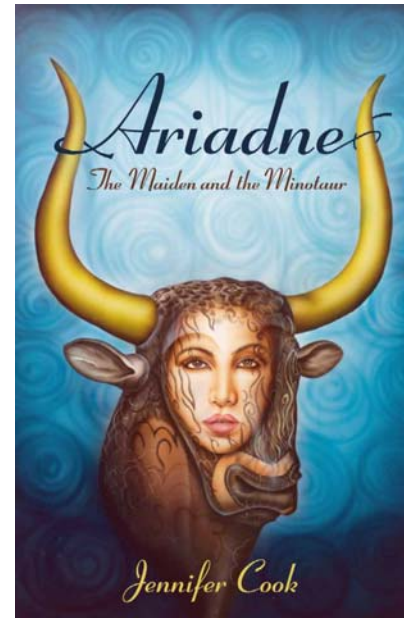


Ariadne *The Maiden and the Minotaur*

Jennifer Cook



Teacher's Notes
Nancy Mortimer

In this novel Jennifer Cook has created a refreshing approach to the ancient myth of Ariadne, the minotaur and the labyrinth.

The story is told by Ariadne herself in the modern vernacular which makes it both accessible and attractive for young people, but the author has imbued her story with just the right mix of sophisticated language for it to be credible whilst still containing challenging concepts.

The story opens with Ariadne dumped on a Greek island lamenting the departing of her husband-to-be, Theseus, who is sailing off with her beautiful sister, Phaedra.

The details of how this has happened are related with a good insight into the life of a teenage princess in the court of King Minos of Crete. Ariadne makes it clear that it is not easy being a princess because of her position and what is expected of her, but she has qualities that are admirable as well as those of a typical teenager determined to get what she wants, although she finds this is not always possible.

The story is full of adventure, romance and has many insights into human nature as well as an idea of what life was like in Ancient Greece. There are numerous intriguing twists and turns as the real story of the Minotaur, which is interpreted anew by the author who has a classical background, unfolds. The novel is an engrossing one.

Because of the complex subject matter this novel is suitable and will be enjoyed by students at middle and upper secondary levels.

The feisty female protagonist will particularly appeal to this audience.

These notes can be photocopied for class use.
They and other resources are available at no charge from the
Lothian Books' website:
www.lothian.com.au

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Read the *Prologue*

- Ascertain what its purpose is and outline what you know by the end of it.
- Make some observations and comments about the language in which the story is told.
- Who is telling the story?
- In what style is the story written?
- Consider the tone of the language in which the tale is told.
- Outline the situation presented at the conclusion of the first chapter
- Mention what your impressions are after reading this chapter.
- What is Ariadne's background? Note down her lineage and parentage.
- Briefly state the importance of the gods in people's lives and make some remarks about this.
- Make a list of the Minos family (20)
- What is the meaning of: Droge learned *that victory was a double-edged sword?* (23)
- What is the *threefold law?* (46)
- In what ways is Ariadne a typical teenage girl?
- Explain what is meant by: "*Overall, it was a very satisfactory arrangement?*" (66)
- Who is Pleiades?
- What is his role in the story?
- What symbol was used to represent Crete? (113)
- What is the explanation of the myth of the Minotaur as given in this text? (148)
- *Then a thought struck me like a bolt from the blue.* (151)
- What was this?
- There is an example of irony on page 186. Can you find others from the text?
- *And suddenly, with a cold certainty, I knew.*(194).
- What did Theseus know?
- What is Theseus' punishment?

Vocabulary

Explain the meaning of the following words:

placated (24); *hubris, acolyte* (27); *pestilence, harbinger* (36); *talisman* (42); *incantations* (45); *insatiable* (50); *omnipotent* (56); *coterie* (71); *maenads* (81); *cacophony* (104); *platitudes* (139); *rhetoric, harrowing* (160); *emissary* (174); *resilient* (177); *expletives* (182); *stoic* (193).

- What is a *heinous deed?* (186)
- Jot down a list of words the author uses to ground her story in a time long ago.
- Jot down words that make the story accessible to a contemporary audience.

Setting

- When and where is the novel set?

