

The Emperor's Groovy New Clothes

A Fashion Statement

Music & Lyrics by George Howe

Book by Frances Limoncelli

Based on the story by Hans Christian Anderson



TEACHER'S NOTES

The following material focuses on Frances Limoncelli's adaptation of *The Emperor's Groovy New Clothes*.

It has been designed for use by the classroom teacher and contains the following information:

- biography of the author,
- adapting the story and biography of the playwright,
- plot, setting and characters in the play,
- preparing your students for their first visit to the theatre.



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About the Playwright



Script: **Frances Limoncelli** is an actor, playwright, director and an ensemble member of Lifeline Theatre, Chicago. She has appeared in, directed, and written many plays that have been produced at various theatre companies around Chicago. Her work includes, *Pinocchio*, *Bunnicula*, *The Story of Ferdinand*, *Queen Lucia: A Musical Romp*, and, of course, *The Emperor's Groovy New Clothes*. Limoncelli graduated from Boston Conservatory with a BFA in theatre performance and an emphasis on directing.

Music & Lyrics: **George Howe** is a composer and lyricist, and a regular figure in Chicago's theatre scene. He won a Chicago Jefferson Award for his new musical, "Queen Lucia" and performs weekly at Davenport's, Chicago's premier cabaret club.

The Emperor's Groovy New Clothes was first produced at Lifeline Theatre, Chicago in June 2001.

Play Synopsis

The Emperor is the best dressed man in the land, but it has all come at a price. Kid, our narrator tells us the tale of how increasing fashion taxes, so that the Emperor can get a new wardrobe, has led all the adults into a fashion frenzy, leaving quality time at home behind. Determined to do something about it, she sets off to see the Emperor. Along the way she meets Shyster, a free spirit who is also interested in meeting the Emperor. They soon make friends.

At the Palace, Kid meets many people who are only too happy to fawn over the Emperor and his vanity. The Emperor has no clue about what he's spending, all he knows is he wants to look good. Shyster, under the guise of a fashion designer, agrees to make the Emperor the finest clothes he's ever worn. But Kid knows that Shyster really just wants to embarrass the Emperor. When Kid finally gets some time alone with the Emperor she realizes that he's not a bad guy, he's just deeply insecure and looking for some affection. Sadly, he thinks being fashionably dressed is the only way to get any attention. But the plot thickens when Kid also realizes that Shyster is not only going to fool the Emperor, but makes him walk around the Palace naked. Then having convinced him he's wearing the finest silks, he's going to steal what's left in the treasury and run! Can Kid stop the deception? Will the Emperor realize his mistakes or will he be broadcast naked on TV? And will they ever stop worrying about the way they look?

Character Breakdown

KID – our narrator, good heart, clever, wants to know why the land has become so fashion obsessed.

MOM & DAD – foolish parents, more interested in the latest fashions than spending time with Kid.

SHYSTER – a free spirit, an opportunist and a con artist. Will be the Emperor's fashion designer.

JUNE/ MARISSA – Mother-Daughter duo who broadcast the latest fashion and gossip for E! The Emperor's Network.

PRIMP & PREEN – the Emperor's right hand men, too busy pleasing their boss to understand the difference between reality and fiction.

EMPEROR – leader of the land, vain, foolish, he has a passion for fashion, but really he's just lonely and wants to be loved.



About the Book

The Emperor's Groovy New Clothes is based on the well known fairy tale, *The Emperor's New Clothes* by Hans Christian Anderson.

Originally published in 1837 in Denmark, it is the tale of an Emperor who has an unhealthy interest in the way he looks. When two swindlers disguised as designers offer to make the Emperor the finest clothes he has ever worn, he agrees without much thought to their warning: only stupid or ignorant people would not be able to see the clothes, and therefore the Emperor would appear naked to these people.

Of course the Emperor is completely naked, but none of his advisers have the guts to say otherwise for fear of appearing stupid. Even the townspeople start to believe they can see some clothing on him. Eventually a small child utters "But he has nothing on!" Soon, everyone agrees with the child, including the Emperor. But because of his pride, he refuses to publicly acknowledge this, and continues to walk in the procession naked.

The story has become a great lesson against denying an obvious truth to stay in with majority favor, even though reality is staring you in the eye. It has especially become a popular criticism of the way in which governments seems to work.

About the Author



Hans Christian Andersen (1805 – 1875), master of the fairy tale whose stories are famous throughout the world; he is also the author of plays, novels, poems, travel books and several autobiographies which are much more famous in Denmark. Born in a slum, Andersen was able to go to school and later the University of Copenhagen in 1828. He was soon writing prolifically. His fairy tales include: *The Princess and the Pea*, *The Snow Queen*, *The Little Mermaid*, and *The Ugly Duckling*. He is credited with introducing adult topics such as vanity, loss, and death to children's stories.

Source: *Encyclopedia Britannica*

The Process of Adaptation

The play being produced by the Cleveland Play House is an adaptation of another story.

