Theseus and the Minotaur
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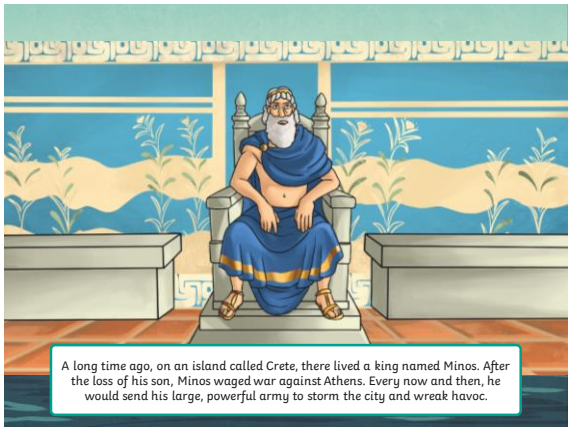
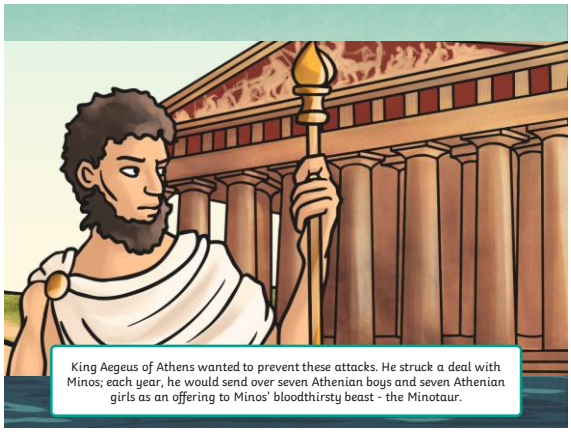
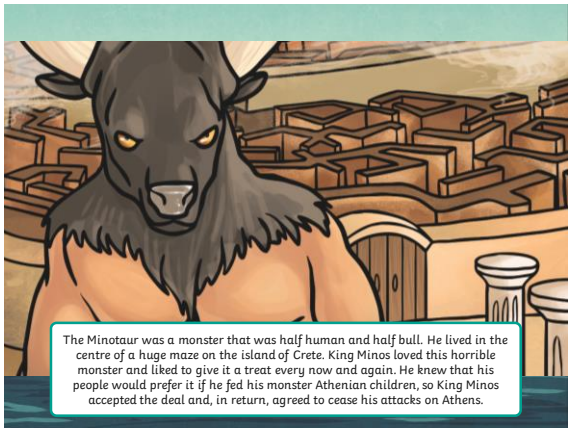
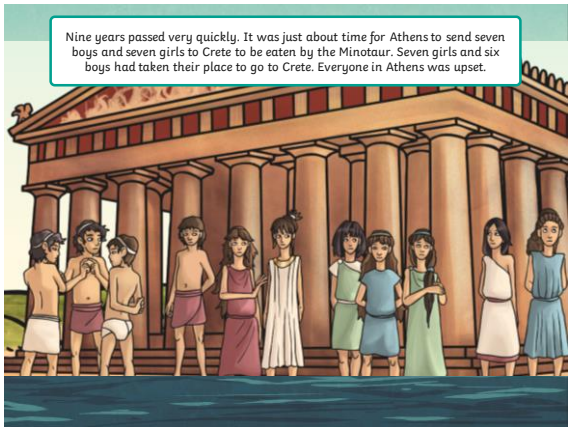
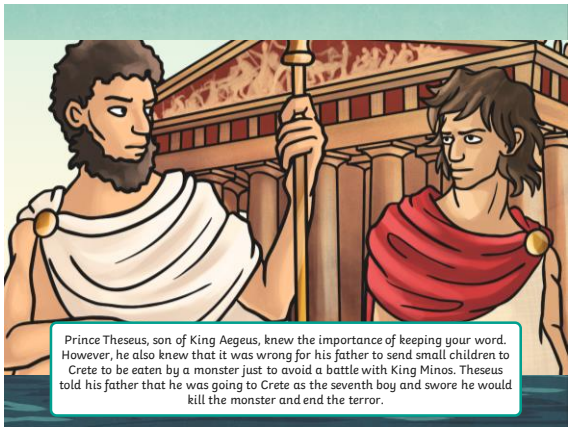
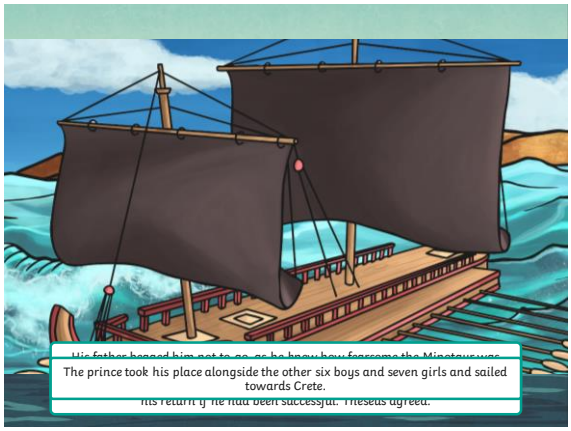

