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THE WINGS OF ICARUS

A short story for
learning to learn



The Wings of Icarus

- **Topic:** Setting realistic goals and persevering to achieve them
- **Reading time:** 30 minutes
- **Level:** 8-12 years

SUMMARY

Theo is a dreamer who is often immersed in his thoughts and imagines life far away from his village. His biggest dream is to explore the world by flying. When he finds the wings built by Daedalus, his dream suddenly becomes achievable. With their help, he will be able to fly to the kingdom of Helios, the god of Sun. However, the road to achieving his dream is not easy, and Theo has to face many technical problems.

Guided by mythological creatures, he learns to evaluate his skills, proceeded step by step and persevere despite adversity.

KEY WORDS

Anticipate, failure, goal, perseverance, plan

Information for the teacher: The teacher presents children with an adventure story. Pupils read the story on their own beforehand or together with the teacher. The teacher then carries out some or all of the tasks given under the text of the story.

Chapter 1: The Desire to fly

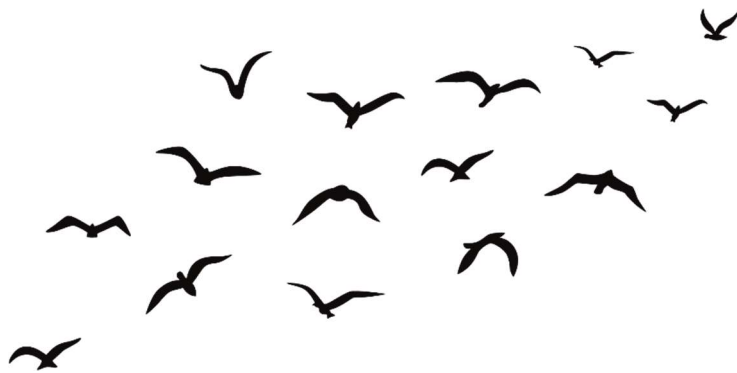
Theo lived in a small village surrounded by mountains. Everyone knew each other there and rarely did anyone leave or come there. It was a beautiful and safe place.

– Theo, please come down to the ground and eat! His **mother** cried, snapping the boy out of his daydreaming fantasy.

As usual, Theo spent long hours looking up at the sky and watching birds. The birds were free and could fly wherever they wanted. The boy dreamed of getting away from the little village. He wanted to see the big world and unknown places. Others thought he was strange because of his dreams. Other children played and ran in the fields, looking down to avoid tripping over stones and clumps of grass. Theo always had his head in the clouds and dreamed of flying. He didn't care if others laughed at him. He was sure that one day he would fulfil his dream.

– But Theo, for God's sake, people don't fly! Stop with the nonsense and go play with your friends. Come on, go!

Once again, his mum 'pulled' him down to earth.



Chapter 2: Ready to go

Theo knew why his mum wanted him to play with other children. She wanted him to be like them with his feet on the ground, not his head in the clouds. She was worried about him, so Theo listened and went to play with his peers. But he soon got bored with running, so he wanted to wander around the nearby mountains and caves.

Theo was excited about his search in the mountains, where he discovered an amazing cave. He imagined he had found a legendary treasure. Deep down he knew it was just a fantasy, so when he saw an old, dusty chest at the bottom of the cave, he thought it was just his imagination. He walked closer, touched the chest and found that it was real. Theo impatiently set about opening it. He imagined that he had to guess the secret formula to open the old, rusty padlock. But suddenly he heard a 'click!' and the lock sprang open. The box opened so easily that Theo felt disappointed. He was sure there was nothing interesting or valuable inside.

He lifted the lid and to his surprise, he saw a pair of huge. He blinked and pinched his arm to make sure he wasn't dreaming. But it was all really happening: the wings were in his hands; he was touching the feathers, and he could feel the wax under his fingers gluing them together. Suddenly, a piece of paper with faded letters slid out of the feathers. The cave was in semi-darkness, so Theo strained his gaze and read:

**'These wings will take you far but remember:
heaven can be cruel to those who challenge it'.**

Beneath the note there was a signature: 'Daedalus'. Theo's heart was beating faster and faster. Had he found the wings made by the brilliant creator of the Minotaur's labyrinth?



Chapter 3: The first flight

This treasure was even more exciting than Theo could have imagined. And so, Theo secretly started learning to fly, away from the village. At first, he didn't do so well. As more attempts failed, the boy began to doubt whether it could even work. One day, while resting, he saw a small sparrow trying to fly. Many times, the bird had taken off from the ground for a moment and then fell, but eventually it succeeded. Theo

noticed that the sparrow was helped by flying with the wind, hovering on warm air currents and, above all, perseverance.

