

# Touching the Story

## The School Story Museum: Trial of a Model for Visual, Auditory and Kinaesthetic Learning

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The Story Museum, Oxford.

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The time and thought freely given by teachers and head teachers was much appreciated: we know how busy you all are!

Finally thanks to the children who made this project come alive for us all.

## 1. Introduction

The Story Museum is a long term project to create a beautiful museum in Oxford, dedicated to inspiring children about books and stories. The future museum will offer a combination of three elements: exhibitions, performances and workshop activities of various kinds, in a way that is engaging, stimulating and fun for the children involved.

The School Story Service is an outreach arm of the museum offering a similar combination of performance, exhibitions and workshops in schools around the county. This report describes a preliminary trial of a way of combining these three elements in a single visit to a school – a “story day”.

The combination of a story performance and related story exhibition offers a new and innovative way of working within a story narrative, while giving opportunities for engagement through listening, observing, imagining, touching, smelling and doing. In this way we imagine appealing to children from a wide range of learning styles and abilities, including and motivating the least able, while providing new learning challenges for the most advanced students.

In addition, the provision of performance plus exhibition offers an opportunity for cross curricular learning, as exhibits may touch themes of history, geography, art, personal and social education, maths, physics ...you name it! In this way the story day provides an opportunity to explore integrating cross-curricular work into teaching practice.

Finally, the provision of workshops sessions – either for children or teachers – provides a way of introducing new story-based learning techniques at the school level.

With these principles in mind, the Story Museum decided to pilot its first schools story day using the Greek Myth “the Minotaur”, a story that is used in most primary schools in the country to combine teaching of Greek myth (literacy curriculum) and Greek history.

This report described the development and testing of the scheme in four schools selected as a varied range of settings, with a view to assisting in the planning of a more extensive pilot programme in 2006.

Participating schools were:

18th Nov.	Dr. Radcliff's Primary, Steeple Aston Village
21st Nov.	King's Meadow Primary, Shakespeare Drive, Bicester
22nd Nov.	Grimsbury St. Leonard Primary, Overthorpe Road, Banbury
23rd Nov.	Edward Feild Primary, Bicester Road, Kidlington

## 2. The Story Days

Each story day comprised the following elements:

- A one hour performance of the Greek myth, the Minotaur, combining story, song and music in a single performance piece for up to 250 students from year 2 and above.
- An all-day exhibition of pictures, objects, sounds, smells and activities all sequenced to follow the story narrative, so that the visitor can “walk through the story” a second time, remembering and re-imagining the narrative.
- An afternoon story/drama workshop for either teachers or one class of children.

Prior to the visit, teachers and head teachers were provided with information about the story-day including suggestions for ways that the teachers might use the day as a platform for other teaching activities. (See annex 1 for letters and suggestions).

During the visits teachers were provided with plot outlines and a character list (Annex 2).

The performances and workshops were conducted by the author, a storyteller and musician with 10 years performing experience, who has completed formal training in storytelling performance and in the use of story in education.

An assistant was present on each day to help set up and take down the exhibition, assist with each class visit and conduct interviews with the visitors.

Information on school response was collected in various ways including:

- 1:1 interviews with children (see annex 3 for questionnaire)
- Graffiti boards for children to give their views
- Group discussions with children
- 1:1 interviews with teachers and the head teacher
- Self administered questionnaires.
- Observations of the assistants.

