

Key Stage Two English

Set A Reading Booklet

This booklet contains:
There's No Place Like Home
Alone Together
Midas and the Golden Touch





The background of the page is a photograph of a natural rock archway. The arch is made of dark, layered rock. Through the arch, a lush green landscape is visible, featuring a waterfall cascading down a rocky cliff. The sky is blue with some light clouds. The overall scene is bright and scenic.

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There's No Place Like Home

Animals require homes for a variety of reasons: somewhere to sleep, a place to shelter from the weather, or a safe place to raise their young.

A good home might also allow an animal to find food nearby, or offer protection from predators. Because different animals have different needs, their homes aren't always alike — they come in a multitude of shapes and sizes.

Burrows

Burrows are small holes or tunnels, which are identified by holes in the ground or sometimes in riverbanks. Burrows are usually small, but they can be extensive tunnel systems housing many animals. Most people associate them with rabbits, but plenty of other animals also inhabit burrows.

One such animal is the water vole, which digs its burrows into riverbanks, near the water's edge. These burrows allow voles, which are excellent swimmers, to escape from predators more easily. Voles construct tunnels composed of multiple levels and lots of entrances, some of which might be underwater.



There's even a species of owl which lives in a burrow! The appropriately named burrowing owl is unable to hollow out its own burrow. Instead, it finds a burrow which has been abandoned by another animal, builds a nest for its eggs inside and then moves in to raise its young. Burrowing



owls often deposit mammal dung at the burrow's entrance. Originally thought to be a means of hiding the scent of baby owls from predators, recent studies have shown that this process is actually intended to attract beetles, which are a source of food for the owls.

Nests

Typically made from twigs, grass and leaves bound together by mud and saliva, nests are mainly used for sleeping and protecting eggs. They can be built amongst tree branches, on the ground or they can be attached to the interior or exterior walls of buildings. Many species of birds live in nests, but they are also home to more unexpected residents.



Australian saltwater crocodiles build nests on riverbanks using bits of plants and mud, ensuring that they choose a location that's unlikely to suffer from flooding. Then the female crocodile lays up to 60 eggs inside the nest. When the baby crocodiles hatch, the mother uses her jaws to extract them from the nest and deposits them at the water's edge, where she looks after them until they are old enough to survive alone.



African mountain gorillas primarily use nests for sleeping, and they have to build one from scratch every evening. They construct their beds by stacking layers of branches on top of each other, sometimes adding leaves. With the exception of baby gorillas (which sleep with their mothers) each gorilla has its own nest. The larger male gorillas only build nests on the ground, but females and young males prefer to take to the trees, bending and weaving branches together. It's a race against time to make sure that the nest is finished and fit for purpose before night falls: it has to be robust enough to support the gorilla's weight throughout the night.



Caves

The area just inside a cave near the entrance can act as a temporary resting spot for many animals, such as foxes, wolves and bears. However, caves can also serve as permanent homes for some creatures.

Bats are probably the most well known cave dwellers. They hunt for food at night, which means they need a safe place to sleep during the day. Bats can use caves to remain out of reach of most predators, since many caves have high ceilings from which these creatures can hang upside down. Sleeping in this position also makes it easier for bats to become airborne: they have a lot of trouble taking to the skies from the ground, so they climb to a high location and fall into flight.



Rather more unusual are Ridley's racer snakes, which spend their lives in the limestone caves of southern Thailand, Malaysia or Borneo and rarely venture outside. Like many other cave-dwelling animals, they are pale in colour, with yellow or beige skin and thick blue-black stripes around their eyes. Ridley's racer snakes share their caves with rodents, bats and insects and, unluckily for the bats, these snakes are exceptional climbers. They tend to hang down from ledges or holes in the ceiling and pluck their flying neighbours from mid-air as they swoop back into the cave.