A long time ago, on an island called Crete, there lived a king named Minos. After the loss of his son, Minos waged war against Athens. Every now and then, he would send his large, powerful army to storm the city and wreak havoc.

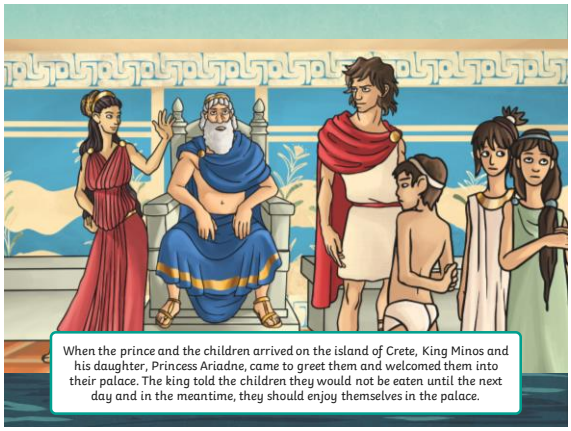

King Aegeus of Athens wanted to prevent these attacks. He struck a deal with Minos; each year, he would send over seven Athenian boys and seven Athenian girls as an offering to Minos' bloodthirsty beast - the Minotaur.

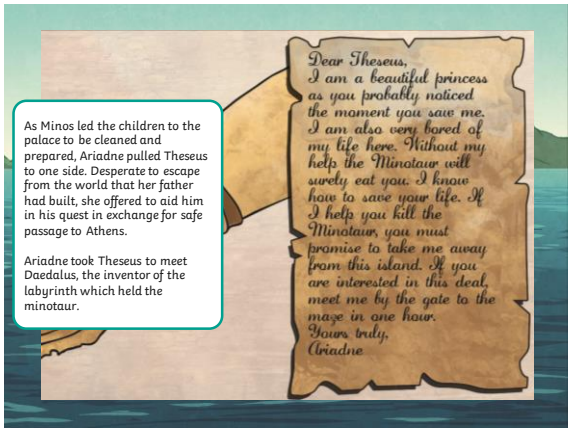

The Minotaur was a monster that was half human and half bull. He lived in the centre of a huge maze on the island of Crete. King Minos loved this horrible monster and liked to give it a treat every now and again. He knew that his people would prefer it if he fed his monster Athenian children, so King Minos accepted the deal and, in return, agreed to cease his attacks on Athens.

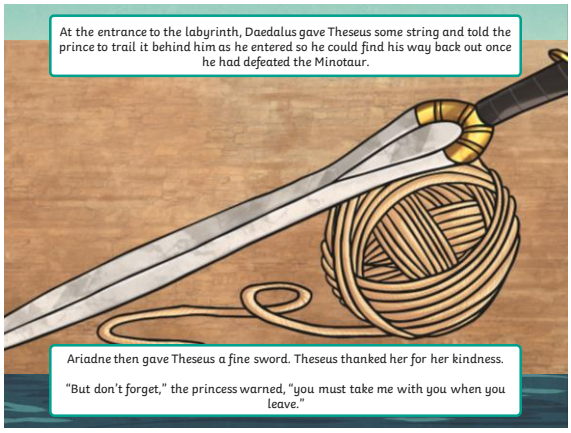

Nine years passed very quickly. It was just about time for Athens to send seven boys and seven girls to Crete to be eaten by the Minotaur. Seven girls and six boys had taken their place to go to Crete. Everyone in Athens was upset.