### 3. The Storytelling



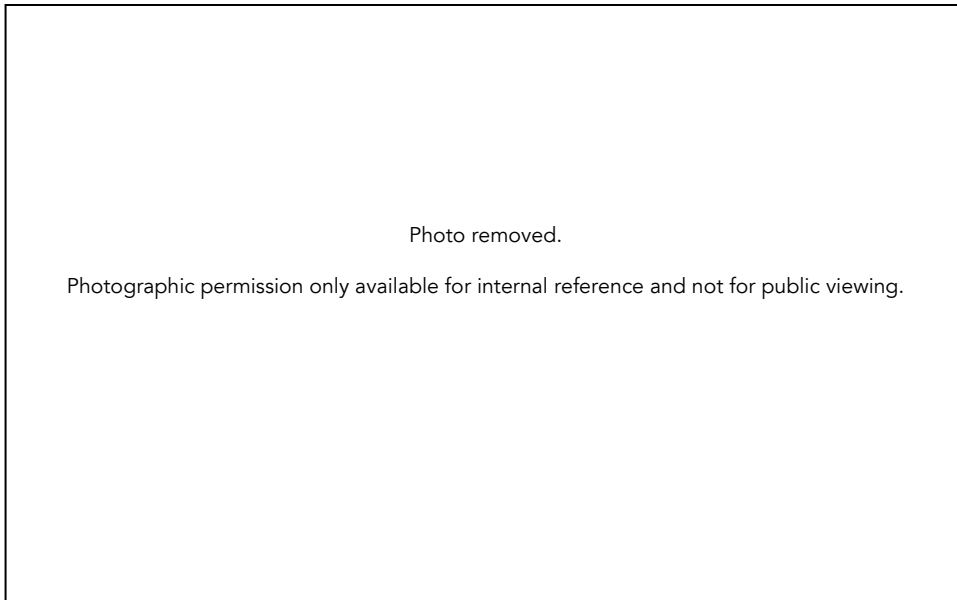
Audiences ranged from 160 to 250 students: in two schools the audience was for years 2-6; in two it was for years 3-6. In all four cases the whole audience (including children with special needs who normally have difficulty concentrating) was spellbound and fully absorbed in the story, illustrating the power of a well performed story to engage and sustain the imagination.

The performance involved use of the lyre, flute, 3 types of drum and a singing bowl. Music was used to accompany the story and provide brief interludes to build atmosphere. A single song was performed with the lyre in ancient Greek to provide atmosphere and context.

The story was a great deal larger and longer than most children were used to – as it spanned the whole of the Minos myth from birth to death, including the abduction of Europa, the curse of Minos, the birth and death of the minotaur, the death of Icarus and finally the death of Minos. A story of this form and scale enables experience of the epic majesty of Greek myth, and the way which many smaller stories all link together into a larger narrative.

Perhaps the most telling indicator of success was the atmosphere and sense of concentrated attention during the story, with full attention and pin drop silence during pauses. There was a kind of wonderful magic that emerged when listeners became fully absorbed in their own imagining.

At the end of each show the audience was asked to vote with their fingers (1=rubbish 10= absolutely fantastic). A typical result is shown in the picture below (mostly 10s).



Children's main feedback on the story from graffiti sheets and about 60 individual questions was as follows. Highlights were as follows:

*On a scale of 1-10 how much did you enjoy the storytelling?*

Score	Number of Children
0	1
6	1
7	2
8	3
9	14
10	39
<hr/>	
Total	60

Main things children liked about the story were:

- Characters and characterisation
- Comedy
- Music
- The way descriptions made pictures
- Gory bits
- Scary bits
- The way the larger story worked

Suggestions for improvement included making it longer, making it shorter, include acting and audience participation and more music.

*One satisfied child remarked: "I liked the way Chris played the music. It really made it interesting. I don't think you could make it any better! You don't need to change anything"*

21 teachers and head teachers filled in a questionnaire. Most felt that the performance part of the day was valuable as:

