

DAY-2_Event-1_v1.mp4

Cressida Cowell [00:00:14] Hello there. I'm Cressida Cowell, author and illustrator of *How to Train Your Dragon* and *Wizards of Once and Which Way to Anywhere*, my new book series. And I'm so glad you've joined me for the Reading is Magic Festival. Sometimes, things that you do or say have a way of turning into something bigger than you imagined and carrying on longer than you thought they would, like the Reading is Magic Festival, which started in 2020 when I was the Waterstones Children's Laureate and was inspired by my belief that reading is magic and magic is for everyone. All the events during the festival explore the themes of the charter I wrote when I was the laureate and celebrate all the things you have the right to. Creativity, having a planet to read on, seeing yourselves in a book, reading for the joy of it and getting brilliant advice about books and about reading from people whose job it is to do that. I hope you enjoy this event.

Lauren Layfield [00:01:32] Hello everyone. I'm Lauren Layfield, I'm a TV presenter. I am currently wearing an orange and white stripy top, I've got my hair up in a ponytail today and I'm in front of this brilliant bit of bunting which reads Reading is Magic Festival, because that's exactly where we are for Day 2. And I am so excited to introduce my first guest of the day because they are the brand new Waterstones Children's Laureate 2022 to 2024, Joseph Coelho. Now he's got a brand new spellbinding novel out full of poetry, and he's going to be talking about what inspires him and also how he blends ancient and modern stories together. So let's hand over to Joseph.

Joseph Coelho [00:02:23] Hello, I'm Joseph Coelho, and it's a pleasure to be joining you for the Reading is Magic Festival. I am a black biracial man with black curly hair, I'm standing in my study against a white wall with some Reading is Magic bunting behind me. I'm wearing a grey t shirt with a very cool skateboarding lady doing a jump or I'm not sure what those jumps are called. A volley? I'm not sure! I don't know my skateboarding terms. But anyway, that doesn't matter because today I'm here to share with you a bit of an extract and some of the thinking behind my book, *The Boy Lost in the Maze*, which is illustrated by Kate Milner and comes out this October, October 6 2022. I'm going to tell you about some of the ideas behind the book, I'm going to read you some poems from the book and tell you some ways that you might want to get inspired to write your own poems. So *The Boy Lost in the Maze* is a YA, young adult, verse novel. So there are poems in this book. It is a story made up of poems, some form poems, and sometimes I have structures and some poems that I freeform, that means I don't have a structure or I've made up the structure. It's the story of young Theo, who we see on the front cover here. Theo is 17 years old, he's just done his mock A-level exams, didn't quite get the results he wanted. He's been brought up in a single parent family. He has memories of his father from when he was young, knows where his father lives, which is not far from him, but hasn't seen him for the past seven years. And on receiving his mock results decides to go and see his father to tell him how he's been doing. He misses not having his father around, but at the same time, whilst doing his English coursework, he finds out about the story of the Six Labours of Theseus, a Greek myth. Now, you may not have come across the Six Labours of Theseus as a myth, but I'm sure you have come across Theseus and the Minotaur. It's the same character. Before he got to the Minotaur, Theseus undertook a journey to meet his father because Theseus did not grow up with his biological father. He finds out at about the age of 16 that his father is a King, King Aegeus of Athens. His mother tells him this and he goes out on a journey to meet his father. But on this journey, he comes across bandits and murderers and thieves and monsters, and he kills each one as he comes across them. In my book, we get the intermingling of these two narratives. So we have Theo in modern day London going on a journey to meet his biological father, and he comes across different