Characters

- Write a pen portrait of Ariadne.
- What is her sister Phaedra like?
- Briefly give an outline of King Minos and Queen Pasiphae
- Write a little about the relationship that exists between the different members of the royal family of Crete
- Do a character study of Theseus.
- How do you feel towards Theseus? Give reasons for your answer.

Gender

- What can you glean about the role and status of women in *Ariadne: The Maiden and the Minotaur*?
- Do the facts bear your conclusions out?

WRITING

- Write a blurb for this novel.
- Do a review of the novel for your local newspaper.
- Write about life in Ariadne's time
- As Theseus, write a piece in your private journal about your experience in the Labyrinth
- Write about *your* greatest fear.

ORAL ACTIVITIES

- Formulate some questions you would ask the author if you had the chance
- Tell the story of the Minotaur
- Relate the story of what happened to King Minos's son, Androgeus and how the king avenged his son's death
- Describe the story to a friend and state what kind of story you think it is.
- As Ariadne, tell your story
- Recount in your own words the voyage back to Athens with Theseus if you were Phaedra.

THE CRAFT OF WRITING

This story is a good example of how the imagination can take old stories and present them to make them interesting to a current audience.

- Look at the way in which the story is told and make some observations about what this allows the author to do.

Jennifer Cook gives very vivid descriptions of her characters.

- Choose one and examine what ingredients the author uses to make her characters come alive.

There are many parts in the novel where feelings and emotions are conveyed in a realistic but graphic manner.

- Find two such instances and share them with the rest of the class and analyse how the author has achieved her effect,

There is the common symbol of thread and cloth woven throughout the story.

- Find instances of this and discuss what it contributes to the story.
- Find other connections that make the text integrated.
- Look closely at the imagery used by Jennifer Cook in her writing

She uses similes and metaphors to make her writing more vivid by creating word pictures: *...her eyes 'as green as those of the cats that roam our palace'*. (18)

... *skinny snake of a daughter* (19): ...*tall and sleek with muscles that moved 'like water under silk'* (22) ...*as bitter as hemlock* (53) are some examples.

- Find further instances from the text and use such figures of speech in your own writing to enhance it and make it come alive.
- Look at where the story begins and ends and what happens in between and make some comments.
- The story is full of unexpected twists and turns. Comment
- There are several places where characters are faced with a dilemma – find one of these.
- What makes the characters credible in the story?

Ending

- Comment on how the story finishes.

DISCUSSION

- Is there modern day relevance or an application to our lives in this story?
- Talk about the following topics as they appear in the novel: hate, love, revenge, retribution, fairness, truth, honesty, pride, jealousy, cruelty, power, magic, abuse, relationships, responsibility, tactics, strategies, forgiveness.
- Examine themes that are contrasts, for example: hate and love; betrayal and trust.
- What messages come through the story?
- Find a portion from the novel where turmoil is depicted and discuss what aspects the author has used to create this effect.
- Talk about:
 - the place of storytelling
 - the place of the imagination
 - being honest with yourself
 - the death of someone close to you
 - standards and values of the time
 - games people play
 - the use of symbols and symbolic meaning in writing
 - the difference between dreams and reality
- Look at the amusing elements in the story and what makes them so
- What does Greek tragedy deal with?
- Examine examples of seeing other people's points-of-view and not just seeing things your way.
- Are we responsible for our own actions?
Do you believe your early life affects you forever?
- Answer with reference to what you know about Theseus from the novel.

Find out more about:

- Greek myths
- The oracle at Delphi
- The Labyrinth

The numerous gods mentioned are all there for effect and most are given their place in an explanatory line that follows their introduction

- Find out more about any that appeal to you or you already know something about.
- Refer to the bibliography for further reading

About the author:

Jennifer Cook studied and taught Context Curriculum at RMIT before moving into journalism. She worked on suburban newspapers and in SBS Radio, where she won a UN Media Peace Prize for a radio feature on East Timor. She later worked for AAP and the ABC Melbourne newsroom and wrote features for the *Age*, the *Herald Sun*, the Victorian Education Department and a DVD magazine, *Region Four*. Jennifer lives with her husband and three children in Park Orchards in Melbourne's east.