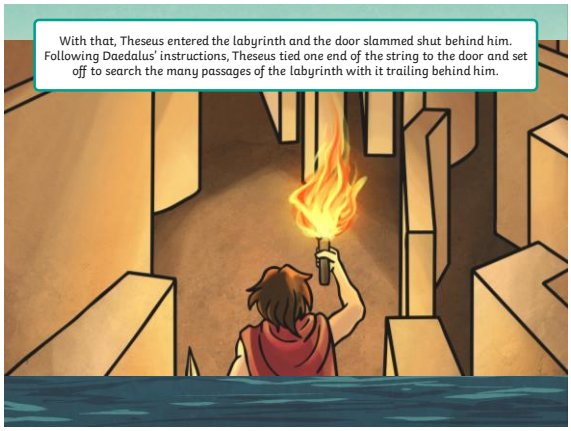

Prince Theseus, son of King Aegeus, knew the importance of keeping your word. However, he also knew that it was wrong for his father to send small children to Crete to be eaten by a monster just to avoid a battle with King Minos. Theseus told his father that he was going to Crete as the seventh boy and swore he would kill the monster and end the terror.

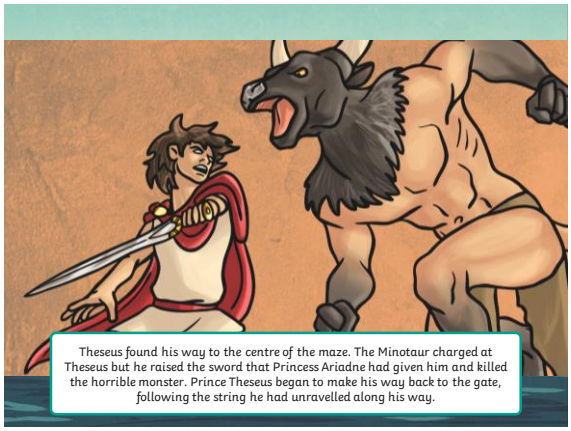

The prince took his place alongside the other six boys and seven girls and sailed towards Crete.

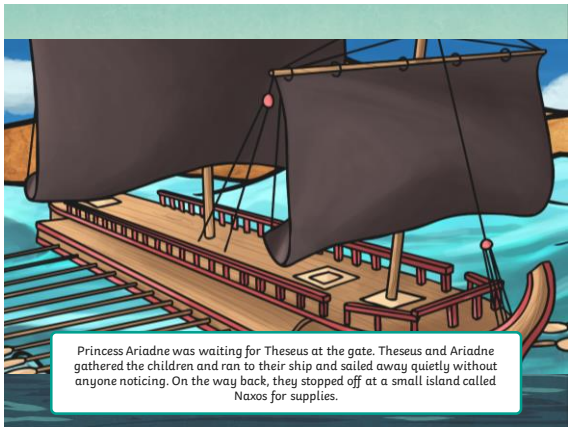

When the prince and the children arrived on the island of Crete, King Minos and his daughter, Princess Ariadne, came to greet them and welcomed them into their palace. The king told the children they would not be eaten until the next day and in the meantime, they should enjoy themselves in the palace.