Theo decided to put this knowledge to use and, despite his skinned knees, made further attempts at flying. One morning, after many falls and wing repairs, the boy broke away from the ground and took to the air. It only lasted for half a second, but it was a very important half-second! Now Theo knew that he would make it!

Chapter 4: Strange Guides

Theo was very excited about his recent success and decided to keep practising. He already knew how to take off, but he still was not able to stay in the air for long. Sometimes he was sad when he failed, but a small spark of hope made him keep trying. Day after day, step by step he practised and learned new things. With hard work and perseverance, he was already able to get away from the ground for a few moments.

One fine day, Theo saw a flock of strange birds. The birds looked at the boy with curiosity because he had wings and was trying to fly. They approached him and started a conversation:

‘Good morning. My name is **Skia** and this big crow is my friend **Ether**,’ said the swallow.

‘Good morning. My name is Theo,’ the boy replied.

‘We can see that you are learning to fly. Take it easy! There's no point in rushing. You need to observe your surroundings better,’ said the wise Ether. ‘Learn to **anticipate** what dangers you might face so you don't get caught off guard.’

‘You can speak!’ exclaimed surprised Theo.

‘And you can fly!’ answered Skia, pulling herself off the ground and making a small circle in the air.

‘Can you help me learn to fly well?’ Theo asked.

‘Of course. We are mythological birds, and we want to help you. Stay close to us, because the sky is full of surprises,’ Ether added.

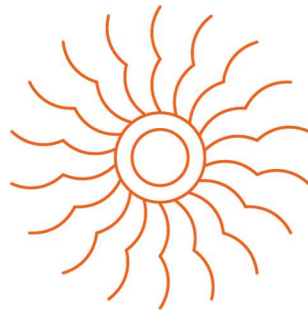
Ether and Skia flew in every day to give Theo valuable advice. Thanks to their support, the boy grew in confidence and appreciated his improvement, even the small ones.

‘If he progresses this fast, he will soon be ready to fly to Helios’ palace,’ said Skia to Ether.

‘Patience!’ Ether replied. ‘He still has a lot of work ahead of him.’

But Theo heard their conversation and, curious, wanted to fly to Helios' palace himself.

The idea of meeting **Helios, the god of the Sun**, made Theo overjoyed: the world of mythology really exists! Encouraged by his recent progress in flying



Chapter 5: Sunburnt

Theo decided to go on a journey. One fine morning, when the sky was cloudless, he began his flight. Unfortunately, the warm winds started to melt the wax on his wings and glued his feathers together. Theo had not anticipated this and was not prepared. Disaster! There were none of his friends next to help him. Fortunately, he remembered Ether and Skia's advice to never panic.

‘Breathe, stay calm and think. You need to act quickly but wisely,’ Theo repeated to himself.

He recalled the winged teachers' advice:

1. observe,
2. think
3. and act carefully.

The most important thing is not to make the situation worse. Theo looked around, concentrated on the wind and looked for a position where the wax would not melt and the wings would continue to carry him. After a few long, particularly stressful seconds, he managed to stabilise his flight. Phew, tragedy was very close at hand! Theo promised himself that he would plan his journey better next time.

Chapter 6: Meeting Helios

Theo was not discouraged by his difficult and dangerous ordeal. This situation showed him that he could overcome difficulties, which gave him courage. During the next stage of his journey, he concentrated on flight. Manoeuvring his wings, he carefully observed the wind and the sun. Overcoming many difficulties and conquering many kilometres, he saw the temple of Helios emerging from the clouds in the distance. Theo could not believe his eyes and his luck. He landed on the square in front of the temple, looked around and, fascinated by what he was seeing, decided to explore the place. From the top of the palace, the sun god was watching him.

‘And this is a surprise. It's not every day that a winged passes through the gates of my palace. What brings you here?’ Helios asked calmly.

Theo, though red from the hot rays of the sun, turned pale at the sight of Helios. However, he overcame his fear and chaotically told him his story: his desire to fly, his hope to meet Helios, his conversation with Skia and Ether and their teachings, and the ridicule and misunderstanding of the villagers, his mother's concern... Helios was very moved by this story and Theo's determination.

‘You focused solely on the end goal but remember that in reality the journey itself is the most important thing. Every obstacle you overcome on your path is a lesson: you have learned patience, perseverance and strategic thinking,’ said the wise Helios.

