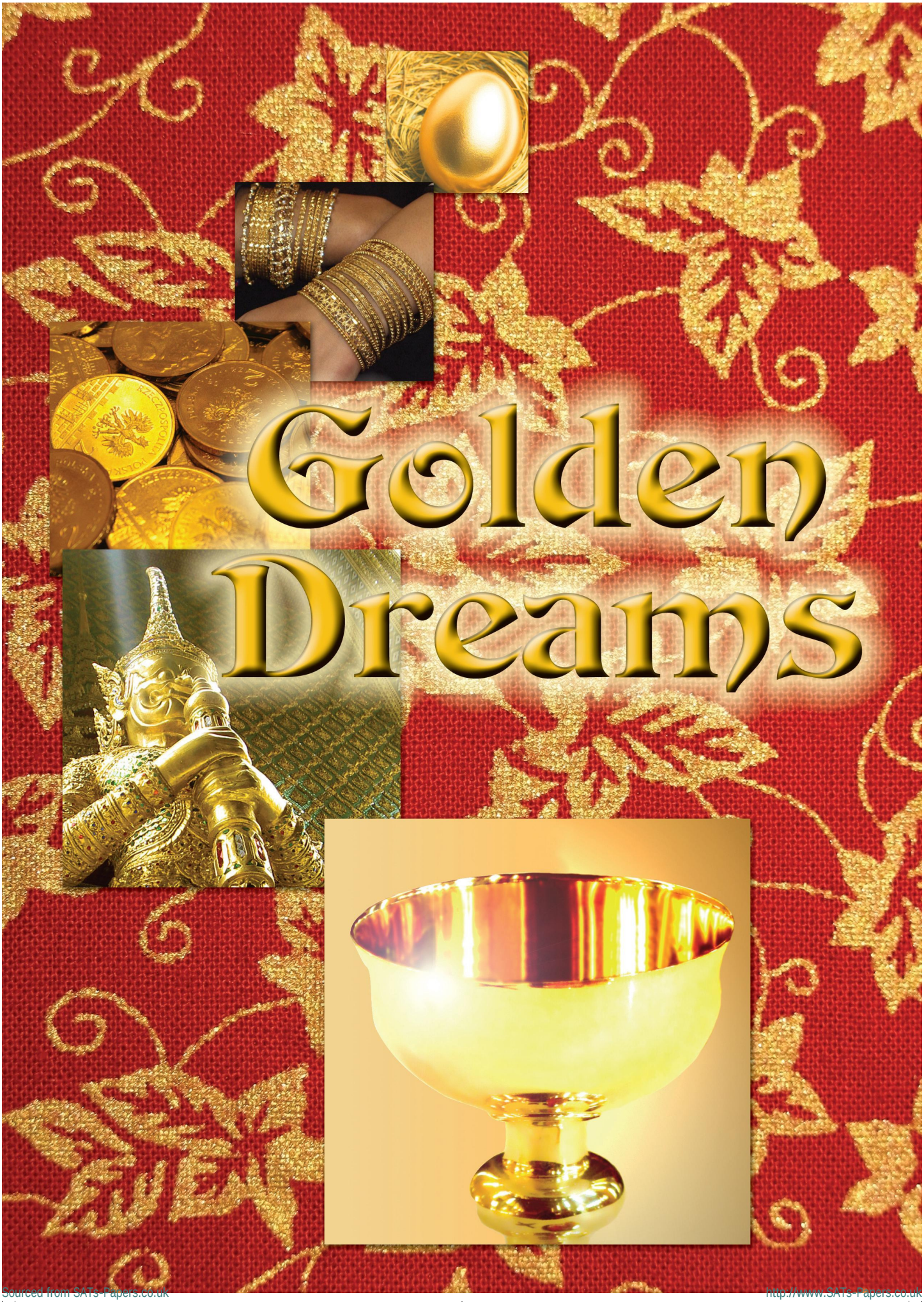
