



WORK IN
A GROUP

Discuss real drugs that, like Laughing Gas, sometimes change the way people behave. Talk about ways that such drugs do people harm. Ask questions about what your classmates say. Talk about the answers.



Focusing on "A Hero's Promise"

Think and Read

- ▶ Talk about heroes who are living today. Discuss what makes someone a hero. Ask your classmates about their heroes.
- ▶ Read the title and the introduction on pages 98–99. Then look at the pictures. Think about what you said about heroes.
 - When do you think this story takes place?
 - Who is the hero? How might the hero keep his promise?
 - What do the rest of the pictures suggest about what will happen in the story?
- ▶ Get ready to read a story about a hero named Theseus. As you read, think about the problems that Theseus has with the unjust King Minos. Think about what you would add to this chart.

Theseus' Problems	Theseus' Solutions

Now turn the page and read "A Hero's Promise."
Then you will talk about justice.

A HERO'S PROMISE

A Greek legend retold by Ian Serraillier

Illustrated by Kinuko Craft



Stories about Theseus,¹ one of the greatest heroes of ancient Greece, have been told for centuries. The story of his struggle with the Minotaur² is but one of many tales about Theseus' strength and bravery.

1. Theseus (THEE-see-uhs).
2. Minotaur (MIN-uh-tawr).

Theseus was a long-lost son of King Aegeus³ of the ancient Greek city of Athens. Many years before this story begins, King Aegeus had caused the death of Androgeus,⁴ the son of King Minos⁵ of Crete.⁶ As punishment, Minos demanded a human sacrifice from the people of Athens. Every year for ten years the people of Athens had sent seven boys and seven girls to the island of Crete, where King Minos forced them to enter the Labyrinth.⁷ The huge maze was the home of the terrible Minotaur, half man and half beast, who ate only human flesh. No one who entered the Labyrinth had ever escaped.

When Theseus came at last to his father's city, he was horrified to learn of this cruel punishment. Theseus felt that his father Aegeus and the people of Athens had paid far too much for one misdeed. He made a promise to the fourteen doomed young people: "Do not despair. I will go with you and kill the Minotaur. None of you will die."

3. Aegeus (EE-jee-uhs).
4. Androgeus (An-DRAH-jee-uhs).
5. Minos (MY-nuhs).
6. Crete (KREET).
7. Labyrinth (LAB-uh-rinth).



In the harbor the ship was already waiting. The helmsman was standing by the steering oar. The pilot at the prow and the thirty oarsmen on their benches were impatient to be off. As the victims embarked, their families and friends followed them up the gangplank, pressing on them food for the voyage, embracing them, clinging to them. And when the ship drew slowly away, they stretched out their hands to them over the water.

Outside the harbor the sailors hauled the black sail up to the masthead and unfurled it. The north wind filled it, and the ship sped away over the waves. But the victims, huddled together amidships, were cold and lonely as the sea, and the crying gulls above their heads echoed their misery.

They sailed past the islands of Aegina⁸ and Milos,⁹ and on the third day out they sighted far off the cliffs of Crete. A ship came out to meet them.

"She has a golden sail painted with royal dolphins," said the pilot. "King Minos himself must be on board."

The sails of both ships were lowered and the oarsmen took over. The Cretan ship drew alongside. King Minos was standing at the prow, splendid in a golden embroidered cloak that streamed behind him in the breeze. He was a great warlord and a lover of beautiful things, but he was also vain.

When the two ships were close enough for the oarsmen to touch hands, he leaped aboard the Greek

8. Aegina (ee-JY-nuh).
9. Milos (MEE-laws).



ship and asked to see the victims. Trembling with fear, they stood up at the prow, with Theseus beside them. At once a quarrel started. When King Minos saw that there were fifteen and not fourteen of them, he said he would keep one of them as his slave. And he picked out Eriboia,¹⁰ the most beautiful of the girls, and touched her pale cheek with his hand as if she were already his slave. She screamed to Theseus to help her.

Theseus leaped up and stood chin to chin with King Minos and said, "She is no slave but a noble's daughter. If you touch her again I shall throw you into the sea."

10. Eriboia (ehr-ih-BOY-uh).



Never before had anyone spoken to King Minos like that.

"Who are you that dare insult me so?" said King Minos, white with anger.

"I am Theseus, son of King Aegeus."

"I am the warlord of Cnossus,¹¹ king of the islands," said Minos. "Immortal Zeus,¹² the king of the gods, is my father." And stretching out his hands to heaven, he called on Zeus to confirm it with a flash of lightning.