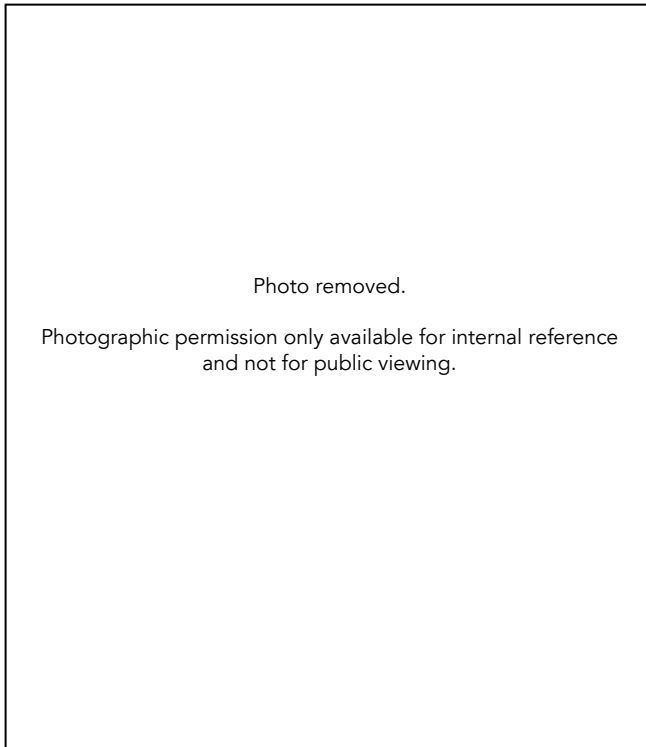
- A fun activity
- Providing extended listening and imagination
- Providing excitement and inspiration
- Experiencing an extended narrative.

*For example: "The story itself provided a good opportunity to get all the children together for a whole school event that was a bit different. It is always good to have an activity that is worked on by all age groups at the same time. The story-telling itself was an excellent opportunity for the children to experience a professionally told story that communicated an appropriate atmosphere as well as the storyline itself."*

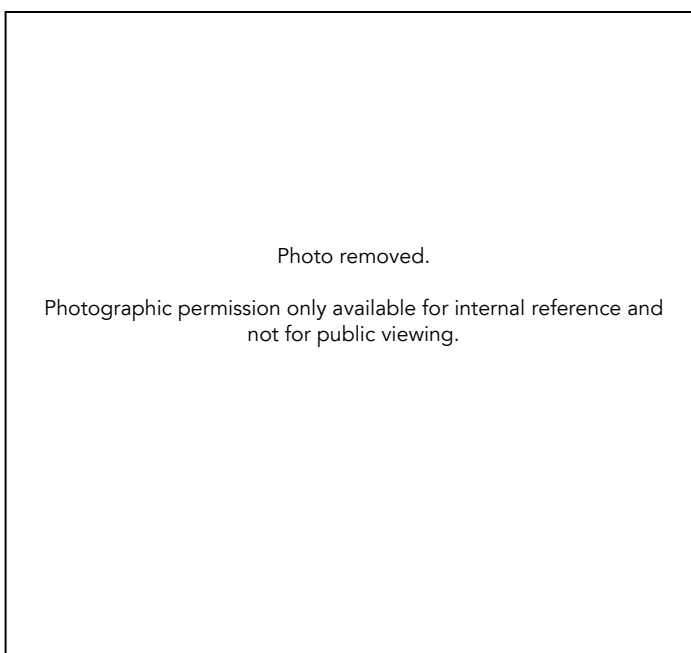
*Head teacher, Edward Feild*

## 4. The Exhibition

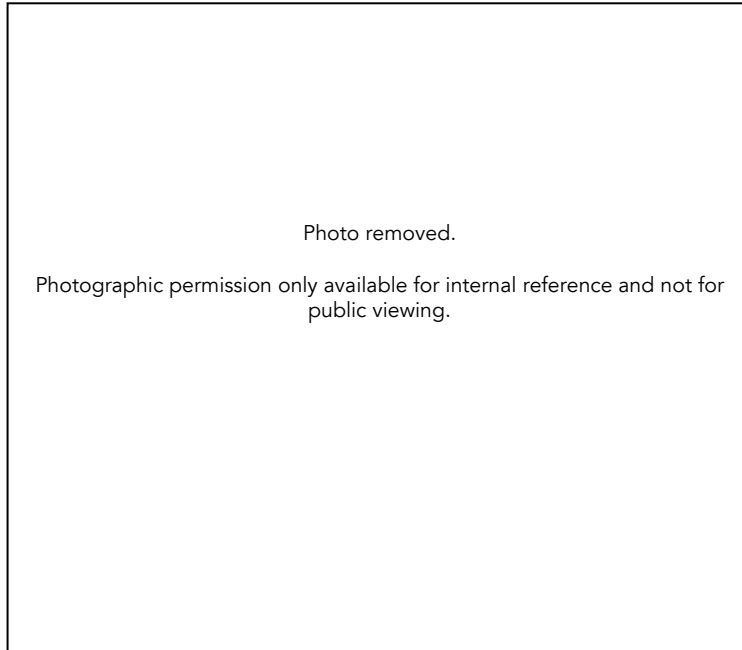
The exhibition comprised a series of 32 objects and pictures, sequenced to mirror the narrative of the story. Each picture was framed in a plastic A1 frame, which was leant against the wall or chair.



