



The Flight of Icarus

retold by
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Cast of Characters

King Minos (mī'nās') tyrant of Crete, enemy of Athens.

Theseus (thē'sē·əs) hero from Athens held captive by Minos. Daedalus helped him escape from the labyrinth on Crete.

Daedalus (ded'l·əs) great Athenian architect who built the labyrinth on Crete.

Icarus (ik'ə·rəs) Daedalus's young son.



IDENTIFY

Underline the names of the two people who are the main characters opposing each other in the **conflict** described here. Circle the name of the son of one of these characters. On what kind of landform are the father and son imprisoned?

VISUALIZE

Re-read lines 13–22. Underline the words that help you picture the process of making the wings. Number each step, placing the number above each step described.

PREDICT

Do you think the wings will work? Will Daedalus and Icarus manage to escape? Tell what you think will happen.

When Theseus escaped from the labyrinth, King Minos flew into a rage with its builder, Daedalus, and ordered him shut up in a high tower that faced the lonely sea. In time, with the help of his young son, Icarus, Daedalus managed to escape from the tower, only to find himself a prisoner on the island. Several times he tried by bribery to stow away on one of the vessels sailing from Crete, but King Minos kept strict watch over them, and no ships were allowed to sail without being carefully searched.

- 10 Daedalus was an ingenious artist and was not discouraged by his failures. “Minos may control the land and sea,” he said, “but he does not control the air. I will try that way.”

He called his son, Icarus, to him and told the boy to gather up all the feathers he could find on the rocky shore. As thousands of gulls soared over the island, Icarus soon collected a huge pile of feathers. Daedalus then melted some wax and made a skeleton in the shape of a bird’s wing. The smallest feathers he pressed into the soft wax and the large ones he tied on with thread.

- 20 Icarus played about on the beach happily while his father worked, chasing the feathers that blew away in the strong wind that swept the island and sometimes taking bits of the wax and working it into strange shapes with his fingers.

It was fun making the wings. The sun shone on the bright feathers; the breezes ruffled them. When they were finished, Daedalus fastened them to his shoulders and found himself lifted upwards, where he hung poised in the air. Filled with excitement, he made another pair for his son. They were smaller than his own, but strong and beautiful.

- 30 Finally, one clear, wind-swept morning, the wings were finished, and Daedalus fastened them to Icarus’s shoulders and taught him how to fly. He bade him watch the movements of the birds, how they soared and glided overhead. He pointed out the slow, graceful sweep of their wings as they beat the air steadily, without fluttering. Soon Icarus was sure that he, too, could fly and, raising his arms up and down, skirted over the white sand and even out over the waves, letting his feet

touch the snowy foam as the water thundered and broke over the sharp rocks. Daedalus watched him proudly but with misgivings.

40 He called Icarus to his side and, putting his arm round the boy's shoulders, said, "Icarus, my son, we are about to make our flight. No human being has ever traveled through the air before, and I want you to listen carefully to my instructions. Keep at a moderate height, for if you fly too low, the fog and spray will clog your wings, and if you fly too high, the heat will melt the wax that holds them together. Keep near me and you will be safe."

He kissed Icarus and fastened the wings more securely to his son's shoulders. Icarus, standing in the bright sun, the shining wings drooping gracefully from his shoulders, his 50 golden hair wet with spray, and his eyes bright and dark with excitement, looked like a lovely bird. Daedalus's eyes filled with tears, and turning away, he soared into the sky, calling to Icarus to follow. From time to time, he looked back to see that the boy was safe and to note how he managed his wings in his flight. As they flew across the land to test their prowess before setting out across the dark wild sea, plowmen below stopped their work and shepherds gazed in wonder, thinking Daedalus and Icarus were gods.

Father and son flew over Samos and Delos, which lay on 60 their left, and Lebinthus,¹ which lay on their right. Icarus, beating his wings in joy, felt the thrill of the cool wind on his face and the clear air above and below him. He flew higher and higher up into the blue sky until he reached the clouds. His father saw him and called out in alarm. He tried to follow him, but he was heavier and his wings would not carry him. Up and up Icarus soared, through the soft, moist clouds and out again toward the glorious sun. He was bewitched by a sense of freedom and beat his wings frantically so that they would carry him higher and higher to heaven itself. The blazing sun beat 70 down on the wings and softened the wax. Small feathers fell from the wings and floated softly down, warning Icarus to stay

1. **Samos** (sā'mās), **Delos** (dē'lās), and **Lebinthus** (lə-bin'thəs): Greek islands in the Aegean Sea.



INFER

As Icarus practices flying (lines 34–38), which of his actions might give Daedalus some cause for worry?

IDENTIFY

Underline the instructions that Daedalus gives Icarus.

BUILD FLUENCY

Read Daedalus's advice to his son aloud, pretending you are a parent. Use the tone of voice that a parent might use when advising a young son about such an important matter.

INFER

Underline the **simile** in lines 47–58. A simile is a comparison of two unlike things using a comparing word such as *like* or *as*. Why do Daedalus's eyes fill with tears? How old do you think Icarus is? Tell why you think so.



INFER

Why does the narrator call Icarus “the enchanted boy”? What do you think *enchanted* means in the context of this paragraph?

RETELL

Go back to line 59. **Retell** what happens to Icarus.

INTERPRET

Based on the details in this myth, and also on your prior knowledge of parents and young people, do you think that Daedalus should have been able to predict what Icarus would do? What could he have said or done that might have saved Icarus?

his flight and glide to earth. But the enchanted boy did not notice them until the sun became so hot that the largest feathers dropped off and he began to sink. Frantically he fluttered his arms, but no feathers remained to hold the air. He cried out to his father, but his voice was submerged in the blue waters of the sea, which has forever after been called by his name.

Daedalus, crazed by anxiety, called back to him, “Icarus! Icarus, my son, where are you?” At last he saw the feathers floating from the sky, and soon his son plunged through the clouds into the sea. Daedalus hurried to save him, but it was too late. He gathered the boy in his arms and flew to land, the tips of his wings dragging in the water from the double burden they bore. Weeping bitterly, he buried his small son and called the land Icaria in his memory.

Then, with a flutter of wings, he once more took to the air, but the joy of his flight was gone and his victory over the air was bitter to him. He arrived safely in Sicily, where he built a temple to Apollo and hung up his wings as an offering to the god, and in the wings he pressed a few bright feathers he had found floating on the water where Icarus fell. And he mourned for the birdlike son who had thrown caution to the winds in the exaltation of his freedom from the earth.

Story Map

The elements of a story or myth can be charted in a **story map** like the one below. Use the first five boxes to outline the main parts of the **plot** of "The Flight of Icarus." Then, review the information you've written, and try to state the myth's **theme**, or message. Think about what Icarus attempts to do, what he ignores, and what happens to him as a result.