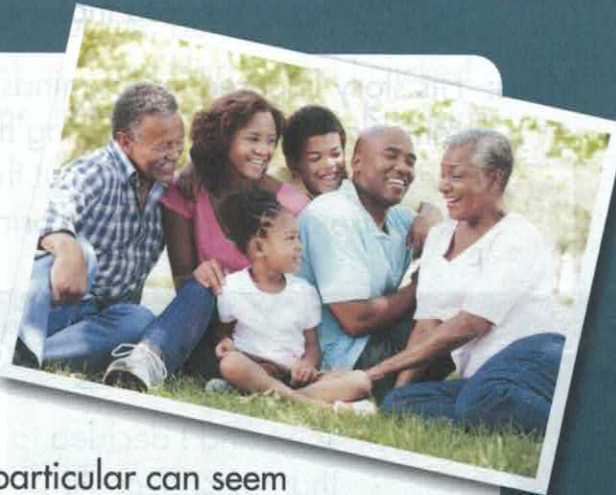
Burrows, nests and caves protect animals from the weather and are safe havens for animals to gather food and to rear offspring. All kinds of creatures live in these remarkable homes — even some unexpected ones!

Come In
WE'RE
OPEN

Alone Together

Sarah Baxter meets the local heroes fighting to eliminate loneliness.

Retirement is something that many people embrace after a lifetime of work. It's a phase of life when senior citizens hope to spend more quality time with family or focus more of their attention on hobbies. They may also relish the opportunity to travel to exciting, far-flung places or to learn new skills.



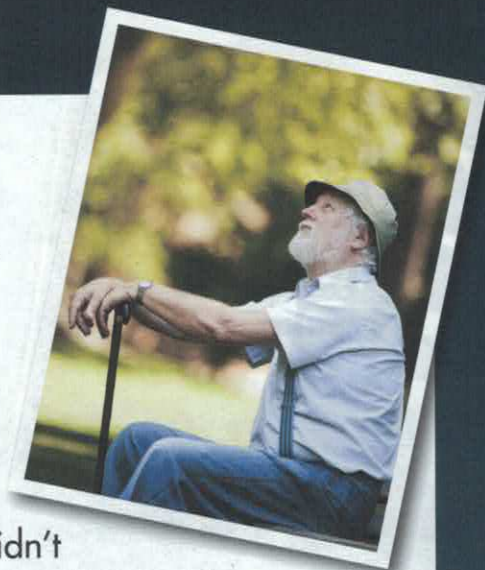
For some, however, the later years of retirement in particular can seem a daunting prospect, since family members may live far away and ill health might hinder mobility. If leaving the house becomes a struggle, regular contact with others can begin to dwindle — many elderly people lose contact with their communities entirely. A scenario such as this can often lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation.



Fortunately, in one coastal town in Cumbria, two local heroes are tackling the problem of loneliness in old age head-on. John Mason, a part-time mechanic, and his wife Olga, the owner of a café, have transformed the lives of dozens of lonely senior citizens through a campaign they call 'Alone Together'. The dedicated duo have kindly agreed to tell us more about the programme.

What was the inspiration for 'Alone Together'?

John: Olga and I were out for a walk one Sunday morning when we noticed an elderly gentleman who was sitting outside his house, watching the world go by. He struck up a conversation and told us that he lived alone; his wife had died and his only child had sadly passed away many years earlier. He did have two grandsons, but they weren't local. To complicate matters, he had health problems and found walking strenuous.



Olga: John and I were moved by the gentleman's story. He didn't actually admit to being lonely, but we could tell that he was because he was obviously pleased that we'd stopped to pass the time of day with him.

John: His story lingered in our minds and made us think about just how many senior citizens were suffering from loneliness in our town. We suspected there were lots of people out there living alone, and we immediately began to devise an action plan to bring them together.

How did you set up 'Alone Together'?

Olga: John and I decided to make use of the resources we already had. I suggested that my café could be perfect as a meeting place for elderly people, and John set about organising transport. By tinkering away at an old van generously donated by his boss, John created a minibus with disabled access.

John: It didn't take long before everything was in place. The bus was soon up and running, and Olga quickly came up with a range of activities for elderly visitors to the café to enjoy. We weighed up the options about how to spread the word of our new venture. We had considered sending out emails to tell the town's senior citizens about 'Alone Together', but we didn't want to exclude those without a computer. Phone calls can also be quite intrusive. Instead, we used flyers, a move which proved extremely successful; within 24 hours, we had a long list of people who wanted to join us. Our next step is to raise enough money to be able to take our elderly visitors on a trip away — maybe to the seaside, or to the theatre.

'Alone Together' has had an incredible impact on this small Cumbrian town. Activity sessions take place four times a week, and Olga's café accommodates as many people as possible. Last Thursday, we visited the café and interviewed two of the programme's regulars — William, who is 72 years old, and Frances, aged 84.