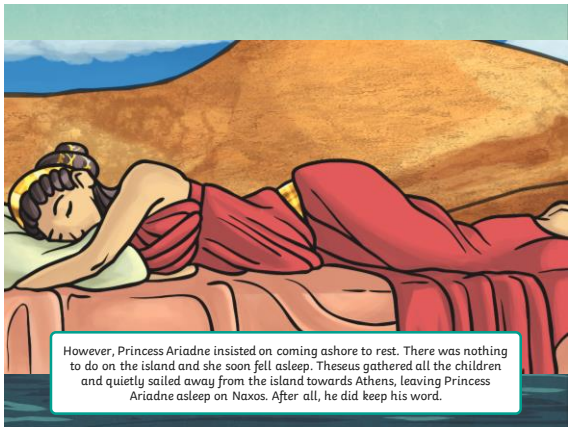

As Minos led the children to the palace to be cleaned and prepared, Ariadne pulled Theseus to one side. Desperate to escape from the world that her father had built, she offered to aid him in his quest in exchange for safe passage to Athens.
Ariadne took Theseus to meet Daedalus, the inventor of the labyrinth which held the minotaur.
Dear Theseus,
I am a beautiful princess as you probably noticed the moment you saw me. I am also very bored of my life here. Without my help the Minotaur will surely eat you. I know how to save your life. If I help you kill the Minotaur, you must promise to take me away from this island. If you are interested in this deal, meet me by the gate to the maze in one hour.
Yours truly,
Ariadne

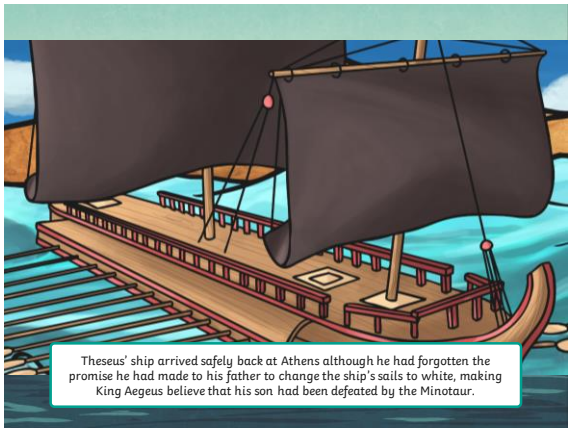
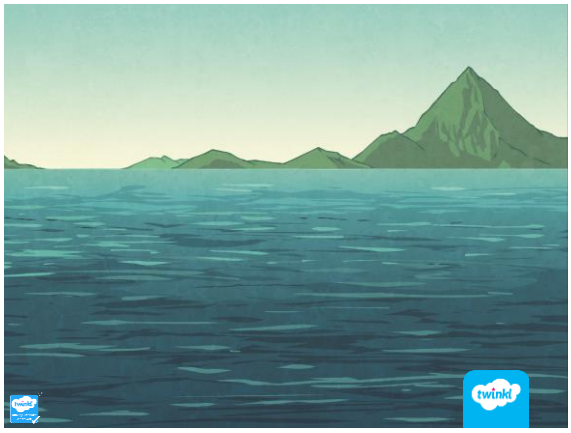

At the entrance to the labyrinth, Daedalus gave Theseus some string and told the prince to trail it behind him as he entered so he could find his way back out once he had defeated the Minotaur.
Ariadne then gave Theseus a fine sword. Theseus thanked her for her kindness.
"But don't forget," the princess warned, "you must take me with you when you leave."


With that, Theseus entered the labyrinth and the door slammed shut behind him. Following Daedalus' instructions, Theseus tied one end of the string to the door and set off to search the many passages of the labyrinth with it trailing behind him.


Theseus found his way to the centre of the maze. The Minotaur charged at Theseus but he raised the sword that Princess Ariadne had given him and killed the horrible monster. Prince Theseus began to make his way back to the gate, following the string he had unravelled along his way.


Princess Ariadne was waiting for Theseus at the gate. Theseus and Ariadne gathered the children and ran to their ship and sailed away quietly without anyone noticing. On the way back, they stopped off at a small island called Naxos for supplies.


However, Princess Ariadne insisted on coming ashore to rest. There was nothing to do on the island and she soon fell asleep. Theseus gathered all the children and quietly sailed away from the island towards Athens, leaving Princess Ariadne asleep on Naxos. After all, he did keep his word.


Theseus' ship arrived safely back at Athens although he had forgotten the promise he had made to his father to change the ship's sails to white, making King Aegeus believe that his son had been defeated by the Minotaur.