

Minoans Teacher Guide

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Overview

Contributions of Early Cultures - Minoans is a 14-panel interactive activity on the Bronze Age civilization of Crete, centered on the Palace of Knossos. Students move from a central Knossos image into panels on geography, inventions, archaeology, art, myth and a puzzle review.

- **Big idea:** What did the Minoans give us, and how did later cultures improve it?
- **Format:** Self-guided in a browser; works for individuals, pairs, or whole-class on a projector.
- **Time:** One 50-minute class, or two if you run the Theseus videos and full discussion.
- **Materials:** Internet access for the video links; this guide for the answer key and talking points.



The main screen: students start at Knossos and click any of the 14 panels.

Suggested order and pacing

Go from place, to people, to inventions, to myth, then finish with the review and the ending. Times assume one 50-minute class.

#	Panels	Focus	Minutes
1	Geography	Crete, the sea, trade	5
2	Arthur Evans · Palace Layout	Who dug up Knossos and what he found	8
3	Flush Toilet	Minoan plumbing and engineering	5
4	Rodeo Bull-Leaping · Snake Goddess	Sport, religion, daily life	8
5	Minotaur Story · Theseus Story · Titian Painting	Myth and how later artists retold it	12
6	Maze Puzzle	Review: maze and crossword	7
7	The End	The Thera eruption and the Minoan decline	5

The rodeo connection

People in almost every culture have tested their nerve against a bull. The Minoans may have done it first, and that's the hook for this lesson. The famous "Bull-Leaping Fresco" from Knossos shows young athletes grabbing a charging bull's horns and vaulting over its back.



The Bull-Leaping Fresco, Palace of Knossos, about 1450 BC. Heraklion Archaeological Museum. Photo: [Wikimedia Commons](#), public domain (CC0).

Use the Rodeo Bull-Leaping panel to ask: **who else does this, and how have they changed it?**

Culture	Bull sport	What changed
Minoan Crete	Bull-leaping	Acrobats vault over the bull; possibly religious
Spain	Recortes	Athletes dodge and leap the bull without harming it
Portugal	Forcados	A team catches the bull bare-handed, head-on
Southern France	Course camarguaise	Runners snatch ribbons off the bull's horns
Tamil Nadu, India	Jallikattu	Young men hang on to the bull's hump
United States and Mexico	Rodeo bull riding	The rider stays on 8 seconds; rodeo bullfighters protect him

Quick activity: Ask students to vote for the hardest event, then explain what the Minoan version tells us about their athletes, courage, and beliefs.

Rodeo bullfighters (often called rodeo clowns) are the closest modern match to the Minoan leapers. Their job is to get the bull's attention and dodge it.

Panel notes and talking points

Panel	Key point to land
Geography	Crete's island location made the Minoans a sea-trading power. The sea was their wall, so the palaces had no big defensive walls.
Flush Toilet	Knossos had clay pipes, drains, and a water-flushed latrine. That was about 3,000 years before flush toilets became common in Europe.
Arthur Evans	The British archaeologist began digging Knossos in 1900. He named the culture "Minoan" after King Minos, and his rebuilt concrete sections are still debated today.
Palace Layout	Knossos had hundreds of rooms on several levels, which may be where the idea of the labyrinth came from.
Rodeo Bull-Leaping	Bulls were central to Minoan art and religion. See "The rodeo connection" above.
Snake Goddess	Faience figurines found by Evans in 1903 suggest women held important religious roles.
Minotaur Story	King Minos keeps the half-bull, half-man Minotaur in the labyrinth and feeds it young people from Athens.
Theseus Story	Theseus kills the Minotaur and gets back out by following Ariadne's ball of string. The links go to Jim Henson's <i>The Storyteller</i> (1990).

Panel	Key point to land
Titian Painting	<i>Bacchus and Ariadne</i> (1520–23) shows Ariadne after Theseus leaves her on Naxos. It's a good example of the Renaissance reusing a Greek myth.
Maze Puzzle	Students review the myth with a maze and a crossword. See the answer key below.
The End	The Thera (Santorini) volcano erupted around 1600 BCE. Later the Mycenaeans took over Knossos, and Minoan power faded.



Titian, Bacchus and Ariadne, 1520–23. National Gallery, London. Public domain, via [Wikimedia Commons](#). Caption for class: "I'm on my way to teach Risk Reduction."

Content heads-up

Check these three panels before you teach with younger students.