A theatrical adaptation is the playwright's interpretation of the existing story. In other words, the play you are about to see may not resemble Hans Christian Andersen's story exactly; rather, character names, places, chronology and other elements of the original story may be altered to fit the playwright's vision for the theatre. It has always, throughout the history of the theatre, remained the artistic license of the playwright to do so.

A Passion for Fashion

FACT

Fashion refers to the dress and adornment (the mode of dressing) that is prevalent during a particular time or in a particular place.

Source: *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

FACT

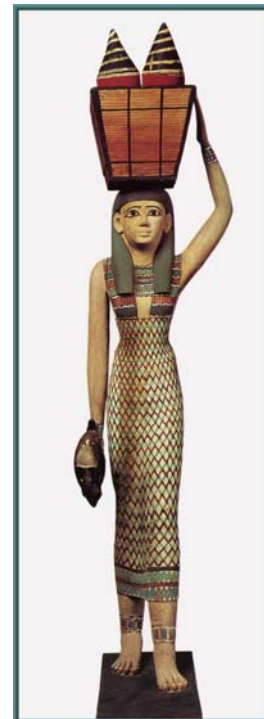
Fashion can indicate a number of things about a person, and these include:

- their gender
- their age
- their social standing
- their individual taste
- and sometimes, their profession



FACT

Fashion is also big business. It is one of the most profitable industries in the Western world. Fashion houses such as Armani, Gucci, Yves Saint Laurent, Calvin Klein, and Tommy Hilfiger have been in the business of dictating what clothes are fashionable for several decades now. Their new clothes appear every "season," which basically follows the seasons of the year: Fall/ Winter, Spring and Summer. Each season they release a new collection indicating what they think people should wear.



FACT

Clothing has not always been so profitable. In fact, when man first appeared on earth he certainly was not wearing any clothes. However, in today's society nakedness is considered strange. If you're made to stand naked in front of other people against your will, this is very demeaning. Nudity (think of the Janet Jackson scandal) is also considered offensive.

FACT

Mankind began wearing clothes for practical reasons such as protection from the weather.

Later reasons for clothing get more complicated. In the Old Testament Laws followers of Jehovah wore tassels on their clothing so as to distinguish themselves from persons of other religions. In Ancient Egypt, clothes were used as a way of establishing power. Slaves would wear simple, plain colored loin cloths whereas the Pharaohs would wear textiles in different colors, cut into various geometric patterns, and heavy jewelry.

FACT

The trend towards greater extravagance in dress occurred in the 11th and 13th Centuries in Europe. Increased exports from the East, as a result of the religious Crusades, and availability of textiles in the West meant that people had a wider range of clothing to wear.



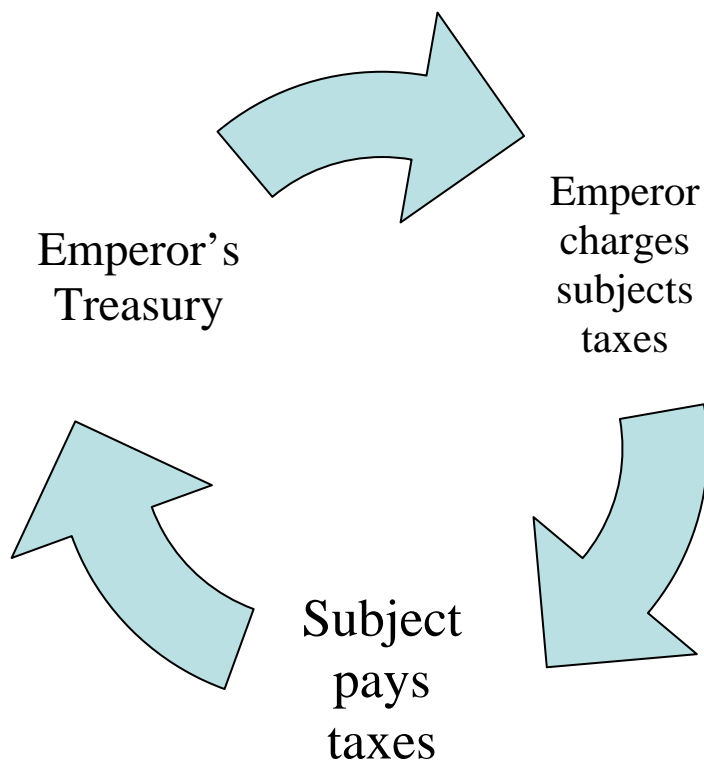
FACT

The early 17th century saw the rise of the ruffled neckline for both men and women. Men would wear short pants or breeches, stockings and oversized shirts, whereas women would wear long dresses, with huge puffed skirts. The nineteenth century saw necklines plunge for women from the Continent (in England and the U.S. it was only women of a certain profession who showed their heaving bosoms), incredibly tight waistlines (normally aided by a corset), and long skirts to the floor. It was only in the early twentieth century, specifically the 1920s, that hemlines became shorter and seeing a woman's lower legs was all the fashion. Of course, in the 1960s, the miniskirt was invented.