Each object was placed on a low plastic table. Both objects and pictures had a number to guide the visitor as to the order of viewing, a red story card to indicate the part of the story connected to the exhibit, and a blue information card explaining about the exhibit and offering questions for discussion.



Three of the exhibits were tape recordings of music which could be heard through mini headphones.



One involved smell (incense) and one melting wax.



In total there were 6 prints of well known paintings (Boucher, Matisse, Titian, Botticelli); two sculpture copies, several pictures of ancient artefacts from the Ashmolean Museum, and several everyday objects connected to the story which could be touched (hide, wood, horns, hammer, plastic flowers, plastic minotaur and so on).

On the first trial day children came to the exhibition in groups of 10 without their teachers. On subsequent days the whole class came with their teacher, so the teacher could be more actively involved with and after the exhibition. Some classes spent 50 minutes in the exhibition – the older children in particular were keen to stay and continue their exploration. Some spent as little as 10 minutes as schools with many classes tried to give everyone a look.

In general the pattern during each visit was one of initial excitement followed by a quiet settling into exploring and re-exploring favourite objects. Most children were self-directing in their pairs without much intervention from adults.

Children rated the exhibition highly, at a similar level to the story.

*On a scale of 1-10 how much did you enjoy the storytelling?*

Score	Number of Children
5	2
6	2
7	2
8	8
9	17
10	28
<hr/> Total	<hr/> 59

There was an extraordinary variety in favourite objects, showing that the variety in the exhibition catered for a variety of preferences in the children. Common favourites were:

- Horns
- Music
- Plastic minotaur
- Toy bull
- Maze toy and maze picture
- Melting candle.

Things that you could touch, do or listen to were most frequently rated: however in most classes there were some children who loved the picture prints and others who loved the artefacts.

Teachers were most enthusiastic about the exhibition and the way in included and engaged the children in a variety of ways. Many would have liked more warning and more details of what to expect so they could have planned more work around it. Everyone thought it was a valuable day.

Teachers were asked to rate the overall experience against 5 objectives: the results are shown below. The five objectives were scored 1 (poor) to excellent (5).

Question	1	2	3	4	5	Average
1. Understanding and appreciation of performance art form			9	6	6	3.9
2. Understanding and appreciation of mythic genre		1	8	8	4	3.7
3. Understanding the way objects, visual art and music can relate to a narrative		1	3	9	7	4.1
4. Developing listening, observation and questioning skills		3	4	11	3	3.7
5. Developing enthusiasm which can be harnessed by the teacher for further class work			3	9	8	4.3

All teachers welcomed the idea of regular visits of this kind (annual or twice yearly) and gave a range of suggestion concerning topic and approach.

