

**John Ruskin's *THE KING OF THE GOLDEN RIVER***

**(target age-group: 12 - 14)**

*(The King of the Golden River is a fairytale written by John Ruskin, and English writer, who lived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is the story of three brothers who lived on their own rich farm, called Treasure Valley. The oldest brothers were mean and greedy and, as a result, their farm is destroyed by the forces of nature who revenge on them. But the King of the Golden River tells the youngest brother, Gluck, who is kind and honest, how to make the river turn to gold. His two oldest brothers go on this journey, but they are turned into stones by the King, as they did not do the right choices on their way. Now it is Gluck's turn to try.)*

When he had climbed for an hour, he got dreadfully thirsty and was going to drink like his brothers, when he saw an old man coming down the path above him, looking very feeble<sup>1</sup> and leaning on<sup>2</sup> a staff. "Why son," said the old man, "I am faint<sup>3</sup> with thirst; give me some of that water." Then Gluck looked at him, and when he saw that he was pale and weary<sup>4</sup>, he gave him the water. "Only pray don't drink it all," said Gluck. But the old man drank a great deal and gave him back the bottle two thirds empty. Then he bade<sup>5</sup> him good speed, and Gluck went on again merrily. And the path became easier to his feet, and two or three blades of grass appeared upon it, and some grasshoppers<sup>6</sup> began singing on the bank<sup>7</sup> beside it, and Gluck thought he had never heard such merry singing.

Then he went on for another hour, and the thirst increased on him so he thought he should be forced to drink. But as he raised the flask he saw a little child lying panting<sup>8</sup> by the roadside, and it cried out piteously<sup>9</sup> for water. Then Gluck struggled with himself and determined to bear the thirst a little longer; and he put the bottle to the child's lips, and it drank it all but a few drops. Then it smiled on him and got up and ran down the hill; and Gluck looked after it till it became as small as a little star, and then turned and began climbing again. And then there were all kinds of sweet flowers growing on the rocks,(...) and the sky sent down such pure light that Gluck had never felt so happy in his life.

Yet, when he had climbed for another hour, his thirst became intolerable again; and when he looked at his bottle, he saw that there were only five or six drops left in it, and he could not venture to drink. And as he was hanging the flask to his belt again, he saw a little dog lying on the rocks, gasping for breath<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> feeble = slab, stins

<sup>2</sup> to lean on = a se sprijini

<sup>3</sup> faint = slăbit, leșinat de (ex. sete)

<sup>4</sup> weary = obosit

<sup>5</sup> to bid (bade, bidden) = a saluta

<sup>6</sup> grasshoper = lăcustă

<sup>7</sup> bank = mal

<sup>8</sup> to pant = a gâfâi

<sup>9</sup> piteously = jalnic

<sup>10</sup> to gasp for breath = a gâfâi

And Gluck stopped and looked at it, and then at the Golden River, not five hundred yards<sup>11</sup> above him; and he thought of the dwarf<sup>12</sup>'s words, that **no one could succeed except in his first attempt**; and he tried to pass the dog, but it whined<sup>13</sup> piteously and Gluck stopped again. "Poor beastie," said Gluck, "it'll be dead when I come down again, if I don't help it." Then he looked closer and closer at it, and its eye turned on him so mournfully<sup>14</sup> that he could not stand it. "Confound the king and his gold too," said Gluck, and he opened the flask and poured all the water into the dog's mouth.

The dog sprang up<sup>15</sup> and stood on its hind<sup>16</sup> legs. Its tail disappeared; its ears became long, longer, silky, golden; its nose became very red; its eyes became very twinkling; in three seconds the dog was gone, and before Gluck stood his old acquaintance<sup>17</sup>, the King of the Golden River.

"Thank you," said the monarch. (...) "Why didn't you come before," continued the dwarf, "instead of sending me those rascally<sup>18</sup> brothers of yours, for me to have trouble to turning into stones? Very hard stones they make, too."

"O dear me!" said Gluck, "have you really been so cruel?"

"Cruel!" said the dwarf; "they poured unholy water into my stream<sup>19</sup>. Do you suppose I'm going to allow that?"

"Why," said Gluck, "I am sure, sir, - your Majesty, I mean, - they got the water out of the church font<sup>20</sup>."

