

Name: _____ Class: _____

Midas

By Thomas Bulfinch
1855

Thomas Bulfinch (1796-1867) was an American writer best known for Bulfinch's Mythology, a collection of Greek mythology translated and retold for English-speaking audiences. The following excerpt retells the myth of King Midas. As you read, take notes on how Midas changes over the course of the story.

[1] Bacchus,¹ on a certain occasion, found his old schoolmaster and foster-father, Silenus,² missing. The old man had been drinking, and in that state wandered away, and was found by some peasants, who carried him to their king, Midas. Midas recognized him, and treated him hospitably, entertaining him for ten days and nights with an unceasing round of jollity.

On the eleventh day he brought Silenus back, and restored him in safety to his pupil. Whereupon Bacchus offered Midas his choice of a reward, whatever he might wish. He asked that whatever he might touch should be changed into gold. Bacchus consented, though sorry that he had not made a better choice.

Midas went his way, rejoicing in his new-acquired power, which he hastened to put to the test. He could scarce³ believe his eyes when he found a twig of an oak, which he plucked from the branch, become gold in his hand. He took up a stone; it changed to gold. He touched a sod;⁴ it did the same. He took up an apple from the tree; you would have thought he had robbed the garden of the Hesperides.⁵ His joy knew no bounds, and as soon as he got home, he ordered the servants to set a splendid repast⁶ on the table. Then he found to his dismay that whether he touched bread, it hardened in his hand; or put a morsel to his lip, it defied his teeth. He took a glass of wine, but it flowed down his throat like melted gold.



"one day when king midas was bored he took a walk in the garden..." by sparkleice is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

1. Bacchus, or Dionysus in the Greek mythology, was the god of the grape harvest, wine, ritual madness, fertility, theatre, and religious ecstasy in the Roman mythology.
2. Silenus was a companion and tutor to the wine god Dionysus (Bacchus).
3. hardly or barely
4. grass and the part of the soil beneath it held together by the roots
5. In Greek mythology, the Hesperides were nymphs who tended a garden in which golden apples grew. Those who ate the apples could become immortal.
6. meal or food

In consternation⁷ at the unprecedented affliction, he strove to divest himself of his power; he hated the gift he had lately coveted.⁸ But all in vain; starvation seemed to await him. He raised his arms, all shining with gold, in prayer to Bacchus, begging to be delivered from his glittering destruction. Bacchus, merciful deity, heard and consented. "Go," said he, "to River Pactolus, trace its fountain-head, there plunge yourself and body in, and wash away your fault and its punishment." He did so, and scarce had he touched the waters before the gold-creating power passed into them, and the river sands became changed into gold, as they remain to this day.

- [5] Thenceforth Midas, hating wealth and splendour, dwelt in the country, and became a worshipper of Pan,⁹ the god of the fields...

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7. **Consternation** (*noun*): feelings of anxiety or distress, typically at something unexpected
8. **Covet** (*verb*): to desire or want to possess something
9. Pan was the satyr-god of the wild, shepherds and flocks, rustic music (i.e. the pan flute), and companion of the nymphs.

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following statements best describes a theme of the story?
 - A. Greed is destructive, and seeking wealth does not guarantee fulfillment.
 - B. One should always offer to help others in need and be polite to guests.
 - C. People who expect a reward for doing good deeds only end up worse off for their greed.
 - D. Money cannot bring people as much happiness as food can.

2. PART B: Which of the following quotes best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "Midas recognized him, and treated him hospitably, entertaining him for ten days and nights with an unceasing round of jollity." (Paragraph 1)
 - B. "Whereupon Bacchus offered Midas his choice of a reward, whatever he might wish." (Paragraph 2)
 - C. "He could scarce believe his eyes when he found a twig of an oak, which he plucked from the branch, become gold in his hand." (Paragraph 3)
 - D. "Then he found to his dismay that whether he touched bread, it hardened in his hand; or put a morsel to his lip, it defied his teeth." (Paragraph 3)

3. PART A: What does the term "divest" most likely mean as used in paragraph 4?
 - A. to reduce
 - B. to escape
 - C. to get rid of
 - D. to protect from

4. PART B: Which of the following quotes best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "But all in vain; starvation seemed to await him." (Paragraph 4)
 - B. "He raised his arms, all shining with gold, in prayer to Bacchus" (Paragraph 4)
 - C. "begging to be delivered from his glittering destruction." (Paragraph 4)
 - D. "Thenceforth Midas, hating wealth and splendour, dwelt in the country" (Paragraph 5)

5. How does Midas' transformation in paragraph 4 develop his character and the meaning of the story? Cite evidence from the text in your answer.
