

Stage 8

Cambridge Lower Secondary Progression Test

Insert



2022

Text for Section A, an extract from *The Legend of the Minotaur* by Alan Gibbons

Chapter 1

But still the beast stood in the archway, pawing at the floor. It was bigger than a man. It stood almost three metres tall and was massively built with slabs of muscle on its chest and shoulders. Below the waist it was bull-like. It had a swinging tail and mud-splattered hooves. Or was it mud? Above the waist it was a man except, that is, for the head. And what a head! The muzzle was huge and when it opened it revealed the sharp, curved teeth, not of a bull but of a big cat. They were the fangs of a lion or tiger, made for ripping flesh. Its eyes were yellow and blazed unflinchingly through the murk. Then there were the great horns, glinting and sharp, curving from its monstrous brow. Thick and muscular as the neck was, it seemed barely able to support such a fearsome head, and strained visibly under the impossible weight.

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'Oh my –'

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The beast stepped out from the tunnel, and the boy actually took a few steps back. It was as if his soul had crept out of his body and was tugging at him, begging him to get away. In the sparse light shed from the gratings in the ceiling, the beast looked even more hideous. There was the sweat for a start, standing out in gleaming beads on that enormous neck and shoulders.

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The beast began to stamp forward, its hooves clashing on the stone floor. It raised its head, the horns scraping on the ceiling, and gave a bellow that seemed to crush the air.

'I can't do this ...'

He fell back, scrambling over obstacles on the floor, and fled. That's when he realized he'd dropped the ball of string. His lifeline had gone.

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'Oh no!'

The beast was charging head down.

Got to get out of here!

In his mind's eye, he could see himself impaled on the points of those evil-looking horns, his legs pedalling feebly in the air, his head snapped back, his eyes growing pale and lifeless.

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Suddenly, he was running for his life, skidding on the slimy floor.

'Help me!'

He saw the startled brown eyes of the girl above the grating.

'Don't run!' she cried, 'Fight. You must fight.'

He was almost dying of shame. This wasn't supposed to happen. He wasn't meant to lose and there weren't meant to be witnesses to his defeat.

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'Fight,' she repeated. 'It's the way of things.'

The way of things. That's right, he was meant to stand and fight. It was in his nature as a hero. But he couldn't. Not against *that*.

'Please,' he begged, turning his face away from the girl in shame, 'somebody help me.'

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The beast was careering through the tunnels, crashing, bellowing, thundering through the maze. Its charge was hot, furious, unstoppable. It was almost on him.

Get me out of here!

'That's it,' he cried, throwing down his sword, 'I've had enough. Game over!'

Chapter 2

Ripping off the mask and gloves, Phoenix bent double gulping down air like it had been rationed. The dank half-light of the tunnels was replaced by the welcome glow from an Anglepoise lamp in his father's study. He glanced at the score bracelet on his wrist. It registered total defeat: **000000**. For a few moments everything was spinning, the claws of the game digging into the flesh of the here and now. Then his surroundings became reassuringly familiar.

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He was out.

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*It **was** a game!*

'Well?' his dad asked, 'What do you think?'

'Mind-blowing,' Phoenix panted. 'It was so real. It was like another world. I mean, I *was* Theseus. I went into the palace of the tyrant-king Minos. I could actually touch the stone columns, feel the heat of the braziers, smell the incense.'

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He knew he was gushing, babbling like a little kid, but he didn't care.

'The king's daughter Ariadne helped me and she wasn't just an image on a screen. She was a real girl. Then I actually came face to face with the Minotaur. It was really happening. I believed it.' He shivered. 'Still do.'

'Oh, I could tell how convincing it was', said Dad, enjoying the mixture of excitement and fear in his son's voice.

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'You were screaming your silly head off by the end.'

Phoenix blushed then, beginning to control his breathing at last, he picked up the mask and gloves and traced the attached wires back to the computer where images of the labyrinth were still flashing away on the screen.

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'It really is just a game?'

Dad pushed his seat back and gave a superior smile.

'That's all. Just a very sophisticated piece of software, hooked up to an even more sophisticated piece of hardware.'

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