characters who have similarities to the thieves and the bandits and the monsters in the original Greek myth, they're like updated modern versions of those characters. And we follow Theseus journey. But there are differences in my version of Theseus journey to the original Greek myth. And of course we find out a bit about the Minotaur, the character that I'm sure you all know, which had the body of a man and the head of a bull. I'm going to read you the first poem called The Oracle. It's a poem which gives you an insight into what's to come, doing what oracles do, giving you a glimpse of the future. The Oracle. Time moves and spirals, we are flotsam in time sea. Time moves and spirals and repeats its tragedies. This story is about two boys separated by centuries, parted by myth, divided by reality. Two boys hoping to be men, two boys severed from their fathers, two boys searching a maze of manhood. One in ancient Greece, from a time of magic and mythos, one in modern London, a city of delusion and gloss. I am the oracle, your thread through this maze. As two boys start their journeys, no step will escape my gaze. Let me hold your hand through these dark and winding lands. Let us discover together what it means to be a man. Now that first poem introduces the main theme of the book, which is about manhood. What does it mean to be a man and trying to challenge some of those more negative associations we have with being a man that you have to be big and brave and strong and, at times, violent. I really wanted to challenge those notions and I have an activity for you. If you want to pause the video, I want you to have a think about what you think it means to be a man. What are the ideas that come to mind when you think about manhood and what it means to be a man? And maybe you could then rewrite that list and do a list of what you think it should mean to be a man. So, what you are told by society it means to be a man, and then what you think it should mean to be a man. I'm sure we will have many things in common. For instance, I don't think manhood should be all about being brave and big and violent and sword wielding, but that's what we get from some of the ancient Greek myths and indeed from modern stories. And I wanted to challenge that. The second poem in The Boy Lost in the Maze is called Theo First Hears of Theseus. And this is the moment where Theo is in his English class, and his English teacher first brings up the story of Theseus. I'm doodling again. Geometric patterns and swirls. Sir doesn't mind. He lets me doodle. Knows it helps me think. Sir is silent again. He does this thing when he forgets words, presses thumb and forefinger to the bridge of his nose and massages like memory is a small furry thing behind the eyes that needs coaxing. He massages and ignores our word offerings until memory squeals to his stroking. Manhood. Theseus' story is about manhood. About fathers and sons, about nature and nurture, about legacy and destiny, about parents and their children and what it means to be a man. I nearly say something, before remembering the happy family kids around me. The two parent kids. The big house in Putney kids. Been on a plane kids. Have the full Sky package kids. I rest my head back on my arms and listen to Sir tell Theseus' story. I scratch a poem title into my book, Theseus Killed Them. I'm going to read you Theo's poem, Theseus Killed Them, because this is his first impression on hearing the story of the Six Labours of Theseus, an impression that is very similar to my own. One might realise that Theseus goes on this journey along the Saronic Gulf, taking the land route to his father in Athens and defeating these villains and criminals and murderers and monsters on the way. But it's very much about a hero going in with his sword and his club and smashing his way through to his father, it's just there's a lot of violence and death. And I felt like the story would be better served if those encounters had more of a chance for understanding, more of a chance for communication and connection, rather than it just being a case of a hero killing villains. But this is Theo's first impression his retelling of the Theseus story and what he takes away from it, what he thinks the Theseus story is about. Your father is a king, said his mother. Just lift this heavy rock, he left some things for you to prove your kingly stock. Beneath the rock, he found sandals and a sword. Sandals for a journey, a sword for the criminal hordes. Theseus walked his father's road, but the way was filled with tests. He had to