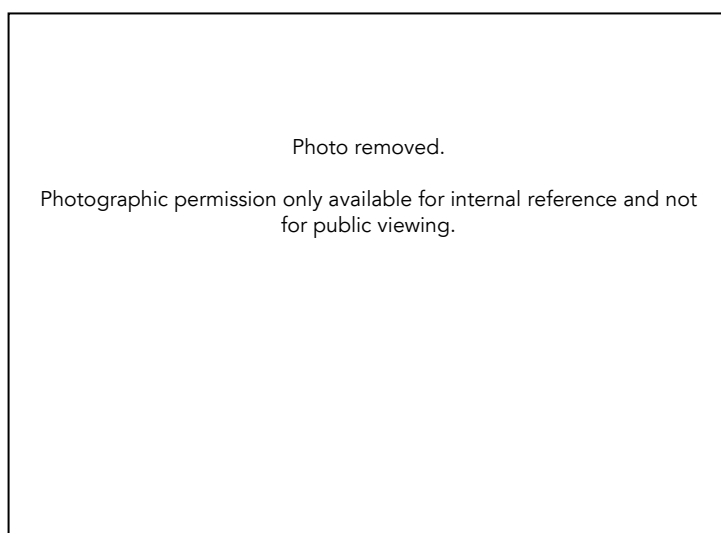
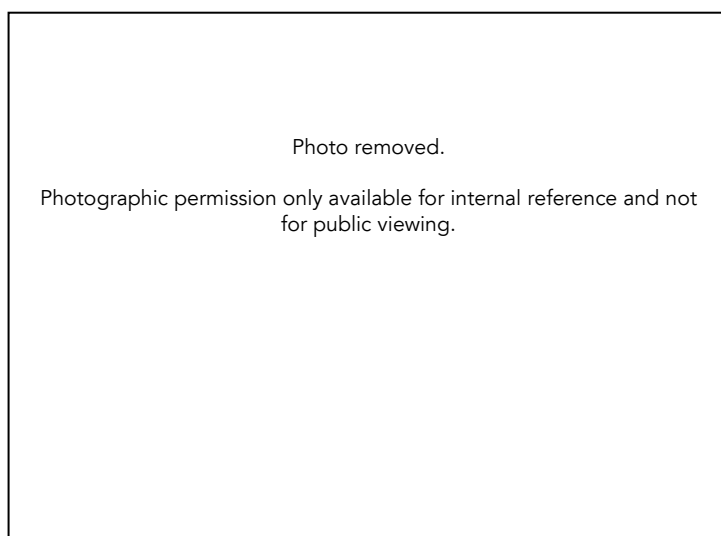
In most schools some classes did a small amount (one hour or so) of follow up work after the exhibition (as other work had already been planned for that term). However in one school several days of work followed the story day, with pupils developing their own story museums, rewriting the story, retelling, creating pictures and plot maps and much besides, illustrating the enormous potential of the story day to motivate and provide a platform for other work.

*In the words of one teacher:*

*"They were so excited and motivated, I can't tell you how much. So many parents came afterwards and said how much their children had loved it. There was so much learning that was not in the "core" curriculum about speaking and listening, organisation, planning ... the children were so inspired and worked enthusiastically all week."*

## 5. The Workshops

In three cases the schools chose an afternoon workshop using drama and a storytelling exercise to lead up to a storyboard for future creative writing. In two of the three schools this workshop was highly valued by teachers, who said it helped them and their children learn about new ways of working with story. In one of the schools the class was a little unresponsive as there had been a variety of events going on all day in the school in addition to the story-day and the head teacher felt the final workshop had been a little much for them.



The fourth school chose an INSET session for their teachers on storytelling methods: a variety of tools and techniques were demonstrated and practised which teachers said they would then go on to use in their classroom practice. In one class we saw a story mapping technique being used subsequently in the classroom.

## 6. Conclusion

The trial story days were received enthusiastically and warmly by the four schools involved. All thought the model was valuable as is, and have suggestions for further development to improve effectiveness including:

- more detailed communication about the exhibition in advance, so that teachers can plan their work around it;
- elaboration of follow up ideas into a resource pack of class plans and worksheets;
- keeping the storyteller in the exhibition all day to interact with children (and offering workshops separately);
- simpler and different ways of labelling;
- marketing through school clusters.

