



THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES

Based on the fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen

Adapted for the stage by Gayle Cornelison

A California Theatre Center Study Guide for Teachers and Students

SYNOPSIS

The Emperor is the best-dressed man in the world--and he is the most vain! He would much rather spend an afternoon trying on fine, luxurious outfits than tending to matters of state, such as wars and taxes. His wife, the Empress, and his staff, which include the Prime Minister and the Treasurer, are continuously frustrated by his insufferable superficiality.

One day, while the Emperor shows off his latest expensive vestments, a Swindler, wandering near the palace with her Husband, gets an earful and eyeful of the vainglorious Emperor. The Swindler, who is a clever schemer, devises a plan to make money by taking advantage of the Emperor's shallowness and his weakness for beautiful clothing. Posing as weavers, she and her Husband convince the Emperor that they can make an outfit for him using cloth so fine that it is "invisible to anyone either badly suited for his job or unforgivably stupid". For

the Emperor, this means that, not only will he receive a fabulous new addition to his wardrobe, but also he will be able to tell the difference between the stupid people and the wise people in his kingdom. In reality, of course, the weavers are weaving nothing--the Swindlers are just pretending so they can get money from the Emperor! So, the “weavers” set to work, amidst the anxieties of the Prime Minister and Treasurer.

As the “weavers” execute their plan, The Emperor decides to hold a Grand Procession so he can publicly display his new accoutrements for the empire. Before the Procession, the Swindler and her Husband bring the Emperor his completed “new clothes”. Naturally, he cannot see them, because there is nothing there and the “weavers” are phony, but the Emperor acts like he can see them so he will not be perceived as stupid and unfit. The Empress is the only one who is aware of the fact that the Emperor is not wearing any clothes! With help from the audience, the Emperor is finally made aware of his vain and foolish mistake.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

1. Discuss the character of the Emperor. Why is he so vain? Why does he wish for more than he has, when he lives a life that provides him with whatever he wants? What does he learn from his experience with the Swindlers?
2. Compare the Emperor to the Empress. She is the only one who realizes the silliness of what is happening around her. She also tells the Emperor that he should be more concerned with affairs of state than with his looks. What must it be like for someone as smart as she is to have to rule an empire with someone as foolish as the Emperor? Who do you think would be the best candidate to be in charge of the Empire--the Emperor or the Empress?
3. Discuss the following words: *villain*, *protagonist*, *antagonist*. The common perception of this story is that the Emperor is the protagonist (the one we root for) and the Swindlers are the antagonists (the ones we are against).
 - a. Is there a definite *villain* in this story? Think about some of the defining traits that a villain possesses. Does the Emperor possess any of those traits?
 - b. What about the Swindlers? They may also have villainous tendencies, but do they also have some of the qualities that we might normally expect of a protagonist? What are their motives? What methods do they use to get what they want?
4. Discuss the Prime Minister and the Treasurer. Compare their levels of intelligence to the Emperor's. Are they smarter than the Emperor, or just as foolish?

DRAMATIC ARTS

1. Think about the parts of the story in which the “invisible” fabric is present. To make it seem as though they are actually handling real fabric, the actors use a theatrical technique called “pantomiming.” What is “pantomiming?” What challenges do these pantomiming scenes present to all the actors, not just the ones who “handle” the fabric?
2. In this adaptation of *The Emperor’s New Clothes*, the audience participates in the story when the Empress asks them to tell the Emperor that he is in his underwear! Discuss the theatrical technique of audience participation. Have you seen any other plays in which the audience is involved in the action in some way? What other types of events might include audience participation?
3. All of the beautiful costumes in the play (including those worn by the actor who plays the Emperor) are made by a costume designer. This person designs and constructs costumes for plays. What other duties does this job involve? (Think about all of the things it takes to maintain a large wardrobe of clothes.)
4. Pretend that you are a costume designer and you have been assigned to design costumes for *The Emperor’s New Clothes*. Design the fanciest, most luxurious outfit that you can think of for the Emperor. Anything goes--the more imaginative, the better! Be creative with colors, fabrics and textures, accessories, and the ways the fabric is cut. Think about the clothes YOU would want to wear if you were a powerful world leader like the Emperor!

LITERATURE

1. Read a version of “The Emperor’s New Clothes” with the class. Before seeing the play, discuss ways in which the story will be different onstage. After seeing the play, compare it to the book. How is the book different from or similar to the play that you saw? Is it funnier or more serious? Does it have more characters or less characters?
2. Research the life and works of Hans Christian Andersen. He is among the most popular fairy tale writers in the world (a distinction he shares with the Brothers Grimm). Focus specifically on the sources he used to write the fairy tales that we know today--what cultural and historical traditions did he draw on? Also, what events in his life may have influenced him to write these wonderful stories?

CREATIVE WRITING

1. *The Emperor’s New Clothes* ends with the Emperor realizing that he has been duped! But what do you think happens next? Does the Emperor finally get over his vanity and begin running a strong Empire? Or does he go back to the way he was, and never see the error of his ways? Write the sequel to *The Emperor’s New Clothes*. Be creative with the plot, characters, and setting.

2. Imagine that you are a citizen of the empire and that you witnessed the Grand Procession at the end of the story. Write a letter to the editor of the local newspaper stating your opinion of the event. From a citizen's perspective, why did the Emperor parade down the main street of the city, accompanied by his closest advisers, wearing only his underwear? And, what did you think of the procession--did you enjoy it? Were you outraged by it? Were you bored?

MATHEMATICS

1. In the play, the Swindlers measure the Emperor for his clothes. What measurements must be taken in order to construct an outfit? Why are these measurements important?
2. Think about the different shapes, lines, and angles that can be used in designing clothes--circles, half-circles, oblongs, acute & obtuse angles, etc. Look for these and other geometric forms as you observe the Emperor's costumes. Also, think about other, more unusual shapes--such as trapezoids, parallelograms, polygons--and see if you can identify any of those in the costumes you see onstage.

SOCIAL STUDIES

1. In the play, the Emperor is assisted by a Prime Minister and a Treasurer. These people are members of his staff. What do real-life people who hold the titles of Prime Minister and Treasurer do for a living? Find out their names--you may have seen them in the news. For example, who is the Prime Minister of Britain? Who is the United States' Secretary of the Treasury?
2. To show off his new clothing ensemble to the public, the Emperor orders a "Grand Procession." What does the word "procession" mean? Can you think of some different types of "processions" that might take place in the real world?
3. What do real emperors, presidents, kings, queens, and other dignitaries wear? Research the clothing styles of many different world leaders. Students can be put into groups and assigned a nation or time period to work with. They can cut out photos from newspapers and magazines, make a collage, and present their findings to the class.

WRITE TO CTC!

After watching the play, write us a letter about it. Tell what you liked or disliked about the story, the characters, costumes, set, or anything else you observed. Support your thoughts with examples and reasons. (*Teachers' comments are also appreciated!*)

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READING SUGGESTIONS

- ***The Emperor's New Clothes*** by Hans Christian Andersen, illustrated by Virginia Lee Burton. Houghton Mifflin, 2004.
- ***The Emperor's New Clothes*** by Eve Tharlett. Michael Neugebauer. North South Books, reprint edition, 2002.
- ***Tales, Then and Now: More Folktales As Literary fictions for Young Adults***. By Anna E. Alltman and Gail de Vos. Libraries Unlimited, 2001.