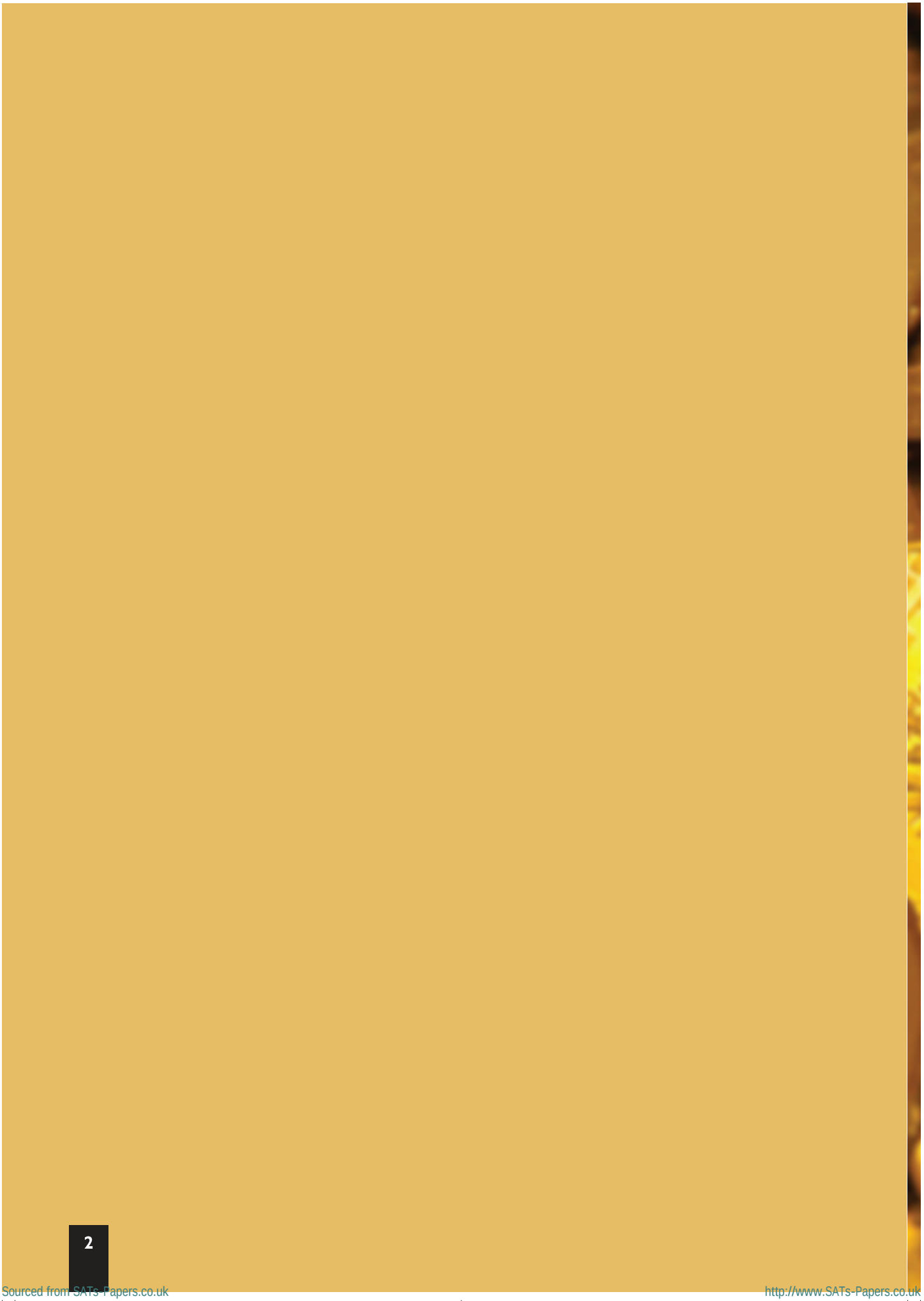