"Very probably," replied the dwarf, "but (...) the water which has been refused to the cry of the weary and dying is unholy, though it had been blessed by every saint in heaven; and the water which is found in the vessel of mercy is holy, though it had been defiled<sup>21</sup> with corpses."

So saying, the dwarf stooped<sup>22</sup> and plucked<sup>23</sup> a lily that grew at his feet. On its white leaves there hung three drops of clear dew<sup>24</sup>. And the dwarf shook them into the flask which Gluck held in his hand. "Cast these into the river," he said, "and descend on the other side of the mountains into the Treasure Valley. And so good speed."(...)

And Gluck climbed to the brink<sup>25</sup> of the Golden River, and its waves were as clear as crystal and as brilliant as the sun. And when he cast<sup>26</sup> the three drops of dew into the stream, there opened where they fell a small, circular, whirlpool<sup>27</sup>, into which the waters descended with a musical noise.

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<sup>11</sup> a yard = 91 cm

<sup>12</sup> dwarf = pitic

<sup>13</sup> to whine = a scânci, a geme

<sup>14</sup> mournfully = cu jale, trist

<sup>15</sup> to spring (sprang, sprung) = a sări

<sup>16</sup> hind = din spate

<sup>17</sup> acquaintance = cunoștință

<sup>18</sup> rascally = ticălos

<sup>19</sup> stream = pârâu, râu

<sup>20</sup> font = cristelniță

<sup>21</sup> to defile = a murdări, a polua

<sup>22</sup> to stoop = a se apleca

<sup>23</sup> to pluck = a rupe (o floare)

<sup>24</sup> dew = rouă

<sup>25</sup> brink = margine, pantă

<sup>26</sup> to cast = a arunca

<sup>27</sup> whirlpool = vârtej

## Follow-up activities

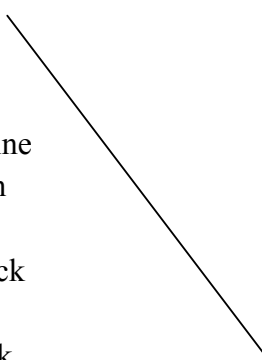
### 1. Answer true (T), false (F) or don't know (DK).

1. Gluck climbed the mountains without effort. ...*e.g.* **F**.....
2. He was very thirsty.....
3. He met an old woman on the way. ....
4. He met an old man. ....
5. He was very hungry and asked for some food. ....
6. Gluck gave him water. ....
7. Then he met a little child and a dog.....
8. The dog was black and white. ....
9. It turned into a Princess.....
10. Gluck arrived at the Golden River.....

### 2. Re-arrange the sentences so that you get a summary of the text.

- a) ....He is very thirsty, but he meets an old man who asks him for water. He decides to help the old man and gives him water.
- b) ....Gluck gives the last drops of water to a little dog, who turns out to be the King of the Golden River.
- c) *e.g.* **I**..Gluck goes to the mountains to pour holy water into the Golden River, as the King of the river told him it would turn into gold.
- d) ....The King gives Gluck a few drops of dew from a lily and Gluck casts them into the Golden River.
- e) ....The climbing is very difficult for him. He lost his food and the only thing he has is the bottle of water.
- f) ....With the two thirds empty bottle of water, he meets a little child, almost dying of thirst and gives him most of the water.

### 3. Match the words with their meaning, by drawing a line.

- |              |  |
|--------------|--|
| 1. path      | a) weak and tired and likely to lose consciousness                       |
| 2. whirlpool | b) to make a long high unpleasant sound because you are unhappy          |
| 3. faint     | c) a small narrow river  |
| 4. to bid    | d) a way from one place to another that people can walk along            |
| 5. flask     | e) to pick a fruit or a flower   |
| 6. to whine  | f) small drops of water that form during the night                       |
| 7. stream    | g) a strong movement in a river / stream that makes the water move round |
| 8. to pluck  | h) right at the side of a river  |
| 9. dew       | i) a kind of a bottle  |
| 10. brink    | j) to say "good morning"   |
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**4. What do you think will happen in the end? Will the River turn to gold?**

