

## King Canute on the seashore

Sist oppdatert: 15. november 2003

A hundred years or more after the time of Alfred the Great there was a king of England named Canute [English name for "Knut"]. King Canute was a Dane; but the Danes were not so fierce and cruel then as they had been when they were at war with King Alfred.



The great men and officers who were around King Canute were always praising him. "You are the greatest man that ever lived," one would say. Then another would say, "O king! there can never be another man so mighty as you." And another would say, "Great Canute, there is nothing in the world that dares to disobey you." The king was a man of sense, and he grew very tired of hearing such foolish speeches.

One day he was by the seashore, and his officers were with him. They were praising him, as they were in the habit of doing. He thought that now he would teach them a lesson, and so he bade them set his chair on the beach close by the edge of the water.

"Am I the greatest man in the world?" he asked.

"O king!" they cried, "there is no one so mighty as you."

"Do all things obey me?" he asked.

"There is nothing that dares to disobey you, O king!" they said. "The world bows before you, and gives you honor."

"Will the sea obey me?" he asked; and he looked down at the little waves which were lapping the sand at his feet.

The foolish officers were puzzled, but they did not dare to say "No."

"Command it, O king! and it will obey," said one.

"Sea," cried Canute, "I command you to come no farther! Waves, stop your rolling, and do not dare to touch my feet!"

But the tide came in, just as it always did. The water rose higher and higher. It came up around the king's chair, and wet not only his feet, but also his robe. His officers stood about him, alarmed, and wondering whether he was not mad. Then Canute took off his crown, and threw it down upon the sand.

"I shall never wear it again," he said. "And do you, my men, learn a lesson from what you have seen. There is only one King who is all-powerful; and it is he who rules the sea, and holds the ocean in the hollow of his hand. It is he whom you ought to praise and serve above all others."

## A. Questions

1. Who was Canute?

2. When did this story happen?

3. Where was Canute from?

4. How did the people around Canute treat him?

5. Why was Canute tired of all this praise?

6. How did Canute prove the people wrong?

7. Whom did Canute want the people to praise and serve?

## B. Past and present

*Change this text into the present tense:*

The king was a man of sense, and he grew very tired of hearing such foolish speeches. One day he was by the seashore, and his officers were with him. They were praising him, as they were in the habit of doing. He thought that now he would teach them a lesson, and so he bade them set his chair on the beach close by the edge of the water.

«King Canute on the seashore»

### **C. Translation**

*Translate this text into your own language:*

A hundred years or more after the time of Alfred the Great there was a king of England named Canute. King Canute was a Dane; but the Danes were not so fierce and cruel then as they had been when they were at war with King Alfred. The great men and officers who were around King Canute were always praising him.

### **D. Gap-filling exercise**

Put these words in the right place in the text:

*serve – crown – chair – wear – who – wondering – tide – higher*

But the \_\_\_\_\_ came in, just as it always did. The water rose \_\_\_\_\_ and higher. It came up around the king's \_\_\_\_\_, and wet not only his feet, but also his robe. His officers stood about him, alarmed, and \_\_\_\_\_ whether he was not mad. Then Canute took off his \_\_\_\_\_, and threw it down upon the sand. "I shall never \_\_\_\_\_ it again," he said. "And do you, my men, learn a lesson from what you have seen. There is only one King \_\_\_\_\_ is all-powerful; and it is he who rules the sea, and holds the ocean in the hollow of his hand. It is he whom you ought to praise and \_\_\_\_\_ above all others."

### **E. Writing**

*Make your own sentence using these phrases:*

1) in the habit of doing:

2) to teach someone a lesson:

***F. Singular and plural***

*Write down the plural form of these nouns in singular form:*

<b><i>Singular</i></b>	<b><i>Plural</i></b>
foot	
year	
speech	
sand	
ocean	
crown	
war	
officer	
king	
wave	

## Answers

### A. Questions

- 1. Who was Canute?**  
*He was King of England.*
- 2. When did this story happen?**  
*More than a hundred years after King Alfred the great reigned (around 1000).*
- 3. Where was Canute from?**  
*From Denmark.*
- 4. How did the people around Canute treat him?**  
*They were always praising him and saying foolish in order to please him.*
- 5. Why was Canute tired of all this praise?**  
*Maybe because he knew it wasn't true?*
- 6. How did Canute prove the people wrong?**  
*By asking the sea to obey him when he knew it wouldn't.*
- 7. Whom did Canute want the people to praise and serve?**  
*Him who ruled the sea and held the oceans in his hands.*

### B. Past and present

The king (was) *is* a man of sense, and he (grew) *grows* very tired of hearing such foolish speeches. One day he (was) *is* by the seashore, and his officers (were) *are* with him. They (were) *are* praising him, as they (were) *are* in the habit of doing. He (thought) *thinks* that now he (would) *will* teach them a lesson, and so he (asked) *asks* them to set his chair on the beach close by the edge of the water.

### C. Translation

Forslag til oversettelse:

*Hundre år eller mer etter Alfred den Stores tid var det en konge i England som het Knut. Kong Knut var dansk, men danskene var ikke så voldelige og grusomme da som de hadde vært mens de lå i krig med*

*kong Alfred. De stormenn og offiserer som samlet seg rundt kong Knut lovpriste ham hele tiden.*

#### D. Gap-filling exercise

But the *tide* came in, just as it always did. The water rose *higher* and higher. It came up around the king's *chair*, and wet not only his feet, but also his robe. His officers stood about him, alarmed, and *wondering* whether he was not mad. Then Canute took off his *crown*, and threw it down upon the sand. "I shall never *wear* it again," he said. "And do you, my men, learn a lesson from what you have seen. There is only one King *who* is all-powerful; and it is he who rules the sea, and holds the ocean in the hollow of his hand. It is he whom you ought to praise and *serve* above all others."

#### E. Writing

*Some possible answers:*

1) in the habit of

*I am in the habit of eating a lot of breakfast.*

*He is in the habit of scoring fine goals for his team.*

2) to teach someone a lesson

*Next time he hits me, I'll teach him a lesson!*

*If I get hurt doing this, it will certainly teach them a lesson.*

#### F. Singular and plural

<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
foot	feet
year	years
speech	speeches
sand	sand or sands
ocean	oceans
crown	crowns
war	wars
officer	officers
king	kings
wave	waves

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## *Philosophical questions*

1. *King Canute's officers praised him all the time. Why do you think they did this? To make the king glad? To show that they loved and respected him? To hide that they feared him? To make him think well of them and like them? Do you admire someone? Why?*

*Do you like being admired? Do praise and admiration make you glad? Is it important to be admired by certain persons or does it not matter who admires you? How do you think and feel about those who admire you? Is it possible to admire someone who already admires you? Is it better to admire oneself than to admire others?*

2. *Canute runs a demonstration for his followers: he commands the waves to stop rolling. And since the waves don't stop rolling upon his command, he proves his point: not everything obeys him.*

*What he does is this: he proves a claim (everything obeys him) to be false by giving a counter-example [moteksempel], i.e. by showing that the opposite is possible (the waves do not obey him).*

*How could you most effectively prove the following claims about you to be false:*

- Everybody loves you!*
- You can ride any bicycle!*
- You are the prettiest girl in the school!*
- You are the stupidest person in existence!*
- Nobody loves you!*