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Introduction

The desire for gold has been a basis for stories, mythical and real, for generations. The desire for this most valuable of metals has even cost some people their lives.

The first text in this booklet gives some extraordinary facts about gold.

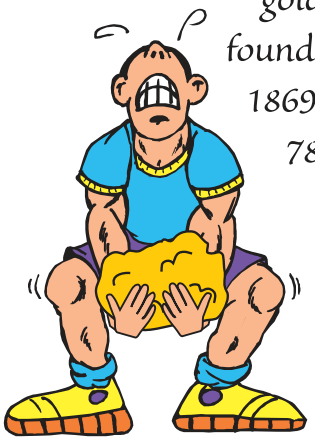
The next two texts explore the story of King Midas, whose greed almost led to him losing the most precious thing in his life.

In the final text, *The Rush for Gold*, you can read about the hardships faced by the gold-seekers who went to get rich in the famous gold rush of 1897, in Canada.

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Did You Know?

The biggest gold nugget was found in Australia in 1869 and weighed 78 kilograms.

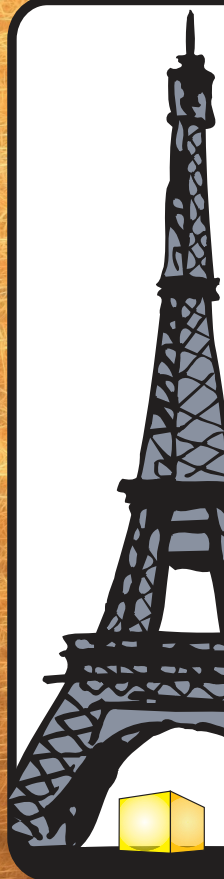


The football World Cup Trophy is 36cm high and is made of solid gold.



A fine wire of gold is used in computers to connect different parts together. This wire is thinner than a human hair.





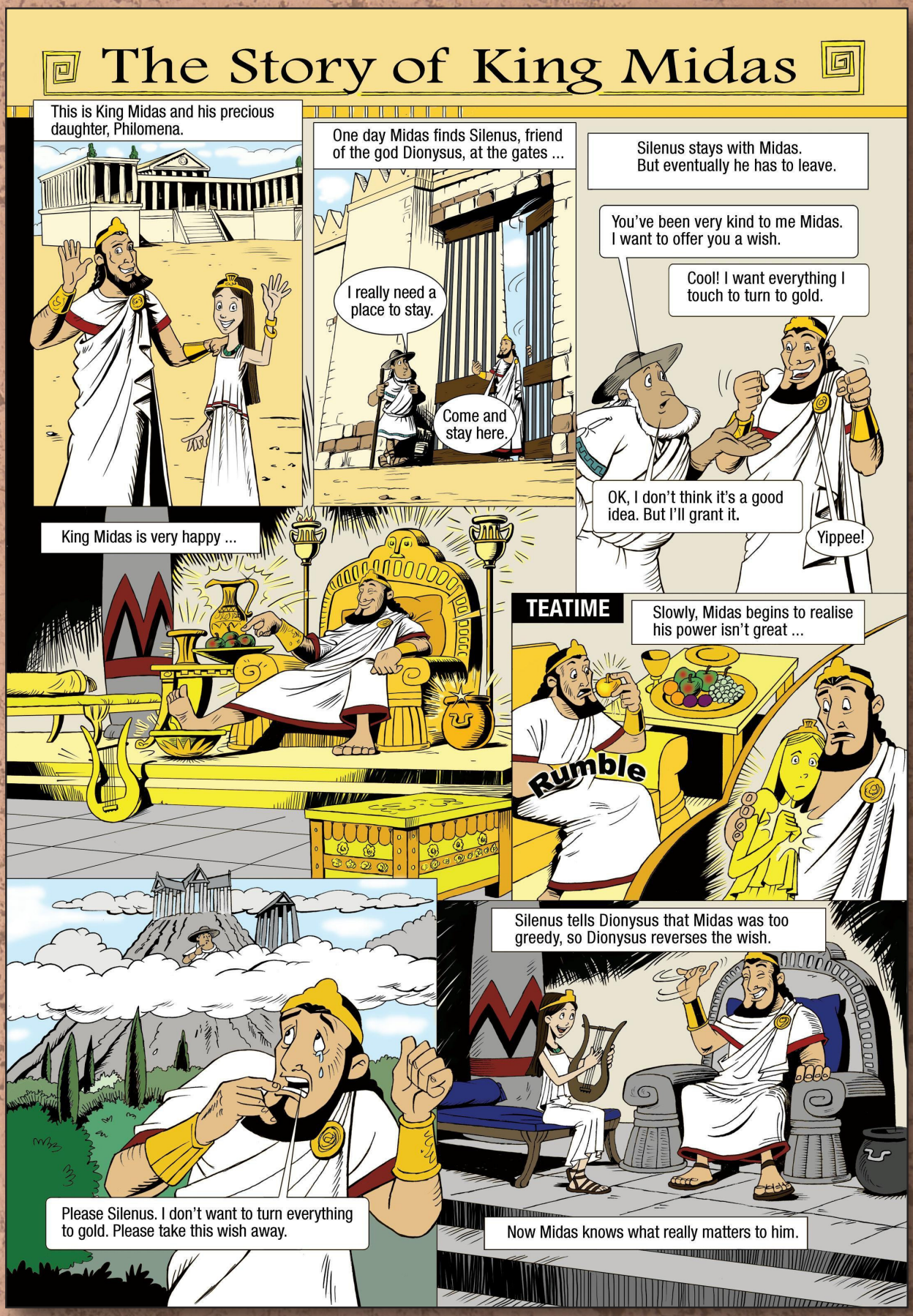
If all the gold that has ever been found in the world were refined, it would form only a single 20m cube and fit easily under the legs of the Eiffel Tower.

