

Myths and Legends: Icarus flies too close to the sun

By Josephine Preston Peabody, adapted by Newsela staff on 11.10.16

Word Count **625**

Level **930L**



TOP: Icarus, the son of Daedalus from Greek mythology, tries to escape from Crete using wings made of wax and feathers. After flying too near the sun, his wings melt and he falls to his death at sea. Meanwhile, Daedalus flies to safety, unaware of his son's fate. BOTTOM: Daedalus helping Icarus put on the wings. Getty Images.

Here is the myth of Icarus. His father, Daedalus, was a skilled inventor who created wings for him and his son, Icarus, so they could escape King Minos of Crete. Excited about this new freedom, Icarus, ignoring the warnings of his father, flies too close to the sun, and falls into the sea.

A Plan To Escape From Crete

Daedalus was a great inventor and builder, who learned many secrets of the gods.

He once built, for King Minos of Crete, a wonderful labyrinth. This was a maze of winding and twisting ways that was impossible to escape. Soon after, King Minos began to see Daedalus as his enemy, so he locked Daedalus and his son, Icarus, in a tower. They were able to escape, but it seemed impossible to leave the island because every ship that came or went was well guarded by order of the king.

Closely watching the seagulls in the air, who each day flew away from the island, Daedalus thought of a plan for their escape.

Little by little, he began collecting feathers and sewed them together with thread. Using just the right amount of wax, he created two great wings like those of a bird. When they were done, Daedalus fitted them to his own shoulders. He found that by waving his arms he could rise into the air and move with the wind. He flew like a bird.

Two Pairs Of Wings

Without delay, he created a pair of wings for the boy Icarus, and taught him carefully how to use them. "Remember," said the father, "never to fly very low or very high, for the fogs about the earth would weigh you down, but the blaze of the sun will surely melt your feathers apart if you go too near."

For Icarus, the warnings went in one ear and out the other. Who could remember to be careful when he was to fly for the first time? Are birds careful? Not they! He only thought of the joy of escape.

The day came with a good wind that would set them free. Daedalus put on his wings and waited to see that all was well with Icarus. The two could not fly hand in hand, so up they rose, the boy after his father. The land of Crete sank below them and people, who saw them high above the treetops, thought they were gods.

Flying Brings Pure Joy

At first there was fear in the joy and looking down made their brains spin. But when a great wind filled his wings, Icarus forgot everything in the world but joy. He forgot Crete, the other islands that he had passed over and that winged thing in the distance before him that was his father, Daedalus. He stretched out his arms to the sky and flew up toward the highest heavens.

Warmer and warmer grew the air. Those arms, that had seemed to hold him up began to droop. Icarus waved his arms harder but he was falling. The heat of the sun had melted the wax from his wings and the feathers fell, one by one, like snowflakes.

Icarus Falls Down, Down, Down

Icarus fell like a leaf tossed down, down, down. Daedalus heard his cry from far away. He searched high and low for the poor boy, but only found the birdlike feathers afloat on the water. He knew that Icarus was drowned.



Daedalus named a nearby island Icaria, in memory of his son. In deep sadness, he went to the temple of Apollo in Sicily, and there hung up his wings. Never again did he attempt to fly.

From Josephine Preston Peabody's "Old Greek Folk Stories Told Anew," published in 1897.

Quiz

- 1 What was the MOST important reason why Daedalus and Icarus needed to fly?
- (A) They wanted to feel like birds.
 - (B) They wanted to know the gods' secrets.
 - (C) They wanted to escape from Crete.
 - (D) They wanted to test their invention.
- 2 The story MAINLY explains the importance of listening to those in authority by:
- (A) indicating what happened to Icarus when he ignored his father
 - (B) explaining the plans of Icarus and Daedalus to escape King Minos
 - (C) showing Daedalus' visit to the temple of Apollo in Sicily
 - (D) describing the reaction of the people who saw them flying
- 3 Look at the image at the TOP of the article. Based on the story, why would someone choose to paint the scene shown in the image?
- (A) because it is showing the whole story
 - (B) because it is the end of the story
 - (C) because it is the happiest part of the story
 - (D) because it is the climax of the story
- 4 Look at the image at the BOTTOM of the article. Based on the story, what is Daedalus doing in the image?
- (A) measuring Icarus for wings
 - (B) giving Icarus his wings
 - (C) telling Icarus to fly above him
 - (D) saying goodbye to Icarus