



## The First Aviators

In the days of King Minos [MY-nohs] of Crete, the greatest architect, builder, and inventor was Daedalus [DED-uh-luhs], a man of Athens. Minos hired Daedalus to design the Labyrinth, a maze of winding passages, to house the terrible Minotaur [MIN-oh-tor]—half-man, half-bull—a kind of monster-god who every year demanded sacrifices of beautiful young men and women, many of them from Athens.

One year a hero appeared among the victims. This was Theseus [THEE-see-uhs], who was determined to kill the monster before the human sacrifice. But once he got into the Labyrinth, how could he find his way out again? His one hope was the king's daughter, Ariadne [air-ee-AD-nee], who had fallen in love with Theseus. Ariadne appealed to Daedalus for help. He provided a ball of thread, which was conveyed to Theseus by Ariadne's nurse, along with instructions on how to fix it in the wall and unwind it behind him on the way in. If he managed to kill the monster, he was to follow the trail of thread out of the maze. Theseus entered the Labyrinth, killed the monster, and escaped with Ariadne to his ship and away from Crete.

But Daedalus was left to face the consequences. Minos was not long in finding out what had happened and who it was that had dared to thwart his will. In a rage, he had Daedalus and his son, Icarus [ICK-uh-ruhs], shut

up in a tower over the Labyrinth. There they could watch the sea and the birds, but had no hope of escape. Daedalus, the inventor, however, managed to occupy himself very well, tinkering and puttering and inventing new things, which he was allowed to do, for such things were useful to Minos. Daedalus had already invented a saw, and he could easily cut through the bars of his tower prison. But the main obstacles for him and Icarus were the height of the tower and the winding lanes and aisles of the Labyrinth below.

Then one day, watching the birds, he had a thought. Wings. He started



**Icarus didn't listen to his father and flew too close to the sun. The heat melted the wax holding his wings together.**

asking for new materials—stout reeds of the kind Pan used for his pipes, wax, and the feathers of eagles. With the reeds he built a frame and waxed the feathers to it. He made a large set for himself and a smaller set for Icarus. When the time came, they flew away from the tower of the Labyrinth.



For awhile they hid out in remote parts of Crete, strolling along the beaches now and then, improving their wings, still studying the flights of birds. But Minos was looking for them, watching all the ships, searching everywhere. So they decided to leave Crete and fly off somewhere else, perhaps to Delos, island of Apollo [uh-PAW-loh], who protects inventors and artists. Before they took off, Daedalus warned his son, "Don't fly too high or the sun will melt the wax and your wings will fall off. But don't fly too low or the waves will moisten the wax. Keep to the middle altitudes and follow me."

At first Icarus was obedient and followed his father on the straight middle course. But after awhile he got excited and began trying stunts. First he would drift down toward the sea until his sandals were almost touching the waves; then he would soar up, up toward the sun—higher, higher.

Suddenly there were feathers floating around him, a cloud of feathers so thick he could hardly see. In terror he knew that the sun had melted the wax; he was losing his wings. Down he fell, down, down, down. Desperately he tried to rise, but it was no use. Turning and twisting, with a last despairing cry, he plunged into the winey-colored waves of the deep sea, that part of the Aegean that lies between Crete and Delos, ever since called the Icarian Sea.

Daedalus, hearing his son's cry, turned back and circled the waters, but saw nothing except a handful of floating white feathers. Sadly he traveled on to friendly Delos where he, the master architect, built a temple to Apollo. Here he hung up his wings in homage to the god. He never again tried to fly.

*Apollo = Apollo*



**Apollo**

### Beyond the Myth

1. How is the story of Daedalus and Icarus similar to the story of Prometheus?

2. How is the story of Icarus like the story of Phaethon?

### Identify:

Arachne

Minotaur

Icarus

### Define:

labyrinth

architect

### Locate on a map:

Crete

Delos

Icarian Sea