Seawater contains huge amounts of dissolved gold. There is more dissolved gold in the Bering Sea than in any other sea. It won't make anyone rich though, because the effort needed to get it is too great.



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The Story of King Midas



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Midas and the Golden Wish

Miriam Hodgson

King Midas owned everything a man could wish for, but his most prized possession was his daughter, Philomena. She was his youngest child and the loveliest. Her eyes were darkest brown, her hair fell softly round her face like silk. Her skin was as soft as velvet. She sang like a nightingale and danced like a butterfly. But her most wonderful gift was her smile. When Philomena smiled everyone became happy. Her name meant, 'I am loved'.

One day Philomena came running to Midas. 'Father, there is a strange man at our gates.'

Midas took Philomena by the hand, and walked to the gate. There stood Silenus, the teacher of the god Dionysus.

Midas welcomed him: 'Silenus, I am honoured by your visit. Come in and rest from your journey.'

Midas sent for servants to look after Silenus. He ordered the finest wines and food to be prepared for a banquet for his guest. Musicians and dancers entertained the visitor and the gentle splashing of fountains lulled him to sleep.

Silenus was grateful. The next day when he took leave of Midas, he said to the king, 'King Midas, you have given me so much. I cannot leave without making you a present in return. What do you wish for?'

Midas thought and thought. He was a greedy man and yet now, when he had such an opportunity to fulfil his wildest dreams, he did not know what to ask for. What about the finest horse in the world? What about a palace that would be famous as one of the wonders of the world? At last he spoke:



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'Silenus, you are too generous, I cannot think of anything unless …'

'Well, come on, speak your wish,' commanded Silenus.

'No, I – er, I cannot,' Midas hesitated again, trying to sound as if he wanted nothing when he really wanted more than a man had the right to ask for.

'Are you sure?' asked Silenus, with his cunning eyes gleaming.

'I, er … need more time,' said Midas.

'Very well,' replied Silenus. 'I must leave you now, but remember my gift. Your wish will be granted whatever it may be.'

****

Midas strolled under the trees, shaded from the brilliant sun. Suddenly he looked up at the sky. He gazed at the sun's rays and thought:

'The light of the sun is so wonderful. It seems that everything it touches turns to gold. How I wish I had such power!'

Midas returned to his throne room. He called to a servant to bring him water. The servant returned with a bronze cup. As Midas touched it, it turned to gold. He was dumbfounded until he remembered. 'My wish, my wish! Silenus has kept his promise. But have I really the power to turn everything I touch to gold?'



Midas ran round the room touching the pillars, the tables, the chairs. They all turned instantly to gold.

'It works, it works!' he cried. 'I shall be the wealthiest man the world has ever known!'

He danced, he shouted, he ran through his palace touching everything he could. Soon the palace was ablaze with golden light. 'How rich I am!' he shouted in triumph.

Exhausted, he returned to his throne room and sat down. He lifted the golden cup to his mouth. No water poured on to his parched lips, only a bitter, golden powder.

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'Bring me wine!' he demanded. 'This water tastes like mud. Bring me peaches!' A servant returned with wine and a bowl of fruit. King Midas picked up a peach but as he bit into it he screamed, 'This peach is as hard as stone!' He looked at it, and it too had turned to gold. Midas was crowing with pride. 'I am so rich,' he shouted.

Dazzled by the light flashing from the golden throne and the pillars all around him, deaf to everything except the sound of his own thoughts, he did not see Philomena coming towards him: 'Father, what is all this?' Midas bent down to lift her into his arms. 'Philomena, look, look around you. Is it not wonderful? Everything I touch turns to gold!'

But Philomena could say nothing. She too had turned to gold. Midas looked down at Philomena.

He touched her face, but her skin was like ice, her hair felt like thorns, her smile was an ugly grin. His tears fell so that they formed golden blisters on her cheeks.

'What have I done? Dionysus, forgive my greed! Philomena is more precious to me than all this gold could ever be.'

****

For many days and nights King Midas lay weeping on the ground, until his tears formed a golden pool beside him. Seeing his despair, Dionysus took pity on him. He ordered the king to bathe in the River Pactolus. Midas dragged himself to the river. The waters took away his terrible gift and for ever after the sands on the river bed glittered with gold.