At once the whole face of the sky was split with lightning, and there was a great drum roll of thunder.

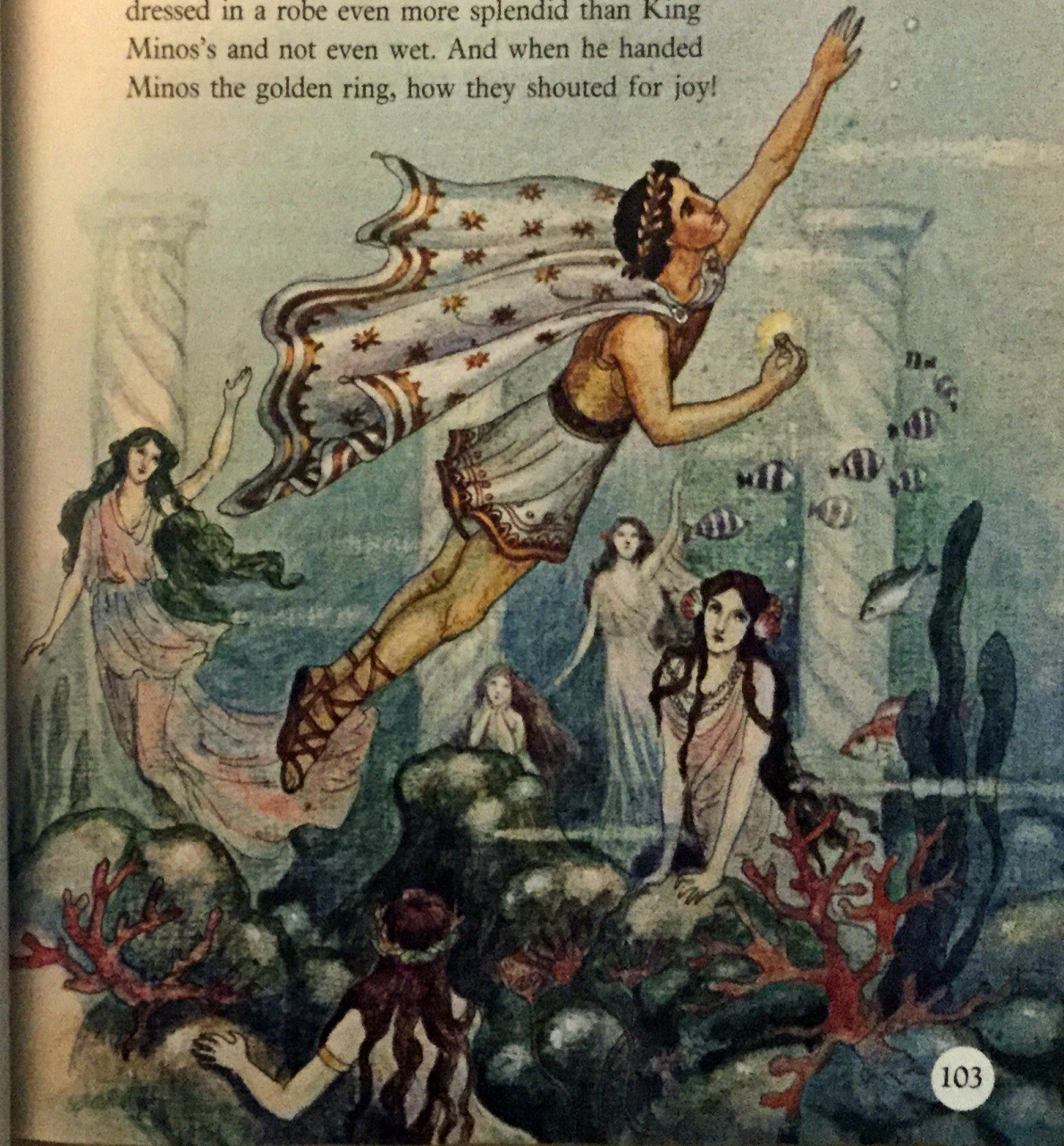
"I have the blood of Poseidon,¹³ the sea god, in my veins," said Theseus. "He will give me whatever help I need."

"Then fetch this," said King Minos. He threw his gold signet ring into the sea, and it sank at once.

