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**GREEK MYTHS SOCRATIC SEMINAR**

7th grade content and literacy-in standards addressed

**7.RH.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.**

**7.RH.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.**

**7.1. Describe and compare the beliefs, the spread, and the influence of religions throughout Europe, Asia, and Africa, Islam, Crusades, Holy Roman Empire. (Greek Myths)**



**polytheism**: belief in many gods

**monotheism:** belief in one God

**hubris:** excessive pride or self-confidence

Back in the day, the Greek gods did not like it when humans tried to act like them by overcoming their mortal limits. In ancient Greek culture, acting like a god was called ***hubris***, and it was often severely punished. Flying through the air definitely constituted hubris, since flight was supposed to be a strictly gods-only activity. Watching from the ground, shepherds and plowmen even mistake Daedalus and Icarus for gods, since mortals had never before achieved flight.

In a Nutshell

Make your bed. Eat your veggies. Never invite a vampire into your home (unless, of course, he's an upstanding gentleman like Edward Cullen).

Parents are *full* of advice. And while some of it is total bunk (fact: you don't need to wait 30 minutes after you've eaten to go swimming—10 minutes is fine), some of it is spot-on. That triple axel you did while rollerblading? Probably not worth the broken arm. And that extra scoop of ice cream you ate for dessert? A steep price to pay for the terrible stomach ache you ended up with. As much as we hate to admit it, sometimes parents are right.

Unfortunately for Icarus—the son of genius inventor Daedalus—ignoring his dad's words of wisdom came with catastrophic consequences. Before embarking on a father/son hang gliding adventure with a pair of wax wings, Daedalus warned Icarus not to fly too high. Icarus obeyed his father's advice for a little while, but eventually he soared too close to the sun, and his wings melted like M&Ms in your mouth. Oops.

So yeah, this is an age-old tale of parents always know best. But don't worry, it's not just boring adult stuff. With its dangerous journey and clever solutions to tricky problems, the tale of Daedalus and Icarus reads like a really intense episode of the [Amazing Race](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0285335/)… except with a much more tragic ending.

DAEDALUS

*First, a quick bio: Daedalus lived in Athens and was rumored to have descended from Erechtheus, one of the first Athenian kings. Pretty good genetic make-up.*

Daedalus is the Steve Jobs of Greek mythology. If something cool and new needs inventing, he's the man to do it. Various Greek writers credit Daedalus with inventing the axe, boat sails, a big maze called the "Labyrinth," statues that depict people with separated legs and hands (this was a big deal at the time), and of course, fake wings for humans.

Unfortunately, in addition to being brilliant, creative, and amazingly logical, Daedalus can also be jealous, cold-hearted, and impulsive. At one point, he throws his nephew (called Talos by some, Perdix by others) off the Acropolis after the poor kid invents a few contraptions that are cooler than Daedalus' (like the saw). After this incident, Daedalus is forced to leave Athens and finds himself in Crete—and we all know how that ends.

Despite all of his successful inventions, Daedalus' faulty wax wing prototypes have probably gained him the most fame. When his son Icarus sails too close to the sun, the wings melt into puddles, and Icarus falls to his death. Talk about career getting in the way of family. So what do you think: is Daedalus a good dad? He does try to protect his son (helping him escape and giving him those parental warnings we all love) but he also risks his kid's life in the meantime. We're on the fence.

DAEDALUS THE MAD SCIENTIST

The quick-tempered guy who invents things just for the sake of inventing them, giving little thought to the consequences of his creations—does that remind you of anyone? Sounds like a mad scientist to us. And when you think about it, constructing a pair of wax wings and trying to fly a hundred miles over the ocean is a pretty crazy thing to do. Humans, by design, are not meant to fly, so sailing into the air symbolizes a huge act of pride (a.k.a. "hubris") on Daedalus' part.