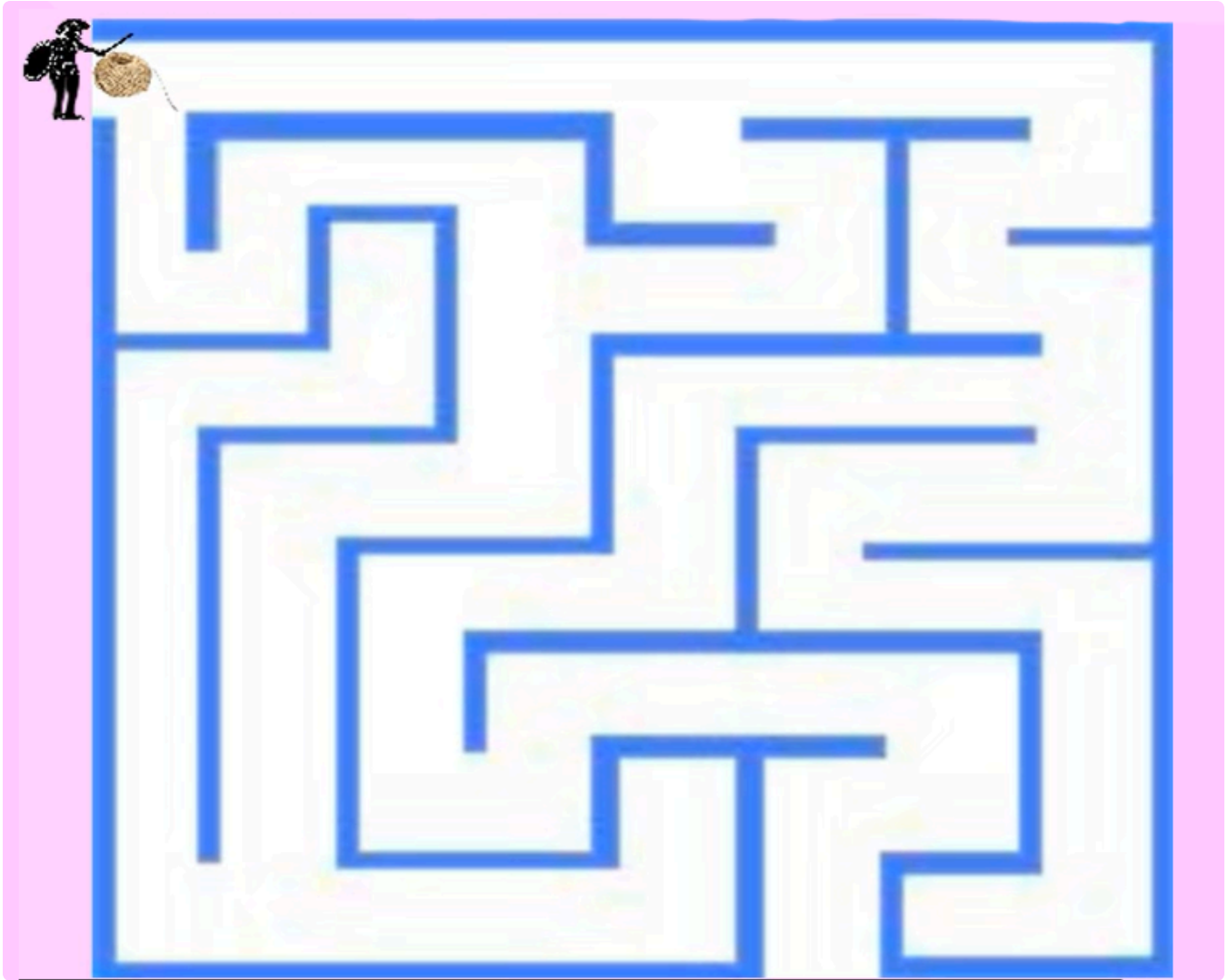
- **Snake Goddess:** The figurines are bare-chested, as in the originals. A quick framing helps: "This is how Minoan religious dress looked."
- **Titian Painting:** It shows partial nudity, which is typical of Renaissance art. Preview it, or skip it for younger grades.
- **Theseus Story videos:** These open on an outside site, which school filters may block. As a backup, have students read the Minotaur Story panel aloud.

Discussion questions

Each question asks what the Minoans gave us and how later cultures improved it.

1. The Minoans had flush toilets around 1700 BCE. Why did Europe lose that idea for centuries, and what does your bathroom do better today?
2. Bull-leaping, bull riding, recortes: why do people in so many cultures test their courage against a bull? Which version would you try?
3. Knossos had no big defensive walls. What did the Minoans rely on instead, and was it a good bet?
4. Arthur Evans rebuilt parts of Knossos in concrete. Did that help us understand the past, or change it?
5. Titian painted Ariadne about 3,000 years after the Minoans. Why do artists keep retelling old myths? Name a modern movie that does the same.
6. A volcano helped end Minoan power. What modern disaster has changed a whole region?

Answer key: maze and crossword



The Maze Puzzle: Theseus starts top left with Ariadne's thread.

Maze: There is one correct path. Students lead Theseus to the Minotaur and follow Ariadne's string back out.

Crossword: Answers are listed in clue order. They match the game's answer list.

#	Direction	Clue	Answer
1	Down	Bull-leaping may be the basis of the modern-day western ___	RODEO
2	Down	Theseus left Ariadne on the Island of ___	NAXOS
3	Down	Besides the sword, what Theseus was given to battle the Minotaur	BALL OF STRING

#	Direction	Clue	Answer
4	Down	Where the Minotaur lived	LABYRINTH
5	Across	Cretan princess who fell in love with Theseus	ARIADNE
6	Across	Knossos's complicated rooms, plumbing and painted walls were called ___	FRESCOES
7	Down	Son of King Aegeus who swore to kill the Minotaur	THESEUS
8	Across	Historian who discovered the site of Knossos	ARTHUR EVANS
9	Across	King who demanded 14 young Athenians every nine years	MINOS
10	Down	___ goddess, another name for the Minoan Mother Goddess	SNAKE