Theseus climbed on to the stern rail and dived into the sea, deep down to the watery halls of Poseidon, the sea god. And a hundred dolphins, rolling and plunging, brought him to the palace of the Nereids,¹⁴ the daughters of Ocean, who were shining with the splendor of fire. Thetis,¹⁵ the loveliest of the sea nymphs, dressed him in a purple robe and gave him a jewelled crown. Meanwhile her sisters swam everywhere to find the golden ring. At last they found it in a cranny of rock and, in front of Poseidon the sea god, they gave it to Theseus. Then

11. Cnossus (NAHS-uhs)
12. Zeus (ZOOS)
13. Poseidon (puh-SY-duhn)
14. Nereids (NUR-ee-ids)
15. Thetis (THEE-tis)

he sped towards the sea roof, a long trail of bubbles marking his path back to the ceiling of light. When he broke the surface, the young men and girls hauled him eagerly aboard. They were amazed to see him dressed in a robe even more splendid than King Minos's and not even wet. And when he handed Minos the golden ring, how they shouted for joy!





As for Minos, he said not a word, but went back to his ship and returned to harbor.

In those days Cnossus was one of the great cities of the world. The nearby port of Heracleion¹⁶ was crowded with shipping, with trading boats from Egypt and Asia as well as the King's own fleet. People had come from all over the island to see the Athenian¹⁷ strangers. They stared at them as they disembarked and marched up the road to the palace.

And what a palace it was! It spread right over the hill. The halls and galleries and countless rooms were built of huge blocks of stone, framed in cypress wood cut from the forests inland. The wooden columns tapered downwards and were painted russet with blue capitals.¹⁸ There was a grand staircase four stories high, lit by wells of light and thus protected from the hot summer sun and freezing winter winds.

As Theseus entered the hall at the foot of the staircase, he was startled to see a huge black bull in front of him. It had gold horns and white nostrils, red-rimmed eyes and a fierce mouth. At once he thought of the Minotaur. He drew his sword and waited for the charge.

"The beast is harmless," laughed King Minos. "Sheathe your sword."

Then Theseus saw it was only a painting on the wall, and he too laughed.

It was the custom for King Minos to entertain his Athenian guests to dinner; they were not shut in the

Labyrinth till the following day. The cups and dishes were all of solid gold; and the food was lavish and magnificent. Yet Theseus and his companions did not feel hungry. They were haunted by the thought of what lay in store for them next day.

In the middle of the dinner they were puzzled by a sudden growl of thunder that seemed to come from underneath their feet. King Minos was quick to explain it.

"The Minotaur is hungry tonight," he said. "Perhaps he has smelled human flesh and cannot wait till morning."

Then the floor began to tremble and the foundations of the palace quivered and shook.



16. Heracleion (ee-RAH-klee-awn).

17. Athenian (uh-THÉE-nee-uhn).

18. capitals: in this story, the upper parts of columns or pillars.



"The Minotaur is trying out his paces," said the King. "His temper does not improve with waiting. But why should we cut short our entertainment to please him?"

King Minos clearly enjoyed his guests' dismay. Not so his daughter, Ariadne,¹⁹ who admired Theseus' dignity and calm. She asked about his exploits on the road to Athens and listened entranced while he told her about them. She could not bear to think of the miserable death that awaited him and his companions next morning. So she decided to help him.

After the dinner she took Theseus to the Hall of Distaffs, where she did her weaving. The walls were bright with deep blue dolphins and starfish and spiky sea urchins painted against a pale blue ground, all lit with a soft light.

"Tomorrow I must wrestle with death," said Theseus.

"I can help you win and escape safely," said Ariadne. "Daedalus,²⁰ the master craftsman who built the Labyrinth, once told me how to find the way out."

She went to her spindle and picked up a ball of wool.

"As soon as you are inside the door, tie the loose end of the wool to the lintel," she said, "and unwind the ball as you go. Do not let it out of your hand or you will never find the way back. When you meet the Minotaur, seize him by the horn and stab him."

"But we are allowed no weapons," said Theseus.

¹⁹ Ariadne (ah-ree-AD-nee)
²⁰ Daedalus (DED-uh-luh-s).



"Take this dagger and hide it in your tunic." She gave it to him; the hilt was of solid gold and the iron point sharp as a needle.

"Tomorrow I shall owe my life to you," said Theseus. "Dearest princess, what can I do for you in return?"

"Make me your wife and take me back to Greece," said Ariadne, and the tears welled up in her eyes. "I am lonely and unhappy here. The palace is full of soldiers; the talk is of nothing but wars and fighting. And at night the monster bellows so loudly that I cannot sleep. I beg you to take me away."

