

King Midas

Reading and Discussion

In Greek mythology, **King Midas** was a very wealthy king who ruled over the country of **Phrygia**, in Asia Minor. He was the adopted son of King **Gordias** and **Cybele**. He was very rich and loved the life of pleasure. He loved money and gold so much that it was his obsession. His avarice, which means extreme greed for material wealth and money, was well known as he spent his days counting his wealth. He lived in a big castle surrounded by riches and was known for his famous beautiful rose garden that was even mentioned by the historian **Herodotus**.

There are two myths surrounding King Midas. The first one is about **Dionysus** and some travel companions who were passing through the city over which King Midas ruled. Dionysus was the son of **Zeus** and he is the Greek god of wine and vegetation. In Greek mythology, Dionysus used to teach humans how to plant grapevines and make wine. He was thought to have two sides. He was very kind and nice to the people who showed him respect and honored him; however, he could also cause chaos and destruction to those who offended or insulted him. His travel companions were mainly **satyrs**. Satyrs were mythical beings that were half human and half goat and liked drinking lots of wine. The head of the satyrs, called **Silenus** was considered the teacher and the loyal companion of Dionysus. One of the legends surrounding Silenus is that whoever catches him while he is drunk can learn important secrets and know about the future.

During Dionysus' travel in the city, Silenus drank too much and slept in Midas' rose garden. Upon finding Silenus, the guards brought Silenus to King Midas. King Midas recognized Silenus as Dionysus' faithful companion and offered him all kinds of hospitality for 10 days. On the eleventh day, King Midas took him to Dionysus. To repay King Midas for his kindness and hospitality to Silenus, Dionysus offered to grant King Midas any one wish. Being obsessed with wealth, Midas chose the wish that whatever he touches be turned into gold. Dionysus warned him about his wish and told him to think about what he was asking, but Midas was certain that this is what he wanted. So Dionysus granted him his wish.

Midas was extremely happy with his new ability and started trying it out on everything. He tried it out on stones, tables, and walls. Then he touched his roses to smell them, but they too turned into gold. Then he got hungry, but whatever he tried eating or drinking turned into gold. Then he accidentally touched his daughter and she too turned into gold.

Midas became miserable as he realized how mistaken he was. So he went to Dionysus and begged him to remove his golden touch. Dionysus felt that Midas was truly desperate and realized his mistake, so he pitied him and told him to go to the **Pactolus River** so that he could wash his wish away. Midas went and when he touched the river, his golden touch was washed away. This myth explains why the Pactolus River had a gold gleam in it. Some also say that the purpose of this myth is to show that happiness is not reached through greedy desire for wealth and money.

The second myth relating to King Midas concerns the time he was asked to be one of the judges of a musical competition between the Greek gods **Pan** and **Apollo**. Though the other judge announced that Apollo was the winner of the contest, Midas did not agree with him. This

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offended the god Apollo, who was the Greek god of truth, medicine, archery, poetry, and music. As punishment for Midas' bad taste and poor judgment, Apollo changed Midas' ears into those of a donkey as a symbol of what he thought of Midas' bad musical hearing and taste. Midas hid his donkey ears under a turban. He would only remove it when he went to his barber, who was sworn to secrecy. One day, the barber could not keep the secret any longer, so he dug a hole into the ground and whispered his secret into it. Immediately reeds started growing there, and it is said that whenever there is a breeze or wind, you can hear the reeds whispering the secret "Midas has donkey ears...."

The first myth is the most famous one relating to King Midas' golden touch. Now, the saying "**the Midas touch**" means that someone is able to deal with large amounts of money or whatever he does is successful and rewarding. Also, this myth was even adapted in Marvel Tales by Stan Lee and Joe Sinnott.

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Activities

Activity A: Multiple Choice:

1. King Midas was known for all except:
 - a. His rose garden
 - b. His love of pleasure
 - c. His love of money and wealth
 - d. His love of knowledge

2. The saying "he has the Midas touch" means the person is:
 - a. Cursed
 - b. Successful or can manage great amounts of money
 - c. Turned his family into gold
 - d. Obsessed with money

Activity B: Matching:

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| _____ 1. Dionysus | a. Turned Midas' ears into ears of donkey |
| _____ 2. Silenus | b. Leader of satyrs |
| _____ 3. Apollo | c. Greek god of wine and vegetation |

Activity C: Name three things that Apollo was a Greek god of:

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Activity D: Fill in the Blanks:

1. Satyrs are mythical creatures that are half _____ and half human.
2. To wash his gift away, Midas had to go to the _____ River.
3. According to Greek mythology, Dionysus used to travel to teach humans how to plant _____ and make wine.
4. Being obsessed with wealth, Midas chose the wish that whatever he touched be turned into _____.

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Answer Key

Activity A

1. King Midas was known for all except:

- a. His rose garden
- b. His love of pleasure
- c. His love of money and wealth
- d. **His love of knowledge**

2. The saying “he has the Midas touch” means the person is:

- a. Cursed
- b. **Successful or can manage great amounts of money**
- c. Turned his family into gold
- d. Obsessed with money

Activity B

 c 3. Dionysus

a. Turned Midas’ ears into ears of donkey

 b 4. Silenus

b. Leader of satyrs

 a 5. Apollo

c. Greek god of wine and vegetation

Activity C

1. Truth, 2. Medicine, 3. Archery, 4. Poetry, 5. Music

Activity D

1. Satyrs are mythical creatures that are half goat and half human.

2. To wash his gift away, Midas had to go to the Pactolus River.

3. According to Greek mythology, Dionysus used to travel to teach humans how to plant grapevines and make wine.

4. Being obsessed with wealth, Midas chose the wish that whatever he touches be turned into gold.