

"The Wife of Bath's Tale" from The Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer**Enrichment: King Midas**

The Wife of Bath tells only part of the famous legend of King Midas. These legends are based on an actual king who ruled the kingdom of Phrygia in Anatolia, or Asia Minor, the Asian part of today's nation of Turkey. In ancient times, much of Asia Minor was part of Greek civilization. The real King Midas lived from about 740 to 696 B.C. According to the Greek historian Herodotus, he was a wealthy king who married a Greek princess and built wonderful gardens. He successfully battled the Assyrians, signing a peace treaty with Assyrian ruler Sargon II in 709 B.C. However, in 696 B.C., fierce horse-riding nomads known as the Cimmerians invaded and destroyed his kingdom.

The legends of Midas often paint him as much more foolish than the real King Midas was. According to one famous legend, Midas rescues Silenus, good friend of Dionysius, the god of wine. To thank him, Dionysius offers to grant any wish Midas chooses. Midas, going against the advice of Dionysius, wishes that everything he touches turns to gold. He walks throughout his palace and turns everything to gold. When he grows hungry, however, all the foods and liquids he touches also turn to gold, and he is unable to eat or drink.

The Wife of Bath tells part of another legend of King Midas. In this legend, Midas serves as a judge between the god Apollo and the satyr Marsyas and rules in Marsyas's favor. Apollo is so furious that he gives Midas a pair of donkey's ears. In many versions of the legend, it is Midas's barber, not his wife, who cannot keep the secret of the ears and whispers it into a hole in the meadow, where he is overheard.

A. DIRECTIONS: Answer these questions based on the material you have just read about Midas.

1. What event do you think might have lead to the death of the real King Midas?

2. What lesson about greed does the first legend of Midas teach?

3. What lesson about magic or fate does the first legend of Midas also teach?

4. How does the legend involving Apollo stress the idea that Midas was foolish?

5. Why does it make sense that Midas's barber knows the secret of his ears?

B. DIRECTIONS: Today, when a businessman or woman is praised for having a "Midas touch," what do you think the expression means? Write your answer on the lines below.