With this encouraging start, the Story Museum will continue to pilot test this exhibition around Oxfordshire in spring 2006, with a view to developing and improving this innovative idea of combining performance and story exhibitions around a single narrative thread. In this way we hope to bring fun, inspiration and learning to the lives of children around the county.

## Annex 1

### Letter and Information Sent to Schools 2 weeks before the Visits

Dear Head Teacher or Visit Coordinator

#### Story Museum Visit

We are looking forward to visiting your school for a pilot story day and working with your teachers and children. Please could you circulate the attached note to teachers whose classes will be involved (years 2-6) so they know what we are planning. We'd be very grateful if you could make the following preparations for our visit so that everyone can get the most out of the day:

##### **1. Assembly Hall**

We'll need to use your assembly hall, please, for a one-hour performance first thing in the morning.

##### **2. Exhibition Space**

We'll need an assembly hall or classroom (minus furniture) for the whole day for the exhibition. Please can you supply 20 chairs which we'll need as part of the exhibition.

##### **3. Scheduling Visits to the Exhibition**

We plan to set up the exhibition after the morning show so it will be ready from 10.45am. As the objects are in the sequence of the story it would be best if visitors were to arrive in single classes at 20-30 minute intervals with their teacher. We'd be grateful if you could set up a schedule for this.

##### **4. Supervision**

Please ensure at least one teacher or teaching assistant is present when their class is in the exhibition to help with supervision and explanation.

##### **5. Afternoon Workshop**

In the afternoon we will run a workshop for pupils or teachers, as agreed with the school. If this is to take place in a classroom, please move the tables and chairs to one side so that we have space to move around; and supply clipboards, paper and pencils for writing during the workshop. For a pupil workshop, we ask that the class teacher be present and participate in the workshop.

Thank you for agreeing to help us develop our Schools Story Service by acting as a pilot school. We will share our findings with you and hope to return next year with 'fully developed' versions of our School Story Days. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you need more information.

I look forward to meeting you soon.

Chris Smith

Schools Story Service Director, The Story Museum  
01865-326417

Dear Teacher

## Story Museum Visit

The Story Museum is an Oxford-based project dedicated to inspiring children about stories and reading ([www.storymuseum.co.uk](http://www.storymuseum.co.uk)). We are currently exploring different ways of combining objects and experiences to educate and entertain children about story.

We are developing a schools programme for the county which will combine story performance, story exhibition and in-school workshops in an innovative way. First a story performance will wake up the story in the imagination of the audience; then the exhibition will allow the child to 'walk through the story' experiencing images, objects and sounds related to the narrative they have heard. We expect that this combination of performance and exhibition will offer a powerful and varied experience for students and a possible stimulus for further class-based work, initiated by the class teacher.

This term we are trialling this idea in a few schools using the Minotaur myth so that we can learn from experience and benefit from your feedback.

When we visit your school we have planned the day as follows:

- We will start the day with a one-hour performance of the Minotaur (from the abduction of Europa to the death of Minos) with music and song. The show is suitable for years 2-6.
- For the rest of the day a simple story exhibition will be set up in the school: the exhibition includes about 30 objects and images including artistic responses to the story (Matisse, Titian, Boucher), natural objects (horns, hide, rocks, shells), music (ancient Greek chants, Holst, The Incredible String Band), replicas (flowers, bull, minotaur, tools), pictures of museum artefacts (ancient images of Theseus, the minotaur and the labyrinth), maps, musical instruments.

We wish to invite all teachers of years 2-6 to use the show and exhibition as a platform for class-based work relevant to their students. We attach a list of possible ideas for various ages, although we imagine many teachers will want to design their own response. We suggest children visit the exhibition in pairs so they can talk together about what they see.

What really matters to us is that we give the idea a good trial so we can plan and budget for a fully-resourced programme next year. To this end we hope there will be time in the day to briefly interview staff and children to get feedback and ideas for future work.