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

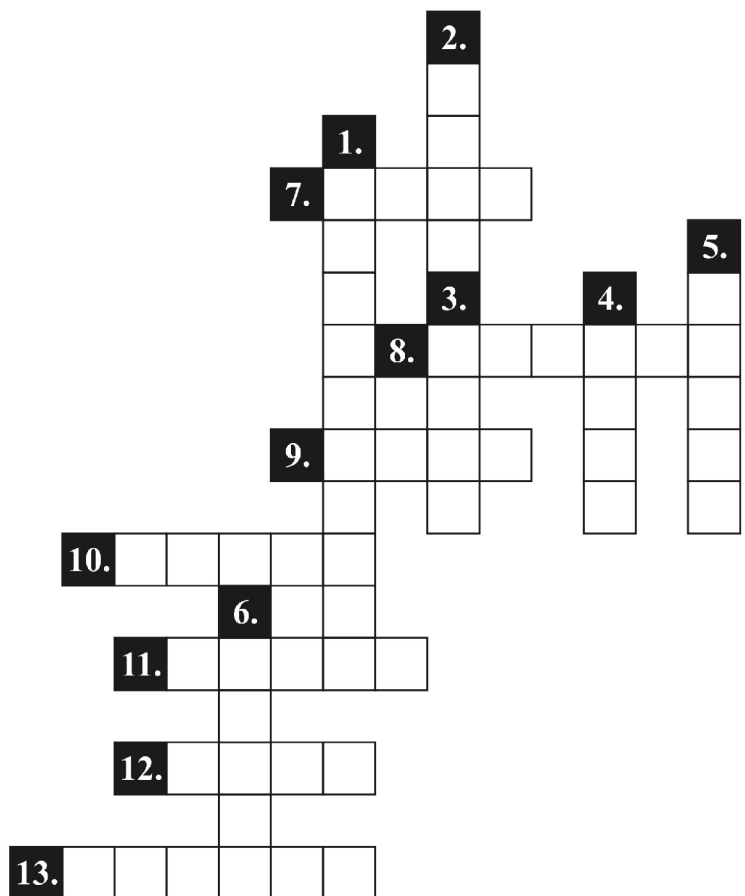
**5. Fill-in the crossword.**

**Down:**

- 1. A large insect with long back legs that jumps.
- 2. To throw something.
- 3. A stone bowl that holds water for the baptism ceremony in the Christian church.
- 4. High land along the side of a river.
- 5. Very tired or weak.
- 6. To make a long high unpleasant sound because you are unhappy.

**Across:**

- 7. To have difficulty breathing or speaking.
- 8. Very weak.
- 9. The .... legs of an animal with 4 legs are situated at the back.
- 10. To bend your body forward.
- 11. A little person in fairy tales.
- 12. A thin cloud close to the ground.
- 13. A small, narrow river.



## Teacher's Guide

**John Ruskin** (8 February 1819 – 20 January 1900) was an English artist, scientist, poet, environmentalist, philosopher, art critic and social thinker. His essays on art and architecture were extremely influential in the Victorian and Edwardian eras. His work was vast. He wrote over 250 works which started from art history, but expanded to cover topics ranging over science, geology, ornithology, literary criticism, the environmental effects of pollution, and mythology

He wrote *The King of the Golden River* in 1841 for the twelve-year-old Effie (Euphemia) Gray, whom Ruskin later married.<sup>[1]</sup> It was published in book form in 1851, and became an early Victorian classic. In the "Advertisement to the First Edition," which prefaces it, it is called a fairy tale, one, it might be added, that illustrates the triumph of love, kindness, and goodness over evil.

### Key to follow-up activities:

#### 1. Answer true (T), false (F) or don't know (DK).

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. T  |
| 2. T | 7. T  |
| 3. F | 8. DK |
| 4. T | 9. F  |
| 5. F | 10. T |

#### 2. Re-arrange the sentences so that you get a summary of the text.

- |      |      |
|------|------|
| 1. c | 2. e |
| 3. a | 4. f |
| 5. b | 6. d |

#### 3. Match the words with their meaning, by drawing a line.

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. d | 2. g  |
| 3. a | 4. j  |
| 5. i | 6. b  |
| 7. c | 8. e  |
| 9. f | 10. h |

#### 4. What do you think will happen in the end? Will the River turn to gold?

Nothing happens at first and Gluck is disappointed. Then he obeys the King's order and descends the other side of the mountains towards the Treasure Valley, where he finds out that the river was springing from the rocks above it. Thus the Treasure Valley becomes fertile again, like in the beginning. So, for Gluck the river had become a river of gold.

