

Myths and Legends: Icarus flies too close to the sun

By Josephine Preston Peabody, adapted by Newsela staff on 11.10.16

Word Count **565**

Level **790L**



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 Way To Get Off The Island

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

King Minos of Crete made him build a labyrinth that was a maze of winding and twisting ways. No one could escape from it. Soon after, King Minos thought Daedalus was his enemy. He locked Daedalus and his son, Icarus, in a tower. They were able to escape, but could not get off the island.

Daedalus began watching seagulls flying away from the island, which gave him an idea.

He began collecting feathers and sewed them together with thread. Using just the right amount of wax, he created two great bird wings. Daedalus fitted them to his own shoulders. He waved his arms, rose into the air and moved with the wind. He flew like a bird.

Not Too High And Not Too Low

He also made a pair of wings for his son and taught him how to fly. “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.

Should Have Listened To Dad

At first there was fear mixed in with 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 fell like a leaf tossed down, down, down. Daedalus heard his cry from far away. He searched for the poor boy, but only found feathers floating 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 hung up his wings. He never flew again.

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

Quiz

- 1 What effect did being an inventor have on Daedalus?
 - (A) It convinced King Minos to set him free from the tower.
 - (B) It made him think he could do things only gods could do.
 - (C) It caused him to build a tower from which he could not escape.
 - (D) It taught him how to make wings that would not melt.

- 2 According to the article, which answer choice accurately characterizes Daedalus' reaction to Icarus' mistake?
 - (A) He blamed himself and tried to honor his son's memory.
 - (B) He blamed the gods and made them take his wings.
 - (C) He was angry with Icarus for not listening to his advice.
 - (D) He was pleased to see that he had been correct about the sun.

- 3 Look at the image at the TOP of the article. Which selection from the story is BEST represented by the image?
 - (A) At first there was fear mixed in with the joy and looking down made their brains spin.
 - (B) He stretched out his arms to the sky and flew up toward the highest heavens.
 - (C) The heat of the sun had melted the wax from his wings and the feathers fell, one by one, like snowflakes.
 - (D) Daedalus heard his cry from far away.

- 4 Look at the image at the BOTTOM of the article. How does the image relate to the MAIN idea of the story?
 - (A) It shows that Icarus did not take his father's advice.
 - (B) It shows that Daedalus was an inventor.
 - (C) It shows that Daedalus was much older than Icarus.
 - (D) It shows Daedalus helping Icarus with his wings.