Icarus and Daedalus
A Greek Myth

As enemies of King Minos, Daedalus and his son Icarus were imprisoned on the beautiful island of Crete – like songbirds trapped in a golden cage. And, like caged birds, they observed with envy those who could come and go as they pleased.

One day, as the sun began to go to sleep and the moon began to wake up, Daedalus turned his eyes towards the heavens and watched the birds as they danced in the winds that carried them. Suddenly, the seed of an idea was planted and it wasn’t long before it began to germinate.

Night after night the two prisoners scoured the dusty ground for feathers long forgotten by the birds. Each night they continued to search, and when the pile had grown big enough, Daedalus set to work. As Icarus slept, Daedalus busily sewed the feathers onto four large pieces of cloth, sealing them with wax to secure them in place. At last their freedom was in sight!

As dawn stretched her arms, Daedalus walked with his son to the tops of the Cretan cliffs and looked out towards the Mediterranean Sea. A soft breeze ruffled their hair and stroked their wings.

‘Remember. Even the birds can’t shake hands with the gods,’ Daedalus warned.

But Icarus did not listen to the words of his father.

Daedalus stepped off the cliff’s edge. Icarus followed.

Like eagles they soared into the air.

‘We’re free father,’ squawked Icarus. ‘We can do anything we want!’

‘Remember. Even the birds can’t kiss the sun,’ Daedalus warned.

But Icarus did not listen to the words of his father.

By now it was noon and the sun scorched the heavens with her mighty rays, and as Icarus climbed higher and higher the wax that held his wings together began to drip, drip, drip. Soon rivers of wax flowed down Icarus’ arms and his feathers began to fall like tears from the sky. Icarus plummeted into the ocean, the huge waves swallowing him up.

Daedalus could only watch in horror as he saw his son fall, like a stone, to his death.

‘If only you had listened to me,’ he wept as his heart was forever broken in two.
Icarus and Daedalus Questions

Warm Up Questions

1. Write the two main characters from the title. Do you think they are English?
2. What else tells us this is not an English story?
3. What country is it from?
4. What type of story is it?
5. Is a myth a true story to a made up story?
6. What does the word ancient mean?

Main Questions

1. Why does the writer liken Icarus and Daedalus to ‘songbirds trapped in a golden cage’?
2. Why do you think the cage is golden?
3. Where did Daedalus get his idea? Draw your answer.
4. Why do you think the two characters collected the feathers at night?
5. Why do you think Icarus slept while his father made the wings?
6. When did they set off on their journey?
7. Why do you think they chose this time of day?
8. Why do you think Daedalus stepped off the cliff first?
9. What was Daedalus trying to say by warning Icarus?
10. What was happening to the wax as Icarus flew closer to the sun?

Essential Vocabulary

1. Find the word ‘plummeted’. Does it mean to fall quickly or to fall slowly?
2. Can you find the simile in the next sentence that adds to this effect?
3. Write the other similes you can find in the text.
4. Find a word that shows the writer compares the melting wax to water.
5. When Icarus begins to fly, how does the writer liken him to a bird in the way that he speaks?
6. Find a word that means ‘jealousy in the first paragraph.

Evaluative Questions

1. Why do you think Icarus fell to his death?
2. What can we learn from this story today?
3. Is it always easy to listen to an adult giving you advice? Why?
4. Why do you think the Greek myths have survived so long? Do you think people will continue to read them in the future?
5. Read the second to last paragraph. Draw Daedalus’ face.
6. Now read the final paragraph. Do you need to change your picture? How?