I look forward to meeting you soon,

Chris Smith, Schools Story Service Director, The Story Museum  
01865-326417

## Possible Responses to the Performance and Exhibition

We request that all the children are asked to walk around the exhibition from start to finish. Also, that they are given some kind of question or assignment to visit the exhibition with, for further work in the classroom afterwards. Here are a few ideas for possible tasks:

### 1. Description

Each pair to choose a few favourite objects, practice describing them verbally, then write down the description.

### 2. Questions

Each pair to make a list of 5 questions they are curious about, and then visit other pairs to discuss and try to find answers.

### 3. Mini Poem

Choose a favourite moment in the story, and objects related to that moment. Brainstorm a list of words. Fit them into a mini-poem skeleton (say, 3 words, 4 words, 3 words); read and echo back in class. For example:

SAD	SAD	WOMAN
-----	-----	-------

HIDING	HER	SECRET	ALONE
--------	-----	--------	-------

NOBODY	TO	TELL
--------	----	------

### 4. Touch Words

Find words to describe the textures and sensations of the objects that were touched.

### 5. Feeling Words

Choose exhibits which made you feel something (happy? sad? bored?) and explore why:

"I felt sad because..."

Repeat using another object and explain how a character was feeling at that moment in the story.

### 6. "What If" Re-Telling

Think of a "what-if" moment in the story when you would like things to be different, and write what happens next as a result.

### 7. Song Writing

Write a song about your favourite character, or maybe a rap.

### 8. Dialogue

Chose a favourite moment in the story and write some dialogue for that moment, either as a play or as a piece of story writing.

## **9. Design**

Design and draw your own labyrinth.

## **10. Re-enact**

In groups choose a favourite scheme in the story and improvise a re-enactment.

## **11. Letter Writing**

Imagine you are the Minotaur in the labyrinth. Write a letter to your Mum!

## **12. Gods**

Draw a picture of one of the Gods as you imagine them. Now describe them in words.

## **13. Personal**

Does anything in the story remind you of something that happened to you (e.g. a time of surprise, a time of fear, a time of shame, a time of violence, a time of fun)?

Talk about it: Write about it.

## **14 Coin Design**

You have seen some designs of old Greek coins. If you were designing a new coin about this story what pictures would you put on it?

## **15. Dilemmas**

List the main dilemmas in the story. Explain what choices the character had and what you would have done in their place. Use a hotseat to explore.

(Should Europa ride the bull; should she marry the king; should Pasiphae tell anyone her secret...etc)

## **16. Ethics**

Explore the role of Daedalus in the story. Was he right to help the queen and build the labyrinth? Should he have said no?

## **17. Cartoons**

Make a cartoon about one of the scenes in the story.

## **18. Wooden Cow Design**

How would you make a replica cow like Daedalus? Show with diagrams.

## **19. Anger**

List the moments when characters got angry. Discuss causes. Discuss possible alternatives to revenge!

## **20. Loss**

List the moments of loss in the story and the different ways the characters react. How do you deal with loss?

## Annex2

### Plot Outline and Character List, Distributed on the Day

#### Plot Outline

##### 1. Birth of Minos

- Zeus-bull takes Europa
- Zeus lives on Crete with Europa- they have three sons
- Zeus leaves

##### 2. Minos became King

- Europa marries the King of Crete
- The King dies
- Minos asks Poseidon to send a white bull from the sea, and promises to kill it
- The bull comes but Minos breaks his promise and keeps it
- Poseidon punishes Minos with a curse that his wife will love the bull

##### 3. The bull-child is born and imprisoned

- Minos is married to Pasiphae
- She is in love with the Bull
- She asks Daedalus' help and he makes a wooden cow
- Dressed up as a cow she spends time with the bull
- A bull-child is born and imprisoned in a labyrinth

##### 4. The Greeks pay for peace

- War between Minos and Greece
- Zeus helps Minos
- Greeks agree to send 14 youths to the Minotaur every 9 years

##### 5. Theseus kills the bull-child

- Theseus travels to kill the minotaur, promising to return in a white-sailed ship
- Minos' daughter, Ariadne falls in love and helps him escape with the thread
- He kills the Minotaur and escapes with her