In a situation where others might have balked (or even used a tiny ounce of caution), Daedalus fully commits himself to his wacky idea, going so far as to risk his son's life in order to test the boundaries of his inventions. Of course, with the death of Icarus, Daedalus pays a steep price for his pride. His reckless wax-wing adventure has since become a cautionary tale, warning others of what might happen if they dare to challenge the laws of nature. It's a common theme throughout a lot of Greek myths—in the battle of mortals versus nature, nature almost always wins. Don't forget it!

Daedalus' cultural descendants include mad scientists like [Dr. Frankenstein](http://www.shmoop.com/frankenstein/victor-frankenstein.html) and [Doc Brown](http://legacy-cdn.smosh.com/smosh-pit/122010/natalie-1.jpg) (you know, the *Back to the Future* guy), whose creations wreaked unintended havoc*.* Daedalus is also associated with great artistry, which may be the reason why James Joyce named one of his characters (an aspiring artist named [Stephen Dedalus](http://www.shmoop.com/ulysses-joyce/stephen-dedalus.html%29)) after him. J.K. Rowling also joined in the fun, naming one of the members of the Order of the Phoenix [Daedalus Diggle](http://www.shmoop.com/harry-potter-5-order-phoenix/dedalus-diggle.html) in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix.*  This guy also seems to have an astounding number of real and fictional spacecrafts named after him. Something about flying maybe? "Project Daedalus" was a spacecraft project done by the British Interplanetary Society, "Daedalus" was the name of the spaceship in the movie *Space Cowboys*, and Star Trek had a whole category of Starfleet ships called "Daedalus." And in terms of celestial bodies, the inventor has an asteroid and moon crater named after him! Whew.

ICARUS

You know that kid who insists on riding his skateboard down the steepest hill in the neighborhood, even though you're *sure* he's going to crash and skin his knee? That's Icarus. The young son of Daedalus and a beautiful slave named Naucrate, Icarus was curious, adventuresome, and reckless. A daredevil in the making, you can bet that his modern day heroes would have included [Tony Hawk](http://www.tonyhawk.com/) and [Evel Knievel](http://evelknievel.com/).

Like any young boy, Icarus liked to test the limits of his father's patience. According to Ovid, while Daedalus diligently crafted his famous wings, Icarus goofed around, playing with the wax and generally getting in the way. And of course, when Daedalus tells Icarus not to fly too high, what does the boy go and do? He takes the express route towards the sun, and ends up melting his wings. It's kind of like when your dad says "Don't touch the stove, it's hot," and you immediately touch the stove and burn yourself. Lesson learned.

Not surprisingly, Icarus has become a symbol for excessive aspiration and the danger of ignoring your parents' advice. The lesson is twofold: (1) don't try to reach your loftiest goals too quickly, because you might burn out (this is what people mean when they say, "Don't try to fly too close to the sun!); and (2) always listen to your parents, especially in situations involving wax wings and celestial bodies.

Icarus's descent has inspired dozens of poems, songs, and paintings. W.H. Auden and Anne Sexton both immortalized him in short poems, and even Shakespeare namedrops Icarus in *Henry VI, Part III.* *Icarus* is also the name of a publication put out by the American Astronomical Society, in celebration of the boy's adventurous spirit.

KING MINOS

Ruler of the island Crete, King Minos is powerful, vengeful, and often kind of childish. For example, when [Poseidon](http://www.shmoop.com/poseidon-neptune/) sends him a beautiful bull, he declines to sacrifice it, because he thinks it is too handsome. This angers the sea god so much that he punishes Minos by causing his wife, Pasiphae, to fall in love with the bull. Oops. That'll teach him.