"With all my heart," said Theseus, much moved by her beauty and goodness. And he took her in his arms and kissed her.



Next morning the palace guards locked Theseus and his companions in the Labyrinth. The huge iron door shut behind them with a clang that echoed through the dark twisting passages, the numberless corridors. And when the last echo had faded, there was a dreadful stillness.

"You have nothing to fear," said Theseus. "I shall keep my promise. Wait here till I return."

He had hidden Ariadne's dagger under his cloak. And to light him on his way, he had the jewelled crown which Thetis had given him. He fastened one end of the ball of wool to the lintel above the door and set off into the darkness. Crouching by the door, his companions watched the splash of light on the walls till he turned a corner and vanished; then they listened in the pitch darkness to the echo of his footsteps fading into the distance.

On and on down the endless corridors went Theseus, hour after hour, unwinding the wool as he walked. The stone walls were ice cold and slimy; they glistened wet in the light of the jewels. Sometimes he stopped to look for signs of the monster, to listen for its footsteps.

He had come to a place where the corridor branched into three when he suddenly heard the sound of heavy breathing. He put down the ball of wool and gripped the hilt of his dagger. He peered round and turned his head slowly while the jewels on his crown, shining like a torch, floodlit the darkness.

The Minotaur was lying in the mouth of the third passage, curled up, asleep. The monstrous bull's head with its golden horns and white nostrils was nodding

over a human chest. Roused by the light, it opened its eyes, red-rimmed and bloodshot, and for a whole minute blinked at Theseus. Suddenly it let out so great a bellow that it seemed as if the walls had crumbled and fallen in. High above in the palace Ariadne heard it as she sat weaving in her room, and the distaff fell from her hand. The trees in the forest trembled and a great wave rolled ashore and rocked the ships in harbor.

Then the creature scrambled upright. It lowered its head and, snorting smoke from its fiery nostrils, charged. There was no room for Theseus to step





aside, but he remembered what Ariadne had told him to do. He reached up with his left hand, caught hold of a horn and wrenched the head backwards. With his right hand he plunged the dagger into its neck. The beast groaned and slumped forward on top of him, almost smothering him as they fell. For a long moment they rolled and wrestled on the stony floor. Then the Minotaur's muscles went limp and slack and it never moved again.

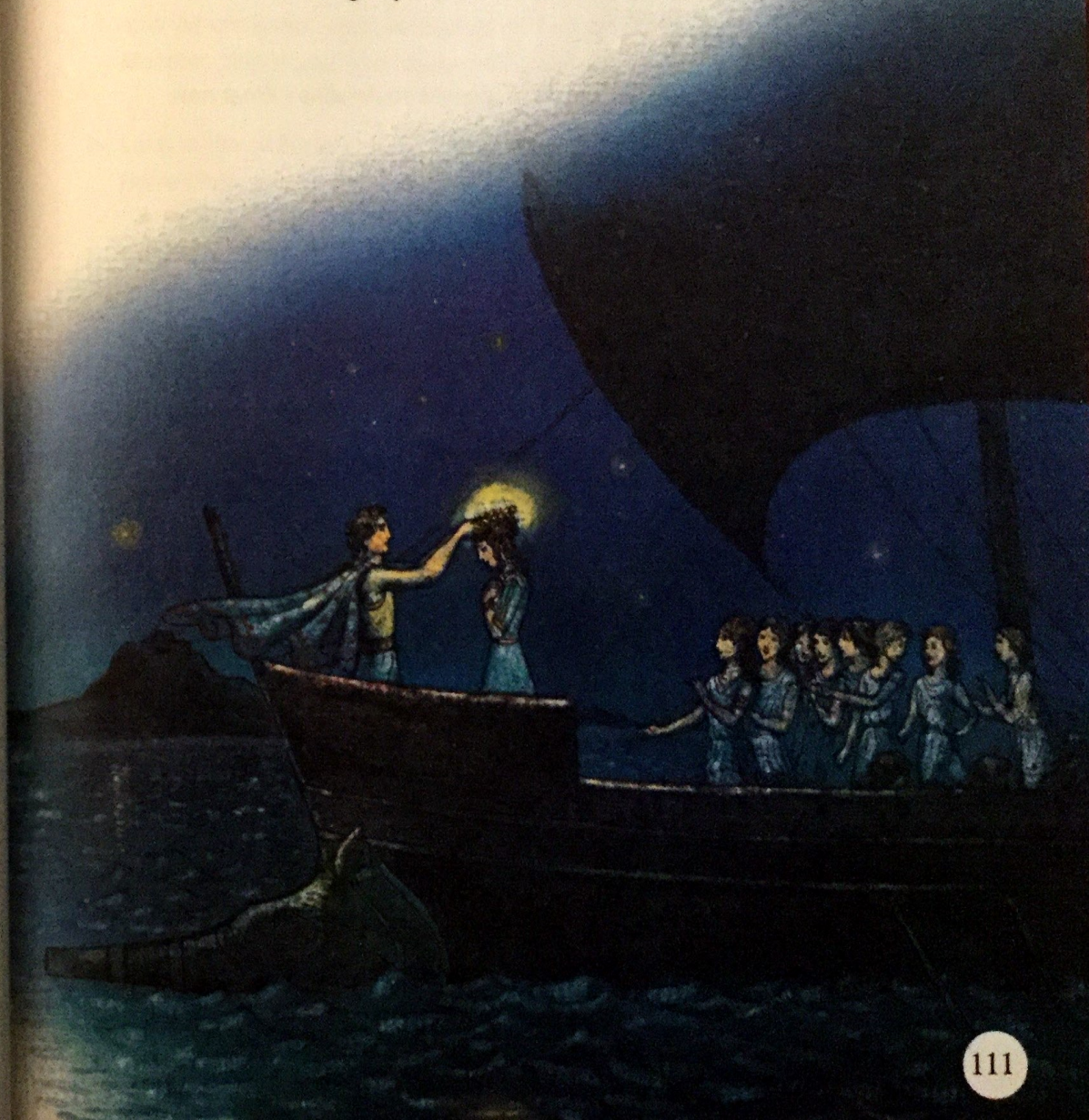
Theseus struggled to his feet. He picked up what was left of the ball of wool, and winding it up as he went, groped his way back to the mouth of the Labyrinth where his companions were waiting. They cheered when they saw him and kissed his hands.