##### 6. Theseus betrays Ariadne and loses his step-father

- Dionysus asks Theseus to leave Ariadne on Naxos for him
- He does it, and she asks Zeus to punish him
- Theseus forgets to change the sail and his father falls from the cliff in grief

##### 7. Daedalus escapes imprisonment, loses his son and kills Minos.

- Minos puts Daedalus and his son Icarus in prison
- Daedalus makes wings from feathers and wax
- Icarus flies high and dies
- Daedalus flies to Sicily
- Daedalus kills Minos with a bath of boiling oil.

# Main Characters

Europa, mother of Minos

Zeus, king of the gods

Minos, eldest son of Europa/Zeus

Poseidon, God of the sea.

Pasiphae, wife of Minos

Daedalus, blacksmith and inventor

Minotaur, the bull-child

Theseus, hero of Greece

Ariadne, daughter of Minos

Dionysus, god of wine

Icarus, son of Daedalus

## Annex 3 Sample Questionnaires

### INTERVIEWS WITH CHILDREN (by helper)

School Name: .....

Date: .....

Age

Gender

On a scale of one to ten show me how much (show me the fingers) you enjoyed

the storytelling ..... and the exhibition .....

Favourite things about the storytelling (max 3)

Ways to make it even better (max 3)

Favourite things about the exhibition(max 3)

Ways to make it even better (max 3)

After today's storytelling and exhibition, are there any new things you would like to do more of at school? (prompt – things enjoyed, things interesting)

Anything else you want to say?

## INTERVIEW OR QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHER

The aim of the project is to find ways to inspire and engage children using a mixture of performance and exhibition, in order to support the school in building enthusiasm for reading, writing, listening, engaging and imagining. We are particularly interested in offering a diversity of stimuli to engage different children in different ways (sounds, music, pictures, poetry, paintings, objects and so on). Please help us assess this modest pilot so we can plan better next time.

School Name: .....

Teache Name: .....

Date: .....

Year Class Taught: .....

### How well did we help children to:

(1 = poor; 5 = excellent – circle number)

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Understand and appreciate a performance art form                                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Understand and appreciate a mythic genre  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Understand the way objects, visual art and music can relate to a narrative      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Develop listening, observation and questioning skills                           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Develop enthusiasm which can be harnessed by the teacher for further class work | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Do you think story days of this kind are useful in other ways? Explain.

What parts of the day were most useful?

Can you suggest ways in which future days could be more effective?

Were the activities inclusive of all abilities? Did you notice any children who particularly benefited?

Are you planning any follow-up work – if yes what; if no, why?!

Was the letter and information we sent in advance useful – how could it have been better?

Any ideas for other stories or themes for future story-days?

How frequently would you enjoy visits of this kind to your school?

Twice a year

Once a year

Once every few years

Other

Any other comments?

## INTERVIEW OR QUESTIONNAIRE FOR HEADTEACHER OR CO-ORDINATOR

School Name: .....

Teacher Name: .....

Position: .....

Date: .....

The aim of the project is to find ways to inspire and engage children using a mixture of performance and exhibition, in order to support the work of the school in building enthusiasm for reading, writing, listening, engaging and imagining. We are particularly interested in offering a diversity of stimuli to engage different children in different ways (sounds, music, pictures, poetry, paintings, objects and so on). Please help us assess this modest pilot so we can plan better next time.

From what you have seen of the story-day, how valuable do you think the day has been to the school? What needs have been met?

Can you suggest any ways to make future story-days more effective?

We have combined three related activities - performance, exhibition and workshop - in a single day package. Do you think the combination is a good idea?

What would be an appropriate price to pay for such an event? Should we charge larger schools more?

We are thinking of enrolling schools to be part of a touring scheme, where we would provide them with one story-day per year as a regular part of our programme at a reduced price. This would cut down marketing costs and make organisation much simpler. Would your school consider enrolling in such a scheme?

Any other comments.