

## P4C resources

### The King has Donkey Ears – a Greek Myth

A long time ago in Ancient Greece, Pan, the god of shepherds, and mighty Apollo were arguing. Pan said, "I think my flute made of reeds can produce a more beautiful melody than your silly harp." Apollo did not agree. "My harp plays the most beautiful music in the universe. To prove it, I challenge you to a music contest."

The two agreed to have a contest with judges. One of the judges was King Midas.

After hearing the two melodies, all but one of the judges voted for Apollo as the winner. But King Midas said he preferred Pan's flute playing.

Apollo was furious. "I see the problem Midas. It's your ears. They are too small to hear properly. Let me fix that for you."

King Midas felt his ears quiver. They sprang out, and out, and turned into the large furry ears of a donkey! King Midas was horrified. He grabbed his ears. "Pan, help me!" he cried. But Pan, with a quick nervous glance at Apollo, turned his back.

From then on, King Midas tried to hide his ears from the people he ruled by wearing huge hats and scarves. He never appeared in public without covering his head. But there was one person who did see his donkey ears. That was his barber. King Midas made his barber promise he would never tell a soul. "Keep my secret or I will throw you in jail."

The barber promised to keep the secret. But, as time went by, he found that keeping such a huge secret was too much for him. It was making him ill. Every day he wanted more and more to share the secret.

In the end he couldn't stand it any longer. The barber went up a mountain and dug a hole in the middle of some reeds. He looked about, to make sure no one was near. Then, he whispered into the hole, "King Midas has the ears of a donkey. The king has donkey ears. The king has donkey ears."

Having spoken out his secret, he felt much better. He walked home happily, feeling relieved and certain that no-one had heard.

Unfortunately, the barber had dug right into a piece of echo. Pieces of echo were scattered all over the mountains. In fact, pieces of echo are scattered all over the world.

And when he got back to town, all around him he could hear echoes of his whispers coming out of the reeds. "The king has donkey ears. The king has donkey ears." And other people could hear it too. Even though it was only a whisper, very soon everyone in the kingdom knew the king's secret. King Midas sent for the barber who had given his secret away...



*King Midas by Emma Chichester Clark, from The Orchard Book of Greek Myths, Orchard Books, 1992*