

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

## Icarus and Daedalus

By Josephine Preston Peabody  
1897

*Josephine Preston Peabody (1874- 1922) was an American poet and dramatist. In the following story, Peabody retells the classic myth of Icarus and Daedalus, in which a skilled inventor creates wings for him and his son, Icarus, so they can escape King Minos of Crete. Overcome by his newly acquired freedom, Icarus flies too close to the sun, resulting in his tragic end. In Old Greek Folk Stories Told Anew, Peabody brings new life to this ancient story, as well as countless others. As you read, take notes on how Josephine Preston Peabody uses imagery and figurative language to describe flying.*

[1] Among all those mortals<sup>1</sup> who grew so wise that they learned the secrets of the gods, none was more cunning<sup>2</sup> than Daedalus. ;

He once built, for King Minos of Crete, a wonderful Labyrinth<sup>3</sup> of winding ways so cunningly tangled up and twisted around that, once inside, you could never find your way out again without a magic clue. But the king's favor<sup>4</sup> veered<sup>5</sup> with the wind, and one day he had his master architect imprisoned in a tower. Daedalus managed to escape from his cell; but it seemed impossible to leave the island, since every ship that came or went was well guarded by order of the king.

At length, watching the sea-gulls in the air—the only creatures that were sure of liberty—he thought of a plan for himself and his young son Icarus, who was captive with him. ;



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Little by little, he gathered a store of feathers great and small. He fastened these together with thread, molded them in with wax, and so fashioned two great wings like those of a bird. When they were done, Daedalus fitted them to his own shoulders, and after one or two efforts, he found that by waving his arms he could winnow<sup>6</sup> the air and cleave it, as a swimmer does the sea. He held himself aloft, wavered this way and that with the wind, and at last, like a great fledgling,<sup>7</sup> he learned to fly. ;

1. In Greek mythology, "mortals" refers to individuals in Greek mythology who do not have God-like powers; they are mere humans.
2. **Cunning (adjective):** clever, often in the sense of trickery
3. Maze
4. **Favor (noun):** approval; support; respect
5. **Veer (verb):** to suddenly turn or move in a different direction
6. "Winnow" means to drive or blow away by fanning
7. A "fledgling" is a young bird that has just become able to fly

- [5] Without delay, he fell to work on a pair of wings for the boy Icarus, and taught him carefully how to use them, bidding him beware of rash<sup>8</sup> adventures among the stars. “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, these cautions went in at one ear and out by the other. Who could remember to be careful when he was to fly for the first time? Are birds careful? Not they! And not an idea remained in the boy’s head but the one joy of escape. ;

The day came, and the fair wind that was to set them free. The father bird put on his wings, and, while the light urged them to be gone, he waited to see that all was well with Icarus, for the two could not fly hand in hand. Up they rose, the boy after his father. The hateful ground of Crete sank beneath them; and the country folk, who caught a glimpse of them when they were high above the tree-tops, took it for a vision of the gods—Apollo,<sup>9</sup> perhaps—with Cupid after him. ;

At first there was a terror in the joy. The wide vacancy of the air dazed them—a glance downward made their brains reel.<sup>10</sup> But when a great wind filled their wings, and Icarus felt himself sustained,<sup>11</sup> like a halcyon-bird<sup>12</sup> in the hollow of a wave, like a child uplifted by his mother, he forgot everything in the world but joy. He forgot Crete and the other islands that he had passed over: he saw but vaguely that winged thing in the distance before him that was his father Daedalus. He longed for one draught of flight to quench the thirst of his captivity: he stretched out his arms to the sky and made towards the highest heavens.

Alas for him! Warmer and warmer grew the air. Those arms, that had seemed to uphold him, relaxed. His wings wavered, drooped. He fluttered his young hands vainly<sup>13</sup>—he was falling—and in that terror he remembered. The heat of the sun had melted the wax from his wings; the feathers were falling, one by one, like snowflakes; and there was none to help. ;

- [10] He fell like a leaf tossed down the wind, down, down, with one cry that overtook Daedalus far away. When he returned, and sought high and low for the poor boy, he saw nothing but the bird-like feathers afloat on the water, and he knew that Icarus was drowned. ;

The nearest island he named Icaria, in memory of the child; but he, in heavy grief, went to the temple of Apollo in Sicily, and there hung up his wings as an offering. Never again did he attempt to fly. ;

*Icarus and Daedalus by Josephine Preston Peabody is in the public domain.*

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8. **Rash** (*adjective*): acting without thinking carefully first; careless
  9. Apollo is a prominent god in Greek and Roman mythology known for commanding many things, including light, truth, prophecy, healing, and more.
  10. **Reel** (*verb*): to move about in an unsteady way
  11. **Sustain** (*verb*): to support from below; keep from falling or sinking
  12. A “halcyon” is a mythical bird that nests at sea and calms the waves
  13. **Vainly** (*adverb*): without success or results

## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which one of the following best identifies the central theme of this story? [RL.2]
  - A. Love
  - B. Education
  - C. Tragedy
  - D. Family
  
2. PART B: Which detail from the text best support the answer to Part A? [RL.1]
  - A. "none was more cunning than Daedalus." (Paragraph 1)
  - B. "bidding him beware of rash adventures among the stars." (Paragraph 5)
  - C. "like a child uplifted by his mother, he forgot everything in the world but joy." (Paragraph 8)
  - D. "The nearest island he named Icaria, in memory of the child; but he, in heavy grief, went to the temple of Apollo in Sicily," (Paragraph 11)
  
3. PART A: What does the word "cleave" most closely mean as it is used in Paragraph 4? [RL.4]
  - A. hold
  - B. submerge
  - C. split apart
  - D. lift
  
4. PART B: Which phrase from paragraph 4 best supports the answer to Part A? [RL.1]
  - A. "by waving his arms"
  - B. "as a swimmer does the sea"
  - C. "held himself aloft,"
  - D. "like a great fledgling"
  
5. How does Josephine Preston Peabody's use of imagery and figurative language enhance the story? Cite specific examples of imagery and figurative language from the text. [RL.5]

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## Discussion Questions

**Directions:** *Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.*

1. Stories are constantly being reimagined. What is the benefit of retelling myths? Even though this myth is hundreds of years old, can we still learn things from it today?
2. In the context of this passage, what can we learn from tragedy? How did people respond to tragedy during ancient times and what can it teach us today? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
3. While Icarus dies due to his inability to listen to his father's warning, Daedalus is also guilty of tampering with devices he does not fully understand: flight. In the context of this story, who is really in control: humanity, or the forces of nature? Explain.
4. In this story, Icarus ignores his father's advice, and his youthful foolishness is eventually his downfall. In the context of this myth, what does it mean to be grown-up? Was Icarus' downfall a result of his youth? Would an older, wiser person have perished in the same way? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.