'Alone Together' has been a vital lifeline for William, who has been living alone since his wife, Sylvie, moved into a residential care home.

"I discovered 'Alone Together' when I saw their flyer at Sylvie's care home," William told us. "I wasn't sure if it was for me, but Sylvie's carers encouraged me to go along. At my first meeting, I met Harry, who I clicked with right away; his wife suffers from the same illness as my Sylvie. Knowing that someone else was in my situation made my loneliness seem more bearable. John and Olga have given me a lifeline."

Frances, a retired lawyer, echoed William's thoughts.

"John and Olga are certainly heroes. I lost touch with my friends when I moved to America. Having returned to Cumbria to care for my sister, who has since passed away, I've been short of ways to reconnect with old acquaintances and make new friends. 'Alone Together' has given me a new lease of life, and my wheelchair's not even a problem for John's bus. The days I spend at the café are the highlight of my week, and I wouldn't give them up for the world."

Having seen the work that John and Olga do first-hand, it wasn't hard to see why William and Frances were singing their praises.



John and Olga's efforts have earned them a nomination for the top prize in this year's 'County Heroes' competition. The winners will receive £500 towards their charity or campaign. John and Olga would be worthy winners — readers can vote on the county website. The results will be announced next week!

Midas and the Golden Touch

Deep in the heart of what is now Turkey runs the River Pactolus, famed for its gold-laden waters. But long ago, in a time very different from today, when strange and mysterious things were commonplace, and when the gods walked the Earth, the Pactolus ran as clean and blue as the summer sky.

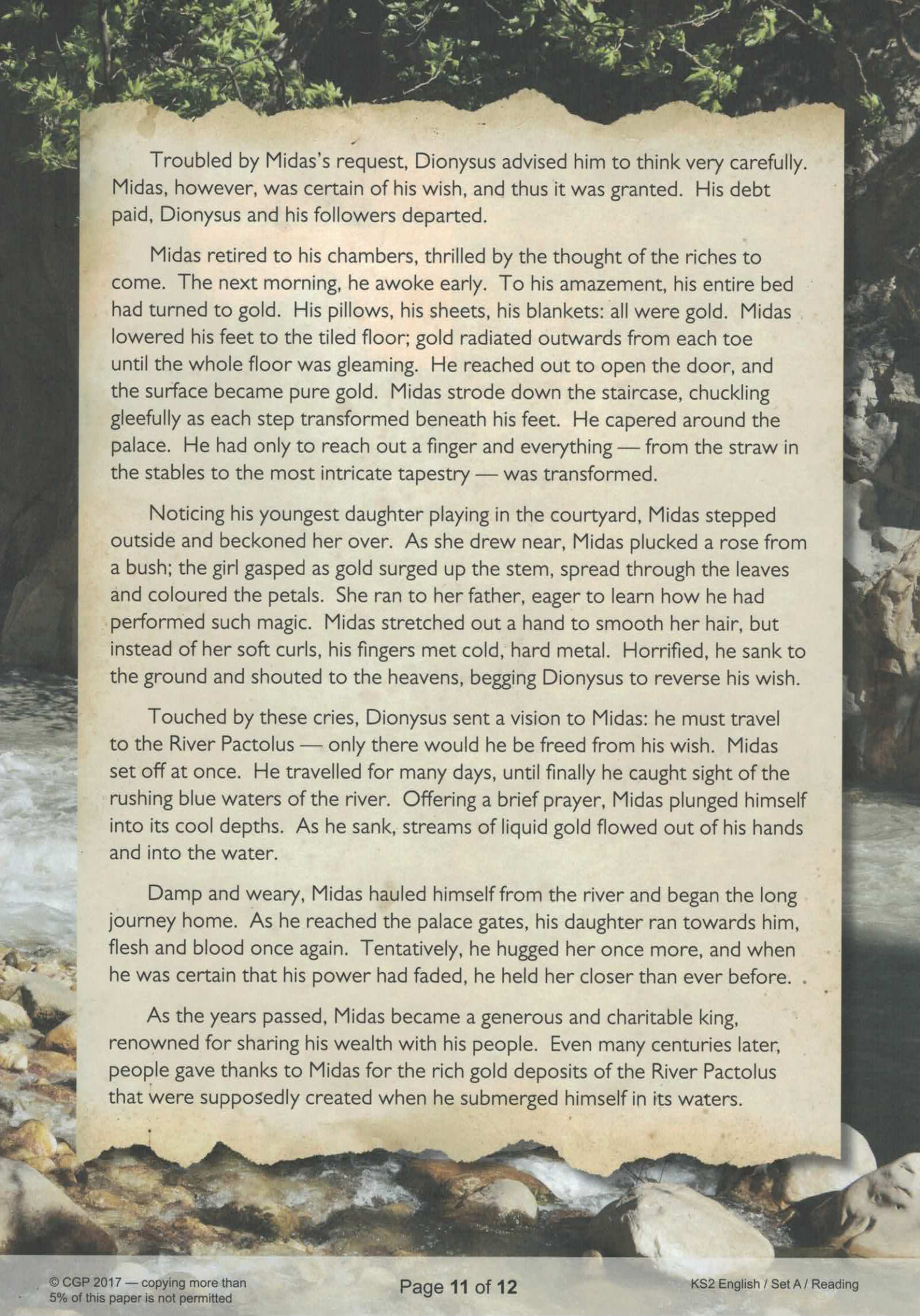
At that time, the kingdom through which the Pactolus flowed was ruled by King Midas. The King had enough riches to last even the most extravagant person for several lifetimes, but it wasn't enough; his bounteous wealth could not satisfy his appetite for gold.

