



King Canute

This source tells the story of King Canute [Cnut] which may or may not be true.

Henry of Huntingdon wrote about Canute in the 12th century.

Cnut reigned for twenty years. Never before him was there a king in England of such greatness. At the very height of his power, he ordered his throne to be put at the seaside when the tide was rising. He spoke to the waves, ***'You are under my control as much as the land on which my throne is. There has never been anyone who has resisted my rule without being punished. I therefore command you not to rise on my land. You shall not dare to wet the clothes or limbs of your master.'*** The sea rose in the usual way and wetted the feet and legs of the King without showing any respect. The King leapt up and said, ***'Everyone on earth should know that the power of kings is useless and unimportant. No one deserves the name of king except God who controls heaven and earth, and sea.'*** Cnut therefore never again wore the golden crown on his head but placed it above an image of the Lord which was nailed to a cross.

Ask the children to say what they think about what Canute did. Was he brave, stupid, wise, strong-minded or strange and explain why?

Canute wanted to show his people that he had limited power and that kings were not more important than God. Failing to prevent the tide coming in showed this.