King Minos isn't especially forgiving, either, especially when it came to personal stuff. He and Daedalus were great buddies until the inventor got mixed up in Minos' personal affairs. According to different stories, Minos is angry with Daedalus for one of two things:

(1) helping his wife seduce the handsome bull by building a cow suit for her

(2) aiding Theseus in his escape from the Labyrinth (thanks to Daedalus, Theseus is able to navigate the Labyrinth and run off with King Minos' daughter)

And of course, rather than have a heart-to-heart with Daedalus to talk about his feelings, King Minos imprisons the inventor and his son. Next best option, we guess. And Minos doesn't let go of a grudge either—too bad because his hunt for Daedalus is what leads to his death. On the bright side, once he's dead, King Minos becomes a judge of the dead down in the Underworld. King Minos isn't as popular as Daddy Daedalus and Punk-Son Icarus, but he does make an appearance as a villain in *Percy Jackson: The Battle of the Labyrinth.*

## BULLET POINT VERSION OF THE STORY

* Daedalus is an Athenian craftsman, famous for his ability to invent and build things. Think Leonardo da Vinci, but with more powers.
* Unfortunately, he also has a jealous streak. When his nephew (Talus) invents the saw, Daedalus realizes that the boy might be more talented than he is. Not good.
* In a fit of jealousy, Daedalus throws Talos off the Acropolis, a tall monument in Athens. That'll teach him not to invent any more carpentry tools.
* Some people say that Athena saw the boy falling, and transformed him into a partridge. But others argue that Talos died and that Daedalus tried to hide the murder by burying him. Well those are very different endings.
* Either because he was feeling guilty or because he was banished, Daedalus leaves Athens and heads to the island of Crete.
* While he's hanging out there, Daedalus befriends King Minos, the island's ruler. (It pays to have friends in high places.)
* Daedalus still has the touch in Crete and he continues his building streak. First, he builds a cow suit so that Crete's queen (Pasiphae) can go on a date with a bull. Yes, we said bull.
* Pasiphae's union with the bull results in a horrible half-man, half-beast called the Minotaur. Heard of him?
* Next up, King Minos (the half-beast's step-dad) asks Daedalus to design a maze (the Labyrinth) in which to put the terrible Minotaur. The Minotaur demands human sacrifices, and every nine years, King Minos sends seven young men and women into the Labyrinth to meet their doom.
* One of these victims sent to his death is the hero Theseus. This guy is tough and he decides to fight back and try to kill the Minotaur.
* King Minos' daughter, Ariadne, falls madly in love with Theseus. And since Daedalus built the Labyrinth, she asks him to help Theseus safely navigate it.
* Always the helpful one, Daedalus gives Theseus a ball of yarn, and tells the hero to trail it behind him, creating a roadmap for how to get back out. Genius, we say! And sure enough, after Theseus kills the Minotaur, he is able to escape. (He and Ariadne leave Crete together.)
* King Minos is not happy with Daedalus for helping Theseus, so he locks Daedalus and his son, Icarus, in the Labyrinth. (This seems to be his punishment of choice.)
* (Some versions of the story say that King Minos actually imprisoned them in a tower. Still others say that Minos just ordered every ship surrounding the island to be searched, making it impossible for Daedalus and Icarus to escape. Any way you look at it, Daedalus and Icarus are trapped on Crete.)
* Clearly our genius inventor won't take this sitting down. Knowing that the land and water are guarded by King Minos' army, Daedalus decides to escape by air. Brilliant.
* Daedalus uses twine, feathers, and wax to build large wings for himself and his son.
* (According to Ovid, Icarus goofed around while Daddy Daedalus was making the wings. He played with the feathers and wax and just generally got in his dad's way. Ah, kids.)
* Finally, the wings are finished. Daedalus tries his set on and—OMG—they totally work. He hangs in the air for a few seconds, flapping his fake wings. Nice!
* Before putting wings on Icarus, Daedalus gives his son some warnings: he should follow him closely and fly at a middle height. If he flies too low, the seawater will dampen the wings, and if he flies too high, the sun will melt them. Got it? Good.
* Daedalus is still a little scared about the journey: the big softy cries while tying the wings onto his son, and gives his little guy a hug.
* And off they go! Daedalus looks back at his son, cheering him on.
* A bunch of people on the ground, including a shepherd and a plowman, stop their work to gaze up at Daedalus and Icarus. They're completely blown away at the sight of two people flying in the air—they figure that Daedalus and Icarus might be gods, since no human has ever achieved flight before. What's up now, humans?
* In all the excitement, Icarus forgets his father's warning and starts to fly higher.
* Sure enough, he gets too close to the sun: the heat softens the wax, and his wings fall apart.
* Icarus plummets into the sea, crying "Father, father!" on his way down. (We'll wait while you break out the tissues.)
* Daedalus tries to save his son, but it's too late—he has drowned. The only thing Daedalus can find are feathers floating in the water.
* For the first time ever, Daedalus curses his "art" (i.e., his crafting skills). That's what got him into this mess to begin with.
* Daedalus names the part of the ocean where Icarus fell the "Icarian Sea." A nice honor for a not-so-well-behaved boy.
* Still mourning, Daedalus flies onward to the Italian island of Sicily. When he gets there, he performs funeral rites for his son (these were super important back then). Oh, and according to Ovid, a partridge watches Daedalus as he does all this. This is no ordinary partridge, but Talos, the nephew that Daedalus once tried to murder.
* Next, Daedalus constructs a temple to Apollo (NBD), where he hangs his wings.
* While living in Sicily, Daedalus strikes up a friendship with King Cocalus, the ruler of the island. When King Minos comes searching for Daedalus, Cocalus takes pity and hides the inventor. Oh, and even better, King Cocalus' daughters kill King Minos with scalding water, freeing Daedalus from his hunt forever.

