

Uncovering the Past: The Humanities of Ancient Greece (Lesson 4)

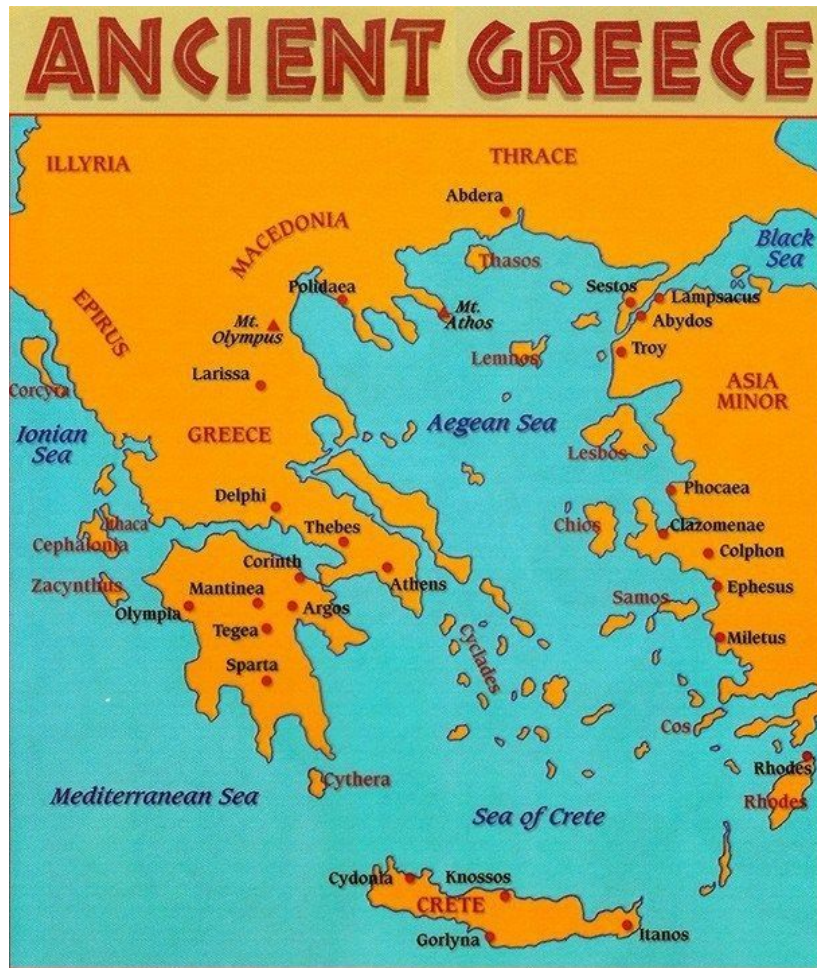
Theseus and the Minotaur: A Greek Myth

Lesson Overview: This lesson introduces students to the Greek myth of the tragic hero Theseus and his quest to conquer the fierce beast, the Minotaur. Through examining vocabulary and responding to critical thinking questions, students will focus on different story elements of this ancient myth.



1. **Pre-Reading:** In ancient Greece, people told myths to explain the ways of the world. Myths often portrayed brave heroes and vicious monsters. The ancient Greeks also believed in powerful gods who watched over Earth and intervened when they saw fit. In this particular myth, a prince from Greece's capital city of Athens travels by sea to another city, Crete, in order to fight a monster.

Map Analysis: Look at the map of Ancient Greece below. Have your student locate both Athens and Crete. Explain that this will be the setting of this myth.



2. Vocabulary:

- **Tributes** (*noun*): In this context, a tribute is a payment made by one state or ruler to another, especially as the price of peace, security, protection or to recognize authority
- **Savage** (*adjective*) : fierce, violent, or uncontrolled
- **Harbour** (*noun*): A harbour is a place on the coast where ships may find shelter
- **Humiliate** (*verb*) : to make someone feel ashamed or foolish
- **Puny** (*adjective*) : small and weak
- **Feeble** (*adjective*) : lacking physical strength, especially due to age or illness

- **Goad** (*verb*) : to provoke or annoy in order to create a reaction
- **Bellow** (*verb*) : to shout in a loud or deep voice
- **Despair** (*noun*) : a feeling that everything is wrong and nothing will get better
- **Haste** (*noun*) : speed or hurry, often made with urgency

3. **Reading the Myth:** Follow this link to read the story of [Theseus and the Minotaur](#).

4. **Post-Reading Activity:** Discussion Questions (from CommonLit): These can either be written down as reflection questions or they can be orally discussed.

- If it weren't for Ariadne, do you think Theseus would have been able to get out of the maze? Use details about the maze and Theseus' character to support your ideas.
- How does the ending of the story change your opinion of Theseus' character? Do you think the gods should punish him? Why or why not?
- The Ancient Greeks often told myths to explain how things came to be and to teach a lesson. What do we, as readers, learn from this myth about power? How can power corrupt people? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
- In the context of this myth, what makes a hero? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.

5. **Extension Activity I:** Students can further explore the myth of the Minotaur in this article on National Geographic. Based on the article and the myth, have your student draw what they imagine this monster looks like.

- <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/magazine/2019/09-10/minotaur-in-greek-roman-mythology/>

6. Extension Activity II: Watch Jim Henson's *The Storyteller: Theseus and the Minotaur*. Have your student note how the live action version compares with the one they read. What is the effect of watching the film version?

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_teNCSRYbVo
- <https://www.amazon.com/Jim-Hensons-Storyteller-Greek-Myths/dp/B077H4KLL7>