battle six enemies to prove he was the best. The first was Periphetes who was a little dim, Theseus took his bronze club, Theseus killed him. The second was Sinis who killed with a bent tree limb, he ripped his victims in two. Theseus killed him. The third was a pig who'd been causing quite a stir, she was the Crommyonian Sow. Theseus killed her. The fourth was named Sciron, who gave his victims a surprise swim, he'd feed them to a monster turtle. Theseus killed him. The sixth was innkeeper Procrustes, who liked everything to be trim, forcing guests to fit his bed. Theseus killed him. When the killing journey was done, Theseus found his father's kingdom grim. The young yearly killed by the Minotaur. So Theseus killed him. So there you get a short version of the Six Labours of Theseus, as understood by Theo. And Theo is quite right. That's all that seems to happen. He meets each monster, each bandit, each thief in turn, and then kills them. Which I think is a pretty sorry state of affairs and I wanted more from that story. So in the book, *The Boy Lost in the Maze*, I retell the story of Theseus and we go into far more detail with each encounter of those villains that have just been listed in Theo's poem, there. We go into more detail and different things happen, it's not always simply a case of Theseus killing each of those individuals. I wanted to show you Theo here, here's Theo as illustrated by the wonderful illustrator Kate Milner, who's done all the illustrations here. So I'm showing the illustration page from the book. It's a young black boy, biracial black boy with his hand on his face, thinking about the Six Labours of Theseus. And there's a square offset just behind the boy's head, which shows the face of the Minotaur, because the Minotaur story also features throughout the book. So really, this is the story of three boys and each of them has their narrative of fatherhood and what it means to be a man. I'm going to give you actually the Minotaur's story now, the first poem we have about the Minotaur called *Birth*. I am born into secrecy. Born to screams and gasps carved into my mother's shaking arms. For years I played alone, ate alone, nursed by the nurses who dared to brave the sight of me. My mother was a ghost, creeping at the edges of open doors, spying from the few windows that faced mine. My father was a myth, a sound, a word, a king. He visited me once, held me in his arms, and slapped me when the point of my horns grazed the whiskers of his chin. From him I learnt the word monster. And there's a lovely illustration here again done by Kate Milner. It shows a kind of black shadow, a black square. And within that square we have a depiction of the Minotaur's mother and the baby Minotaur himself. So we get the sense of this poor person, this poor little monster, little Minotaur who's always been treated as a monster. And we follow his story throughout the book and we see what it means for the Minotaur to be a man and what manhood means to him. The next poem I wanted to share with you is called *Stone, Sandals, Sword*. This poem uses a lot of alliteration, so a lot of 's' words. I like using alliteration, it's a great poetic device. And maybe this poem will inspire you to write your own poem that uses alliteration. I chose the letter S because this part of the story is about Theseus being told by his mother that his father is actually King Aegeus who lives in Athens, who is the King of Athens. And underneath this huge stone, his father, the king, had left him some sandals and a sword and had told his mother, when my boy is old enough, old enough to lift up this stone, get him to take the sword and the sandals, and to make his way to me to claim his birthright as my son. So we had stone and sandals and sword, and I was struck by those three S's. And I wanted to write a poem that celebrated the S the sibilance of the S. Son I've held a secret, I have spun a smokescreen. There is something I must tell you, now that you've reached 16. Your father is not a god. Not a spirit of the sea. Your father is a king and he rules overseas. See if you can stand that stone upon its seat there is something in the soil there, a subterranean treat, a souvenir from your source, a little something from your sire. A subsidy of sorts for being an orphaned little squire. For surviving all those school days sans your shepherd, your father left you something to stop you feeling severed. Search for that special something sieve your snatchers through that spot. The stone is somewhat heavy, make sure it doesn't drop. There! Sticking out from the shadow, there's the

