Name: _____ Date: _____

The King Who Loved Gold

Reading level 8 (4th grade) · 648 words

Long ago in the land of Phrygia, the Greeks said, there lived a king named Midas who loved gold more than anything. He had a palace with a hundred rooms and a garden full of roses. But every night he crept down to a secret room to count his coins. "More," he whispered. "If only I had more."

One morning, the gardeners found an old man snoring among the rose bushes. He was round and sleepy, with ivy in his hair. He could not remember how he got there. Midas did not know that the old man was a friend of the god Dionysus. He only saw a lost stranger, so he gave him a bed and a feast.

On the eleventh day, Midas took the old man home to Dionysus. The young god was so glad that he laughed out loud. "You were kind to my friend," he said. "Choose any gift you like, and it is yours." Midas did not even stop to think.

"I wish that everything I touch would turn to gold," said Midas. The god raised one eyebrow. "Do you really want that?" he asked. "Quite sure," said the king. "Then it is done," said Dionysus, and he did not smile. Midas grinned and rubbed his hands.

Midas hurried home, and he could hardly wait to try it. He snapped a twig from an oak tree, and it turned to gold in his hand. He picked up a stone, and that turned to gold too. "No king was ever as rich as I am!" he shouted.

At the palace, he ran from room to room, touching everything he could reach. The doors turned gold, and so did the chairs and the tall pillars. In the garden, he touched the roses one by one. The golden roses were lovely, but they did not smell sweet any more. Midas did not notice. He was too busy laughing.

By evening he was hungry, so his servants set out a great feast. Midas bit into a piece of bread, and it clanked against his teeth. It was solid gold. He picked up a grape, and it became a hard little golden ball. He raised a cup of water to his lips, and the water turned to gold before he could drink.

Midas looked at the golden food on the golden table. For the first time that day, Midas had stopped laughing. He was hungry and thirsty and very alone in his shining palace. He picked up one of the golden roses and held it to his nose, but it had no smell at all.

Midas ran out of the palace and all the way to the god. He fell on his knees in the grass. "Please take back your gift," he begged. "I was a foolish man. I would give every coin I own for one cup of water."

The god looked at him for a long time, and his face grew kind. "Go to the river Pactolus," he said. "Find where it starts, high in the hills, and wash in it." Midas ran until his legs ached. He found the river, bubbling out of the hills, and he jumped in with his crown and robe on.

The water swirled around him, and the gold slid from his hands like paint. It sank and glittered in the sand at the bottom of the river. Midas climbed out and drank, and the water was cool and wet and wonderful. He had never tasted anything so good.

After that, King Midas was a changed man. He gave most of his treasure to his people. He never counted coins in the dark again. He liked plain bread and cool water, and the roses in his garden, red and soft and sweet. People say the river still has flecks of gold in its sand, where the king washed his wish away.

Questions

1. Why did the god give Midas a wish?

A. Midas won a game
B. Midas had been kind to his friend
C. Midas paid him in coins

2. What did Midas wish for?

A. A palace with more rooms
B. To be a god
C. That everything he touched would turn to gold

3. What happened when Midas tried to eat?

A. The bread turned to solid gold
B. The grapes were sour
C. The servants forgot him

4. Why did the golden roses make Midas feel sad?

A. They were too big
B. They were not red
C. They had lost their sweet smell

5. In this story, what does "begged" mean?

A. Ran away from
B. Asked with a strong feeling
C. Shouted at

6. What changed in Midas at the end?

A. He cared more about simple good things than gold
B. He wanted a bigger palace
C. He stopped liking roses

Words to know

Phrygia: a land long ago
treasure: stored riches
pillars: tall posts
begged: asked with feeling
flecks: tiny bits

Answer key: The King Who Loved Gold

1. B. Midas had been kind to his friend
2. C. That everything he touched would turn to gold
3. A. The bread turned to solid gold
4. C. They had lost their sweet smell
5. B. Asked with a strong feeling
6. A. He cared more about simple good things than gold