

## King Midas 1

### Length

6 min 42 sec.

### Summary

When King Midas shows kindness to Silenos, Dionysos' old tutor, he is rewarded by Dionysos with the grant of a wish. Midas soon finds that his wish — that everything he touch turn to gold — has unforeseen consequences. When Midas admits the foolishness of his choice, Dionysos takes pity and returns everything he has touched to its natural state.

### Starting-points

- You could start by telling the children that they are going to hear a story about someone who is granted a wish. What would they choose if they were granted just one wish and what would be the reasons for their choice? Compare children's responses. To what extent are their choices determined by personal or wider considerations?
- Ask the children to listen out for any changes that take place in the story. All the stories in this collection are taken from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* — a Greek word meaning 'transformations' — and all involve changes of some kind.

### Pause points

1 min 44 sec: *And when the feast was finished, King Midas himself led the satyr to Dionysos, the great god.*

- Why does King Midas hold a feast in honour of Silenos and then take Silenos to Dionysos?
- How do you think Dionysos feels when King Midas brings him Silenos?
- What do we learn about the character of King Midas from his treatment of Silenos?

3 min 33 sec: *... and there it was, a golden tree stretching high above his head, the leaves no longer whispering and rustling, but clinking and clanking like golden chimes.*

- How do you think King Midas is feeling now that everything he touches turns to gold?
- Can you think of any problems that this power might cause him?

### Questions for discussion

- What changes take place in this story? (*Silenos' status changed from prisoner to honoured guest; grass, apples, leaves, doorway, bread, wine, daughter turned to gold; Midas' attitude to gold turned from love to hate.*)
- What do we learn about Midas in this story? What adjectives might we use to describe him?
- What do we learn about Dionysos in this story? What adjectives might we use to describe him?
- Do you think that Dionysos knows Midas has made a foolish wish?
- At what point does Midas realise that his wish is really a curse?
- Why does Dionysos undo Midas' wish? What does his willingness to do so tell us about Dionysos?
- What is the climax of the story?
- The dictionary definition of the Midas touch is 'the ability to succeed at whatever you do, especially making money'. On the basis of this story, do you think that is a good definition?

You might want to use this story to explore adjectives describing character. King Midas is **god-fearing** — he is a worshipper of Dionysos and respectful of Dionysos' old teacher, Silenos. He can be **angry** — he is furious with his subjects when they bring him Silenos bound with ropes. He is **generous** — he did not just set Silenos free, he put him on his throne and held a feast in his honour. He might be seen as **greedy** — he wanted more gold than he had ever dreamed of — but we do not know if he wanted the gold for himself or

his subjects. He is **foolish**, or at the very least **short-sighted** — he did not think through the consequences of his choice. Finally, he is **repentant** — he sees the errors of his ways and seeks forgiveness from Dionysos. What do we learn about Dionysos? The fact that he is the god of drinking and drunkenness, wild music and wild dancing suggests that he is **wild** and **untamed**. He is grateful to Midas for bringing him Silenos, his tutor, and **generous** in rewarding him, but he does not try to persuade Midas that his choice is unwise. On the other hand, he is **sympathetic** when Midas admits his mistake and rescues him from his foolishness.

### **Suggested activities**

- Write a Midas-style story in a modern context, using a different wish (e.g. for endless junk food, computer games etc.) as the starting-point for the story.
- Write an alternative ending, trying to bring the story full circle. Ensure it is satisfying and that the final sentence sums up the message of the story. First discuss different types of endings and the need to bring out the characters' feelings and how or if they have changed.
- Debate the statement, '*You can never have enough money*'. A possible starting-point is the statement made by Ivan Boesky (an American stock market trader who was sent to prison for insider trading) when defending greed in his commencement address at the UC Berkeley's School of Business Administration: 'I think greed is healthy. You can be greedy and still feel good about yourself'.
- Debate the statement, '*Winning the lottery is the best thing that could happen to a person*'.