



**NEW MEXICO YOUNG ACTORS  
THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES STUDY GUIDE**

**SUMMARY**

**THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES**

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Dear Teachers,

Welcome to New Mexico Young Actors production of *The Emperor's New Clothes*. We are offering this study guide as a way to help you prepare your classes for our upcoming production. Included in this guide are a synopsis of our story, a list of characters, a vocabulary list and lesson ideas, as well as some audience protocol reminders. We always enjoy hearing from you and your students and look forward to receiving any pictures, stories, or comments about the production. Thank you for your interest and support of New Mexico Young Actors. We look forward to seeing you soon!

**Synopsis**

*The Emperor's New Clothes* was published in 1837 and has become one of Hans Christian Andersen's most popular stories, now released in over 100 languages. Andersen based his story on a Spanish tale from the 14th century. The story has contemporary implications as it provides a great lesson into the folly of pride and vanity, especially in those who have power—"to whom much is given, from him much will be required." Our version of the story is set in Japanese Kabuki style. Kabuki is traditional Japanese drama that dates from nearly four centuries ago, usually performed in a highly stylized manner.

Our story is introduced and narrated by the Keeper. She states that the play takes place in the Land of the Rising Sun. Gengo enters and introduces himself as the Lord-High General of the Imperial Guard. He claims to be a fierce warrior, only to admit that all of his victories have been won from the safety of the palace. Haiton, Lord High Overseer of the Imperial Wardrobe, enters and we quickly observe that he is always exasperated, out of shape, and frequently trips over his own words. He is in a rush to get the Emperor's gown delivered. The Empress enters and introduces herself as the inferior wife of the exalted Emperor.

Two playful children of the palace, Minamoto, daughter of General Gengo, and Mikilu, her cousin, enter in the following scene. Morotaka and Takaguchi enter and impress the audience as cunning foreigners bent on hoodwinking all members of the imperial entourage. First, they convince young Mikilu that there is a dragon loose in the palace. It is soon discovered that this was a trick in order to get an audience with the Emperor. When the Emperor finally makes his appearance, we learn that he is a self-absorbed ruler who isn't very bright. The swindlers enter, confess their dragon ploy, and reveal that the real reason for their visit is to provide the Emperor with a set of new robes made with special cloth—only those worthy of their office can see it!

The Emperor gives Morotaka and Takaguchi free reign in the imperial loom room. The Emperor and Empress feign to see the invisible robe, as do Gengo and Haiton, who also devise a plot to kidnap the swindlers in order to save the palace. Their plot fails and the Emperor agrees to model his new gown for his loyal subjects. He does so and little Mikilu is the only one that confesses the truth about the Emperor standing in front of the crowd with nothing on! All admit their faults and reconcile with the Emperor, who has learned a valuable lesson in humility.

### **Cast of Characters**

**The Emperor of the Land of the Smiling Sun**

**The Empress**

**Gengo**, Lord High Overseer of the Imperial Guard

**Minamoto**, his small daughter

**Mikilu**, Minamoto's cousin

**Haiton**, Lord High Overseer of the Imperial Wardrobe

**Takaguchi**, an ancient traveler

**Morotaka**, his companion

**Keeper of the Stage**

### **CLASSROOM DISCUSSION (PRE-PERFORMANCE)**

1. *How many of you have experienced a live dramatic performance? What did you see?*

2. *What are some of the differences between seeing a live performance and watching television or going to a movie?*

- Theater features live actors on-stage. They have spent many weeks rehearsing for the performance.
- The audience is a very important part of the performance. Appreciation and enthusiasm for the performers is shown by close attention and participation and applause at the proper times. The success of the play often depends on the audience.
- The atmosphere of a live performance is entirely different from your home, where the television is always available.
- It is easy to identify with live actors. You can see how they use their bodies and voices to convey different emotions.
- Actors wear costumes and make-up to help create the impression of the characters they play.
- There is much more to most live performances than actors. Special sets, effects, lighting, music, costumes, and of course, the audience add to the total experience.

3. *Introduce your students to the following theatrical terms:*

Box Office • Acts & Scenes • Producer • Program • Costumes • Props • Director • Stage • Curtain Call • Stagehand • Lobby • Usher • Musical Theater • Orchestra Pit • Playwright • Scenery • Makeup • Actor • Balcony • Play

4. *This script is filled with extensive vocabulary. Introduce your students to the following terms:*

imperial, ceremonial, skulking, incorrigible, majestic, supreme, exalted, courteous, thorough, inferior, picturesque, suspicious, wishy-washy, intention, acquaintance, impetuous, sentinel, sentry, peculiar, imbecile, rogue, colleague, ruffian, prattle, esteemed, venerable, vexing