## *Bring on the tough stuff - there’s not just one right answer.* DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## **(be ready to discuss these in the Seminar. You don’t have to write answers out, just some words or ideas)**

1. Why does Daedalus come to Crete to begin with? Is it his own fault? Why do you think King Minos was so angry with Daedalus?
2. What materials did Daedalus use to craft his famous wings? If someone gave you wings made out of these materials, would you use them?
3. Why did Daedalus tell Icarus to fly at a middle height? Was he being sensible, or an overly protective parent?
4. Is it better to play it safe or to try to achieve your loftiest, craziest goals? What about this story helps you answer that?
5. After Daedalus and Icarus take off, who sees them from the ground? What would you do if you saw a similar sight in the sky?
6. How does Daedalus react when Icarus dies? Does he have an appropriate reaction for a father losing a son?
7. Why do you think Daedalus decides to build a temple after his son dies? Have you ever distracted yourself from bad news with a big project?
8. In your opinion, is there anything Daedalus could have done differently to prevent Icarus' death?
9. Who has more hubris, Daedalus or Icarus? Have you ever gotten yourself in trouble for reaching beyond your limits?
10. For trying to be like the gods, Daedalus lost his son. Was this a fair punishment? Do you think Daedalus would have learned his lesson with a lesser punishment?
11. Is humility (being humble) a "good" characteristic? Does it keep us safe, or does it hold us back from accomplishing great things?
12. What do you think Daedalus' nephew Talos felt as he watched his uncle perform Icarus' funeral rites?

***Collections* Grade 7 Guiding Questions**

**“The Flight of Icarus” retold by Sally Benson**

**Read the Greek myth “The Flight of Icarus” retold by Sally Benson.  Then, reread the lines indicated with each question below.  Answer each question, citing text evidence.**

1. Lines 10–12: What have readers learned so far about Daedalus? What evidence in the text hints that he may have unusual or supernatural powers?
2. Lines 4–12:  What do Daedalus and Icarus want?
3. Lines 15–29: Summarize what Daedalus does to help himself and his son escape from the island.
4. Lines 39–47:  What specific evidence in these lines suggests Daedalus’s plan will not go well?
5. Lines 57–63: Myths typically include events that cannot happen in real life and characters with unusual abilities. What specific evidence in the text illustrates these two aspects of a myth?
6. Lines 60–79: What causes Icarus’s fall? What does his failure reveal about the cultural values of the ancient Greeks?
7. Lines 88–95: Did Daedalus succeed or fail in his original goal?  What might this reveal about a life lesson or theme?