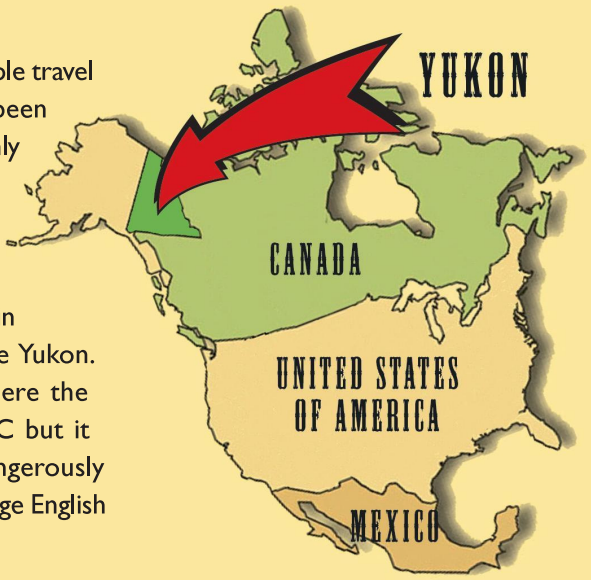
Midas walked humbly back to his palace, stopping from time to time to touch a tree or a stone. His touch did not change them. As he neared the palace garden, he saw a girl dancing as lightly as a butterfly, he heard a laugh as sweet as the nightingale's song and saw a smile that warmed away his unhappiness. It was Philomena.

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THE RUSH FOR GOLD

Gold is a very beautiful and valuable metal and has been used for centuries in the exchange of goods. From the earliest times, men and women have searched for gold, willing to travel for hundreds of miles and live in poverty, hoping to find gold and 'get rich quick'.

A 'gold rush' is when hundreds of people travel to the same place after gold has been discovered there. It starts very suddenly when news of the discovery of gold spreads. There have been gold rushes in different places all over the world.



A famous gold rush occurred in 1897 in a remote part of Canada called the Yukon. The Yukon is a very cold region where the average winter temperature is –28°C but it can sometimes drop to a dangerously cold –50°C. (Compare this to an average English winter temperature of 3°C.)

On 16th August 1896 a group of prospectors* located gold in the Yukon, near a town called Dawson. They immediately claimed the area as their own. Local people then started looking for gold and were equally lucky. These early prospectors and the local people owned all the gold they found and became very wealthy.

Because the Yukon is very isolated and difficult to reach, it took nearly a year for news about the discovery of gold to leak out to people in the rest of the world. When people heard, a race to reach the Yukon began. These gold-seekers were so desperate for wealth that they travelled through harrowing and dangerous conditions to get it.

**People who search for gold are called prospectors.*

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The journey was very long and very cold. The cheapest way of travelling was on foot or by horse. However, horses could not travel up the steep and icy mountains so the gold-seekers were forced to carry the food and supplies themselves. Mountains were not the only difficulty they had to face. There were wild animals and raging rivers as well as extreme weather conditions. Many gold-seekers died, fell ill or lost enthusiasm and either stopped where they were or turned back.

Approximately 100,000 gold-seekers set off to the Yukon. Only 30,000 completed the journey.

Unfortunately, of those who actually made it to Dawson, few found the riches they had hoped for. By the time most arrived, all the land and the gold in it had been claimed. The gold-seekers' dreams were shattered.

Now, many people travel to the Yukon in search not of gold, but of a unique holiday experience. Instead of inns where the lucky few could celebrate their success, there are jewellery shops, whose owners are hoping to get a share of the tourists' spending money.

These are quotations from people who took part in the Yukon Gold Rush.

We got up at five this morning ... There are hundreds of people here dragging or carrying their supplies, all striving to reach the Yukon. Some have horses and still others have dog teams, but most of them act as their own horses.

Inga Kolloen's diary, March 21, 1898, on the Dyea Trail

This may have begun as an exciting adventure, and seemed exceedingly romantic, but digging for gold is downright hard labour. I don't know anymore if it's really worth it.

Letter written by Alfred Green

Ice cream would be a hot drink here. Oil is frozen in the cans.

Diary of Edward C. Adams, January 16, 1901, Yukon Territory

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'Midas and the Golden Wish' adapted from the story by Miriam Hodgson in *A Touch of Gold*, Methuen, 1983.

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