were trapped.

Questions

- 1) Who was the monstrous son of King Minos, and what made him so fearsome?
- 2) Describe the dilemma faced by King Minos regarding his son, the Minotaur. Why couldn't he feed the Minotaur his own people?
- 3) What did one of King Minos' advisors suggest as a solution to feed the Minotaur?
- 4) Why did the people of Athens shudder when they saw King Minos' fleet approaching?
- 5) Who were Daedalus and Icarus, and what happened to them during King Minos' previous visit to Athens?
- 6) What plea did King Aegeus make to King Minos to spare his son, Theseus?
- 7) How did King Minos respond to King Aegeus' plea regarding Theseus?
- 8) Describe the fate of the Athenian youths who were taken to Crete as tribute for the Minotaur.
- 9) What signalled the trapped state of Theseus and his companions upon their arrival in the palace of King Minos?
- 10) Reflecting on the story, what moral dilemmas do you think King Minos faced, and how might you have approached the situation differently if you were in his position?

ANSWERS

1. The monstrous son of King Minos was the Minotaur, who had the body of a man and the head of a bull, making him fearsome.
2. King Minos couldn't feed the Minotaur his own people because it would lead to rebellion against him, despite the creature being his own son.
3. One of King Minos' advisors suggested demanding that each kingdom send seven young men a year to feed the Minotaur.
4. The people of Athens shuddered when they saw King Minos' fleet approaching because they feared the fate of being taken as tribute for the Minotaur.
5. Daedalus was an inventor, and Icarus was his son. They disappeared during King Minos' previous visit to Athens.
6. King Aegeus pleaded with King Minos to spare his son, Theseus, as he was his only son.
7. King Minos disregarded King Aegeus' plea and ordered Theseus to be seized along with the other youths.
8. The fate of the Athenian youths taken to Crete as tribute for the Minotaur was to be trapped in the palace and eventually become the Minotaur's prey.
9. The ominous sound of locks turning signalled the trapped state of Theseus and his companions upon their arrival in the palace of King Minos.
10. Reflecting on the story, King Minos faced moral dilemmas regarding his duty as a father and his responsibilities as a ruler. Students might suggest different ways to address the situation, such as finding alternative sources of sustenance for the Minotaur or seeking diplomatic solutions with other kingdoms.