

THESEUS AND THE MINOTAUR - An introductory drama lesson + stimulus for writing in role
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This drama activity is intended to introduce the story of Theseus and the Minotaur by looking at parts of it from the perspective of the young Athenians who may have travelled to Crete with Theseus. This is an introduction to the text so they should not be told the name of the story or shown the book beforehand. It is also intended as a stimulus for writing in role

You will need:

- a hall or similar cleared space + 3 chairs
- a piece of black cloth to represent the ship's sails when draped over a chair
- a scarf or cloak as a sign of teacher in role
- the letter/message from Theseus (see lesson)
- The story as a text
- Other versions of the story in text and other media e.g. video, graphic etc as comparisons.

The Contract

- Ask the children if they will take on the roles of young adults who lived in Athens during the time of the Ancient Greeks. Explain that the drama will be about a Greek myth that some of them may already know, but do not tell them what it is. Explain that if they realise they have heard it before, they should keep it secret until after the lesson, to compare the version they know with the one in the drama.
- Explain that the drama starts beside a harbour in Athens where there is a large sailing ship with a black sail. Ask the children to imagine that the space they are in is the harbour. Walk round the space to indicate what area of the room will be used. Talk about what it might look like in those days. Then walk round a space that represents the ship and place 2 chairs either side of an imaginary gang plank. Place a chair in the middle of the imaginary ship's deck and drape the black cloth over it. Ask them to imagine this represents the black sail.

Dramatic play

- Ask the children to imagine there are boxes and barrels of provisions beside this ship, as if it is about to go on a long voyage.
- Explain that the young people have been ordered to meet there by the king of Athens, King Aegeus. They have been ordered to load the ship with the provisions and then board the ship to wait for further instructions. They do not know why but Athenians must always obey the king.
- Explain that the drama will start as they load the ship with provisions. They must talk as if they were really there but they will need to mime the actions. Discuss what might be in the boxes of provisions and how they will carry them up the gangway into the ship. Some of the barrels will be heavy and need to be rolled. Children can work in pairs if they wish. Start the drama with a freeze as they are just about to pick up a box or roll a barrel. Start with the word *Action* and stop with the word *Freeze*.
- Let this run for a short while until a few provisions have been loaded, then stop.

Narration

- Ask the children to sit on board the ship, ready for what happened next.
- Narrate that the king's son Theseus arrived on board ship with a lady called Ariadne and a couple of servants. Theseus and Ariadne had something important to discuss so went to a private room below deck with their servants. Theseus gave a letter/ message to one of the crew. He instructed the member of the crew to pass it on to the young Athenians after the ship set sail.

Teacher-in-role /information via a letter or verbal message

- Ask if they can imagine that, when you wear a scarf, you are the member of the crew reading the letter to them as the ship sets sail. If you prefer, you can relay the content as a verbal message.
- Put on the scarf and tell them that Prince Theseus is planning the most difficult challenge he has ever faced and Ariadne is going to help him. He has sent them a message.

- Unravel the scroll and read out the following letter or relate a verbal version of the message. Use a formal tone, but do not speak or behave in a manner significantly different from your own as that can distract the children.

THE MESSAGE FROM THESEUS

To the young Athenians aboard the ship with the black sail

I Theseus, son of King Aegeus of Athens, must impart to you the following information. Listen well for your lives will depend on it.

Many years ago, my father held some games in Athens and people came from far and wide to take part. Across the sea there is an island called Crete. The king of Crete is called King Minos and he sent his only son to take part in the games. This young man was so good that he won nearly every event. But then something terrible happened. Someone from Athens was so jealous that they murdered him.

King Minos was so angry that he threatened to wage war on Athens and kill us all. His army was more powerful than ours and my father knew if he carried out his threat, we would all die. So my father asked King Minos if there was anything he could do to prevent him from attacking Athens. That was when my father made an agreement with King Minos.

In Crete, there is a creature known as a Minotaur. It has the head and body of a huge bull but it has the legs of a man. It lives underground in a labyrinth, a maze of tunnels. Every 9 years the Minotaur comes out of the labyrinth looking for food. It likes to eat young humans and it was killing many young people from Crete. King Minos said that if my father sent a boatload of our young people from Athens to Crete every 9 years, to be fed to the Minotaur instead of it eating their young people, he would not attack Athens. My father agreed and said to King Minos 'You will know the ship when it comes. It is the ship of death and it will be flying a black sail'.

This year is the 9th year. It is time to send a ship of young Athenians to Crete to be fed to the Minotaur. This is the ship and I Theseus, along with you here on the ship, are the young people to be fed to the Minotaur. But do not be afraid for I have a plan to kill the Minotaur before it kills us. Ariadne has given me a special dagger and some thread so I will not get lost in the labyrinth.

I made my father a promise that if I kill the Minotaur, he will know because when we return, we will be flying a white sail instead of the black one.

Have no fear. I will save you all and you will be welcomed back to Athens as brave heroes.

Theseus.

Reflection

- Take off the scarf and say *Freeze* to stop the drama.
- Ask them to raise their hands if they would like to share their thoughts after hearing the message.
- Talk about how the young people might be feeling – Betrayed? Proud? Scared? Excited?

Narrate Move time on to describe how they were met by armed guards in Crete and taken to a cell.

Version 1- TELL THE STORY describe how Ariadne gave Theseus the dagger and thread because he promised he would marry her and make her the next queen when they returned. Describe how he volunteered to go first into the labyrinth – how he tied the invisible thread to a post by the cell before he left and, after killing the Minotaur with the dagger, he found his way out and the guards freed them.

Version 2 – TEACHER IN ROLE as Theseus. Ask the children to accept that when you wear a cloak or different scarf, you will play the part of Theseus. On the word *Action*, tell the young Athenians about the deal with Ariadne to marry her on your return and of your plan to use her dagger and thread– pass the end of the invisible thread to one of the young Athenians and ask them to tie it to a post. Then bid them farewell and ask them to wait for you. Stop the drama and narrate how Theseus killed the Minotaur with the dagger and followed the thread. Once the guards realised the Minotaur was dead, they freed the Athenians.

Freeze-frames

- Invite three children out the front to be the characters in a freeze-frame of the moment just after Theseus killed the Minotaur. One child represents Theseus with an imaginary dagger and the other two make a shape to represent the Minotaur on the floor. Organise it by saying *123 Freeze – this is what it might have looked like when Theseus killed the Minotaur*. Ask the class what might be going through Theseus’s mind at this point. Then finish the freeze with the words *123 relax*.
- In a similar way, create a class freeze-frame on board the ship as the young people set sail back to Athens with Theseus. Ask some to speak out their thoughts during the freeze-frame before ending it.
- Ask the class what Ariadne might be thinking. Then narrate how they stopped on an island after a storm but when they left the next day, Ariadne was asleep and Theseus either forgot or didn’t wake her on purpose. So she was left behind.

Read the text– Read the end of the story from a text version - when Theseus forgot to change the sail to white, so his father, seeing the ship still had a black sail, thought Theseus was dead and threw himself off the cliff to his own death. Talk about different versions of what happened to Ariadne – found by other sailors – married a Greek god – disappeared etc.

Reflection /writing in role / compare different versions

- Discuss who they think was to blame for Aegeus’s death and talk about Theseus’s decision to abandon Ariadne if appropriate.
- Children can write an eye-witness account as one of the young Athenians, to explain to other Athenians what happened .
- Compare different versions of the story and if they knew the story before the drama, discuss how it compared to this drama version? Talk about Greek myths in general.

Further information on drama and Lorraine’s novels for children: Red Snow and Angel’s Child

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