## THEATER ETIQUETTE

*Discuss the role of the audience and proper theater etiquette.*

- Arrive on time so that you do not miss anything and so that you will not disturb the rest of the audience while trying to get comfortable. Lights may go out before the performance begins and seating is very difficult after that time.
- It is easier for you (and the rest of the audience) to see and hear the performance if you stay in your seat and listen very carefully.
- Try your best to remain in your seat once the performance has begun. There is no intermission during the performance of *The Emperor's New Clothes*, which is 55 minutes in length.
- Although you may wish to say something to the actors, you need to hold your thoughts, as you will disturb their concentration.
- Sing or participate *if and only if* you are invited to do so. Your participation is often very important.
- Show the cast and crew your appreciation for their hard work with applause. Do this when you like a song, dance, or joke.

## CLASSROOM DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES (POST- PERFORMANCE)

1. *Write an Epilogue:* Predict what happened next in the story. Write an article in which you tell the readers what happened after the Emperor learns he is wearing no clothes. What happened to the other characters in the story? Be as specific as possible and keep with the spirit of the original story.

2. *Discuss real life situations that reflect the moral in The Emperor's New Clothes.*

- a) Ask the children what it means to have vanity. How can a vain outlook be problematic? Why is humility considered an important virtue? What about honesty, genuineness, and integrity. Why are such concepts important considerations for those in authority?
- b) Discuss the lesson that the swindlers wanted to teach the Emperor. Did the Emperor learn his lesson? Why was it so easy for the swindlers to fool the Emperor and the other members of the palace?
- c) Reflect on the characters in the play. Ask your students which character they identify with the most. Why? List positive and negative traits of each character. What might each character do to improve his or her flaws?

3. *Music*: Was music used in the performance? Was it live or recorded? How could you tell? When was the music used? Why? Did it help develop the plot? What types of music were used? Identify musical instruments that were played. Can you describe how different kinds of music would make you have different kinds of feelings? When a play is a musical, an actor must have additional skills. Can you name some? A musical costs much more to produce. Can you name some additional expenses? (e.g., orchestra, a practice piano, a score, a choreographer, etc.)

4. *Sets*: Describe the sets used in the play you just saw. What props or details were used to suggest specific times or settings? How could lighting be changed to create a mood, season, time of day, etc.? What materials might have been used in building the sets? How were the sets and props moved on and off the stage? Describe a simple scene (a day in school, a trip to the mall, a ride in the car or on the bus) and ask students to describe a basic set for the scene.

5. *Costumes*: What would you need to know to create costumes for a play (historical accuracy, sewing, theatrical effects, knowledge of fabric, etc.)? Why is the right costume important to the character in the play?

6. *Art activities*:

- Draw a picture of a favorite scene or character.
- Draw a picture of what the audience might look like from on-stage.
- Re-create a scene from the play using clay forms in a box.
- Design a program cover for the play using the title, date, and an illustration inspired by the play.
- Draw an advertisement for the play.
- Create a Japanese Kabuki stage set!

7. *Language arts*:

- Choose a character that you liked and write a one-day's diary for that character. Write a letter to a cast member telling what you liked about her or his character.
- Discuss the play. Was there a hero or heroine? A villain? The setting? Was there a moral to the story?
- In 25 words or fewer, describe the plot of the play.
- Discuss the work of a movie or theater critic. Write a newspaper-type review of the play.
- Read the original fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen. Expand that into other H.C. Andersen stories. Assign various stories for the students to read and investigate.
- Explore the Japanese language!

8. *Theater*

- Discuss live theater. Are the actors aware of the audience? Why might an actor change his presentation because of audience reaction? Would it be easy to be an actor? Conduct an interview with a classmate pretending to be one of the actors and find out the actor's feelings about being on stage, memorization, rehearsals, costumes, audience, etc.
- Make a list of all the personnel needed for a play (director, actors, musicians, author, designers—set, costumes, lights, sound—stagehands, choreographer, producer, etc). What do these different jobs contribute to the theatrical production?

9. *History*

- Our play is set in the 18th century. Have you students research the time period. What was life like in an Imperial palace in the 1700s?

- Discuss the history of Japanese Kabuki drama. What are some characteristic features of the style? Is it still performed today? How is Kabuki technique different from contemporary Western acting technique?
- Research the history and biography of Hans Christian Andersen.

### THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES – INTERNET ACTIVITIES

[http://japan-magazine.jnto.go.jp/en/1508\\_kabuki.html](http://japan-magazine.jnto.go.jp/en/1508_kabuki.html)

<https://www.britannica.com/art/Kabuki>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9QHX0LTL0w>

[http://www.andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheEmperorsNewClothes\\_e.html](http://www.andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheEmperorsNewClothes_e.html)

<http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type1620.html>

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