Name _____ Date _____

Daedalus and Icarus

Myth or legend · 4th–5th grade

Daedalus was the greatest inventor in ancient Greece. King Minos of Crete hired him to build the Labyrinth, a maze so twisting that no one who entered could find the way out. But when the work was done, the king would not let Daedalus leave. He kept the inventor and his young son, Icarus, locked in a tall tower by the sea.

Every day, Daedalus watched the seabirds glide past the window. "The king rules the land and the sea," he said to himself, "but he does not rule the sky." He began to collect feathers that the birds dropped, small ones and large ones, and hid them under his bed.

Late at night, he laid the feathers in rows, from shortest to longest, like the wing of a bird. He tied them with thread and pressed them together with soft wax from candles. Little by little, he made two pairs of wings: one for himself and one for Icarus.

On the morning of their escape, Daedalus strapped the wings onto his son's arms. "Listen carefully," he said. "Fly in the middle of the sky. If you fly too low, the spray from the sea will soak your feathers. If you fly too high, the sun will melt the wax. Stay close to me."

They leaped from the tower, and the wings caught the wind. Fishermen below dropped their nets and stared, thinking they were gods. At first, Icarus stayed beside his father. But the feeling of flying was so thrilling that he forgot every word. He swooped and climbed, higher and higher, toward the bright, warm sun.

The heat softened the wax. One feather slipped loose, then another, then dozens. Icarus flapped his arms, but there was nothing left to hold the air. He fell into the sea far below.

Daedalus circled over the waves, calling his son's name, but only feathers floated on the water. He flew on to safety alone, and he never built another pair of wings. The sea where Icarus fell is still called the Icarian Sea.

Questions

1. Why were Daedalus and Icarus locked in the tower?

2. What gave Daedalus the idea to escape?

3. What two dangers did Daedalus warn about?

4. Why did Icarus fly too high?

5. Which theme fits the myth best?

6. Was Icarus foolish, or just excited? What do you think?

7. Today, people say someone is "flying too close to the sun." What could that mean?

The lesson in my own words

Answer Key

1. The king would not let Daedalus leave Crete.
2. Watching the seabirds fly.
3. The sea spray if too low, and the sun if too high.
4. Flying was so thrilling that he forgot the warning.
5. Listen to wise advice, and know your limits.
6. Answers will vary.
7. Answers will vary.

Lesson: Listen to wise advice, and know your limits.