something your father stored. A pair of his smashing sandals and his Cretan smashing sword. So there we get that scene of Theseus being told that his father is King Aegeus from Athens and that his father has left him sandals and a sword. And now that he's old enough, he can know the truth and claim his birthright. I hope you do have a go at writing your own alliterative poems. Maybe you could write a poem about Theo, or about Theseus. Or even about the Minotaur. Maybe one about the Minotaur that loses lots of M's. That'd be good fun. The next poem I wanted to share with you is called Bronze Words. This is the point at which Theo goes to his father's house. He remembers where his father lived from when he did used to see him when he was much younger. And he turns up at his father's doorstep, but there is told the truth that the person he thought was his father is not his biological father. And this sets off Theo's journey to find his father. To find his king, if you will. It's called Bronze Words. Words are heavy in his square jaw, barely able to hold their bronze. He swipes lazily with the questions, clattering behind his teeth. What? Who are you? I'm undeterred. Seven years change a face. He squints through his one good eye, the barbershop mirror wink gone. It's me, I say. Theo, your son. With his weight on his good leg, he eyes me up, prepares a volley of swipes and swings. Didn't your mum tell you? I thought your mum would have told you? Didn't your mum say? I thought your mom would have said, can't believe she didn't say. Thought you would have known. I duck, dive and weave through the blows, his words skim my skin. He watches each syllable failing to land, leans back, grunts in a bellow of air, mentally tests the weight of his metallic words and upswings with all his might. I'm not your dad. You might have noticed in that poem, there's a lot of imagery around metal and bronze, and the fact that it's called Bronze Words as well, they're in the title. I did that on purpose because I wanted to show a similarity between Theo's stepfather and the first bandit that Theseus comes across. A bandit known as Periphetes, now Periphetes was famous for having one eye, in some stories he's got one eye like a cyclops and also has a bronze club which he would like to strike victims down with. In the original Greek myth, Theseus takes that bronze club from Pereiphetes and kills him with it. And it's very similar in my version, but this is the first death that Theseus commits. But from then on things start to change because that first death changes Theseus. I wanted to read you the interaction between Theseus and Periphetes. So remember, there are two narrative threads happening here. We've got the story of Theseus in ancient Greece, making his way to his father, taking the Six Labours, my version of the Six Labours. At the same time, we've got Theo in modern day London and he meets his version of the Six Labours but in a modern day. This poem, Theseus Battles Periphetes, is Theseus battling the cyclops who's got the bronze club and you may notice some similarities between Periphetes and Theo's stepfather. A psycho cyclops Highway Man too proud of his God-forged club, the bronze he'd use to batter the innocent. Each swing of his club spells out pain on my skin, composes agony on my muscles, threatens to unknit my bones with its verbosity. I'm down and beat so I muscle into my words, grab at them with toothed hands forming a sentence to stop the battering. You don't hit as hard as I expected, are you sure that club is bronze? It bronze, feel it and see. He slurs, shouts as his bruised pride hands me the club for validation. I flip it in my articulate hands. You're right, I say, it's undoubtedly bronze. I let my grip do the talking as I shout its alloy through him. So that's the first Labour that Theseus undertakes battling Periphetes, taking his bronze club through him. But I use the language of words in that poem to show this connection between the Theo story, when Theo meets his stepfather, who is very similar to Periphetes. But instead of having a bronze club, he uses bronze words. And I've tried to do that throughout the book of finding similarities and connections between the ancient Greek myth of Theseus' Six Labours and the new modern story of Theo's search for his biological father. I want to just read one more poem for you called Theseus Creeps, and this uses a choose your own adventure element. Now, for those of you who don't know, choose your own adventure books are books where at the end of a

chapter you get to decide where the protagonist, the main character, goes next. And I wanted to bring that element into this first novel. So on some of the poems, you have choices where you can decide where you want the characters to go. Do they go left? Do they go right? Do they go up the stairs, down the stairs, or how they should act? In this poem, Theseus Creeps, Theseus has come across another Labour on his journey, a bandit called Sinis, who would like to tie people to bent tree limbs and then released the tree limbs, and as they snapped up into the air with the people attached, they would rip the people in half, a really horrendous way to die. Theseus is creeping up on Sinis and is planning on killing him, but not everything goes to plan. Theseus creeps low, skirting around the side of that bovine hill with its pine tree horns. He takes aim at the back of Sinis' head with bronze shout in one hand, his father's sword dragging in the other, wondering how fragile an eggshell skull can contain so rotten a yoke. Sinis is admiring his handiwork, his splitting, ripping and zipping work sweat glazing his sun-aged face, his crown hair damp against his otherwise bald pate. Theseus is framed by the sun as two halves of a man flounder in the wind above him. He doesn't look up, doesn't want to see it again. He raises club and sword zenith high, aiming to bash and slice his way to heroics but is caught off guard, off balance, bronze-handed by girl. A girl with startling wide eyes and deep bronze skin. She has a look about her of Sinis. Sinis minus the mad, the brutal, the violent. She must be his daughter. She is as beautiful as the sun. And she is staring at him. So that's the end of the poem. But at the end, you have three options about where to go next in the story. Should Theseus strike Sinis before his daughter raises the alarm? If so, go to page 98. Should Theseus hesitate? Take a moment? Pause? If so, go to page 100. Or should Theseus run away? If you think he should run away, go to page 104. I won't tell you what happens on those pages, you'll have to get the book and read it yourselves and take your own journey through this maze, through *The Boy Lost in the Maze* illustrated by Kate Milner. Thanks so much for listening and I hope you enjoy the story. Bye bye.

Lauren Layfield [00:25:02] Thank you so much, Joseph, for inspiring us with your new verse novel. It sounds absolutely brilliant and has it inspired you to give a bit of poetry a go? Or maybe you think there's an ancient tale that would blend well with a modern story? We would love to hear from you! Join in the conversation, you can use the hashtag Reading is Magic Festival.