Chapter 7: The Triumphant Return

At the same time, there was great anxiety in the village because Theo had gone missing, and the villagers had been looking for him for several days. Everyone knew that Theo was a dreamer and loved adventure, so he sometimes disappeared for a day

or two. This time his absence lasted much longer. All the houses, caves and surrounding areas had already been searched, but he was nowhere to be found. Theo's mum was crying, but deep in her heart she believed that her son would be found. She looked up at the sky with hope.... Suddenly, a speck appeared in the sky, approaching the village. The shape became more and more distinct and resembled a bird. What was the surprise of the villagers when a huge bird landed, and Theo's tired but happy face emerged from its feathers. Everyone started clapping and shouting with joy: 'Theo the hero! Theo the bird man! Theo can fly!'. As the boy recounted his adventures and journey, everyone admired him for his courage, perseverance and achievements. The villagers were proud of Theo, but his story of meeting Helios, the god of Sun, made them doubtful. 'An encounter with the Sun god? What else will this dreamer come up with?' they wondered.



Chapter 8: New dreams

Theo looked at his wings with a smile. Thanks to them, he had learnt to fly, had many incredible adventures and met new friends, as well as Helios himself. Thinking back on it, he realised that his journey had only just begun. The sky he loves so much is vast and full of mysteries to discover and new challenges to take on.

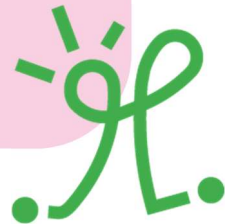
His mum asked Theo to stay at home for a while. So, Theo tucked his wings away in his chest, but promised himself that he would continue to learn, dream and fly even higher, with care and wisdom.

Today, I learnt...

Theo made his dream come true, but the road was full of obstacles.

Theo had to:

- anticipate his goals,
- persevere, even in difficult moments,
- use his failures to understand what he needed to improve,
- and dare to ask for help from people who could guide him in this learning process.



YOUR TURN TO PLAY!

Solve the quiz

Question 1

When Theo was learning to fly, he often fell and had to reflect on what went wrong to make progress. If you were in his shoes, how would you react after a fall?

- I would take a moment to calm down before trying again.
- I would ask for help from someone who could explain to me what went wrong.
- I would try to understand what caused the error and adjust my course of action.
- I would do it again straight away, hoping it would work this time.



Each answer shows a different way of learning. Think about which one fits you?

Question 2

When Theo is going through a storm, he remembers his friends' advice about making the right decisions. If you were in a difficult situation, what would you do to get through it?

- a. I would think about similar situations I have been through and what I learned from them.
- b. I would ask for advice from someone I trust.
- c. I would take a break to think about all the possibilities.
- d. I would act instinctively to get out of the situation quickly.



Each of these approaches can be useful at different times. Think about which one suits you best?

Question 3

Helios explains to Theo that his journey has given him a better understanding of how to achieve his goals. If you were to set a big goal for yourself, how would you approach it?

- a. I would start by identifying small steps to slowly move forward.
- b. I would look for ideas by observing what others before me have done.
- c. I would get started right away, even if I had to adjust my plan along the way.
- d. I would think for a long time before making a decision to make sure I got off to a good start.



Each strategy has its strengths. Ask yourself, which one is closest to your way of thinking?

Write Theo's features in the rectangles.

Write in the rectangles below the 6 characteristics of Theo that you think best describe him.

Choose terms from those given below.

dreamy, realistic, cowardly, brave, stubborn, submissive, curious about the world, persistent, imaginative, giving in, independent, listens to advice, open to learning, self-obsessed, closed to advice, closed to learning, acting schematically.

Theo

Persistence and striving – are these your strengths?

Dream map – how to get there?

Theo had a dream of flying and step by step he pursued it. What is your dream?

1. Draw your 'dream map' on a piece of paper – in the middle write or draw your goal.
2. Around it, write down 3-5 steps that will help you get there (e.g. if you want to learn how to draw, you could write e.g.: practice every day, try drawing with different materials – crayons, paints, look at books about drawing, watch videos, etc....
3. Think: what will you do if you encounter difficulties?



Just like Theo did not give up after his first unsuccessful flight, you too can strive step by step towards your goal!

Group work – creative thinking

1. Write or arrange with a friend a short dialogue between Theo and his mother, in which Theo talks about his dreams and difficulties.
2. Divide into groups and prepare a short theatre scene based on a selected passage from the text (each group chooses one chapter of the story).
3. Discuss in groups how Theo could help other children to achieve their dreams.



CogniQuest is a project created by organisations and schools from Belgium, Croatia, France, Greece and Poland.

Together, they have developed tools to help you think about your thinking. This is called metacognition - a fancy word that means “learning how to learn”.

Through these tales, you’ll discover different ways to solve problems, stay focused, and reflect on how you learn best.

Explore the whole CogniQuest collections on the website of the project:

www.cogniquet.eu



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Code project: 2023-1-FR01-KA220-SCH-000158225