But he silenced them at once, for they were not out of danger yet. "We must stay here till night-fall, till the guards are sure we are dead," he told them. "Then Ariadne will unlock the door and let us out."

At last they heard the key grate in the lock and the door creak open. The stars were shining as they tiptoed out into the warm night. He called softly to Ariadne. "I have killed the Minotaur," he whispered. He slipped her hand into his and they hurried down to the harbor, with the seven young men and the seven girls behind them.

The ship was waiting. They hoisted sail and cast off their moorings and steered past the sleeping ships. So that King Minos could not pursue them, they scuttled one of the ships in the harbor mouth to block the way out. Then joyfully they made for the open sea.

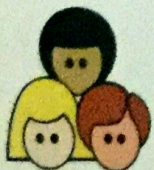
With his companions as witnesses, while the wind filled the sail and tugged at the rigging, Theseus made Ariadne his wife. And as a pledge that he would love her all his life, he gave her his jewelled crown and set it on her head, where it sparkled in the darkness as brightly as the stars.



Think about the story. Finish the chart on page 97 by filling in Theseus' problems and solutions. Then answer the questions.

Think and Discuss

1. Use your chart. Would you say that Theseus' greatest problem is a person, a place, or a thing? Explain your choice.
2. What is Theseus' promise to Ariadne? What new problems could this cause?
3. Do you think Theseus' promise to Ariadne is as important as the promise he made to the seven boys and seven girls of Athens? Explain why or why not.
4. How might Theseus keep his promise without any help from Ariadne?
5. What incident first shows that Theseus belongs in a unit about amazing talents?
6. Why does King Minos want the young people from Athens to be fed to the Minotaur? Do you think this is just?
7. In the United States, who decides how someone is punished for a crime? How is this decided under King Minos' system?



WORK IN A GROUP

Meet in a group. Talk about how justice systems work in a classroom and in a school. Ask questions about what your classmates say. Compare their ideas to yours.

Focusing on "Animal Myths and Mysteries"

Think and Read

- ▶ Quickly write down everything you have heard about strange creatures, such as Bigfoot or the Loch Ness Monster. Share your information with your classmates.
- ▶ Look at the pictures in this information article. Remember your discussion of strange creatures.
 - What animals will you read about in this article?
 - Which of the animals really exist? Which ones are make-believe?
 - What might the purpose of this selection be?
- ▶ Read the information article to learn details about mysterious animals. Take notes as you read. Use this chart to remember the animals' names and the details that describe them.

Animal Name	Details

Now turn the page and read "Animal Myths and Mysteries." Then you will talk about mythical and mysterious animals.