One morning, as Midas admired his collection of gold coins, the palace guards brought forth a creature that was half-man, half-goat, whom they had found sleeping amongst the rose bushes in the palace gardens. Such creatures were common in ancient times, and Midas was not shocked. Indeed, he recognised him as Silenus, tutor to Dionysus, the great god of revelry. Silenus explained that he had become separated from the rest of his party, and had sought refuge in Midas's gardens.

Midas welcomed Silenus as a privileged guest and ordered that he be served the finest wine and the most decadent food. For ten whole days they feasted on a spread of delicacies: succulent meats, rich cheeses and honey-coated fruits, to name but a few. The feasting was accompanied by music and merrymaking that would make even Dionysus proud.

On the final day, Dionysus arrived at the palace in search of Silenus. Learning of Midas's hospitality, Dionysus offered to grant Midas one wish as a sign of his gratitude. Midas was quick to decide what to wish for.

"I wish that everything I touch would turn to gold!" he exclaimed.



Troubled by Midas's request, Dionysus advised him to think very carefully. Midas, however, was certain of his wish, and thus it was granted. His debt paid, Dionysus and his followers departed.

Midas retired to his chambers, thrilled by the thought of the riches to come. The next morning, he awoke early. To his amazement, his entire bed had turned to gold. His pillows, his sheets, his blankets: all were gold. Midas lowered his feet to the tiled floor; gold radiated outwards from each toe until the whole floor was gleaming. He reached out to open the door, and the surface became pure gold. Midas strode down the staircase, chuckling gleefully as each step transformed beneath his feet. He capered around the palace. He had only to reach out a finger and everything — from the straw in the stables to the most intricate tapestry — was transformed.

Noticing his youngest daughter playing in the courtyard, Midas stepped outside and beckoned her over. As she drew near, Midas plucked a rose from a bush; the girl gasped as gold surged up the stem, spread through the leaves and coloured the petals. She ran to her father, eager to learn how he had performed such magic. Midas stretched out a hand to smooth her hair, but instead of her soft curls, his fingers met cold, hard metal. Horrified, he sank to the ground and shouted to the heavens, begging Dionysus to reverse his wish.

Touched by these cries, Dionysus sent a vision to Midas: he must travel to the River Pactolus — only there would he be freed from his wish. Midas set off at once. He travelled for many days, until finally he caught sight of the rushing blue waters of the river. Offering a brief prayer, Midas plunged himself into its cool depths. As he sank, streams of liquid gold flowed out of his hands and into the water.

Damp and weary, Midas hauled himself from the river and began the long journey home. As he reached the palace gates, his daughter ran towards him, flesh and blood once again. Tentatively, he hugged her once more, and when he was certain that his power had faded, he held her closer than ever before.

As the years passed, Midas became a generous and charitable king, renowned for sharing his wealth with his people. Even many centuries later, people gave thanks to Midas for the rich gold deposits of the River Pactolus that were supposedly created when he submerged himself in its waters.