FACT

Now there are a range of styles for us to wear. Short, long, sleeveless, trousers, skirts, silk, linen, cotton, you name it, we have a wide range of choices in the clothes we wear.

In the play, the Emperor wants to charge increased fashion taxes. While we don't pay "fashion taxes" explicitly, we do pay sales tax on the clothes we wear. Here's a diagram to show the financial pattern occurring in the play.



This all flows well up to a certain point.

However, if the Emperor increases the amount of fashion tax the subject has to pay, and the subject's income does not increase, then he cannot afford the taxes.

This means the collapse of the Emperor's treasury, which is exactly what happens in the play.

Great Heroes of Children's Literature

Character	Story	Author
Ugly Duckling	<i>The Ugly Duckling</i>	H.C. Andersen (Danish)
Little Girl	<i>The Little Match Girl</i>	H.C. Andersen (Danish)
Big Bad Wolf	<i>Three Little Pigs</i>	European Folk Tales
Pinocchio	<i>Pinocchio</i>	Carlo Collodi (Italian)
Three Blind Mice	<i>Three Blind Mice</i>	Thomas Ravenscroft (British)
Captain Hook	<i>Peter Pan</i>	J. M. Barrie (Scottish)
Humpty Dumpty	<i>Humpty Dumpty</i>	English Riddle
Little Red Riding Hood	<i>Little Red Riding Hood</i>	Brothers Grimm (German)
Jack	<i>Jack and the Beanstalk</i>	Benjamin Tabart (English)
Hansel and Gretel	<i>Hansel and Gretel</i>	Brothers Grimm (German)
Rumpelstiltskin	<i>Rumpelstiltskin</i>	Brothers Grimm (German)
The Seven Dwarves	<i>Snow White</i>	Brothers Grimm (German)
Thumbelina	<i>Thumbelina</i>	H.C. Andersen (Danish)
Goldilocks	<i>The Three Bears</i>	Brothers Grimm (German)

PREPARING YOUR STUDENTS FOR THEIR TRIP TO THE CLEVELAND PLAY HOUSE

This might be the first time that some of your students are attending the theatre. Here is some information about The Cleveland Play House and the production that will help you and your students prepare for your role as audience members.

I. Expected Behavior

For many children, this production will be their first experience with live theatre, therefore it is important to discuss with them the expected behavior of the audience.

The Cleveland Play House asks that prior to the performance, students are made aware of the following:

- Do not go on stage at any time. The stage will be three-quarter thrust (not proscenium, as you might be used to, where the audience all sit facing the stage). It is therefore important that you ask your students not to disturb the action on stage nor try to communicate to audience members sitting opposite them.
- All aisles must be kept clear throughout the performance (no sitting on the stairs).
- Visit the washroom before the show. It is hard to leave once the performance begins.
- Do not bring food or drinks into the theatre. The theatre is not a place for popcorn and rustling candy wrappers.
- Try not to talk throughout the performance – even whispering voices can be distracting.
- Don't leave your seat unless instructed by the teacher or theatre staff.
- Turn off your cell phone, if you have brought one, and don't use a camera or video recorder.

II. Relationship to the Theatre

- There is an implicit understanding between audience and performer to "suspend disbelief." Here, both audience and performer pretend that the action is real and is happening for the first time.
- The characters in the play will not look exactly like the drawings provided. They will wear an item that will help us know who the character is.

- Actors, costumed in neutral colors, who move scenery and props, are considered “invisible” by other performers and the audience.
- Some performers may play many characters.
- There might be some nontraditional casting, in which actors play roles regardless of their gender and/or race
- Characters sometimes speak their thoughts aloud (soliloquy) so that the audience knows what the characters are thinking.

III. The Production

There are many people who work together to put on a play. The whole process takes about one year from deciding to produce the play to the play’s opening night. Each team consists of the following people:

- **Playwright:** a person who writes plays is called a playwright. A playwright writes lines (dialogue) for the actors.
- **Director:** the person who interprets the play. S/He works with the designers to establish the concept of the play. After several meetings s/he will agree on the production elements to be used for the show including sets, costumes, props, lights and sounds. The director also chooses the actors to play the different parts in the show. Once rehearsals begin, the director conveys his ideas to the actors by giving them directions on their character development and blocking their movements. Once the play opens for the public, the majority of the director’s job is over.
- **Actors:** actors pretend to be the characters in a play. Sometimes, a grown-up plays the part of a child. They might also play old people or animals. Sometimes, one actor plays many different characters. Watch the ways in which actors change their voices, movements, or costumes to become different characters.
- **Set Designer:** the person who designs the set. S/He creates the world that is seen when you enter the theatre. S/He decides whether there will be real or pretend furniture (such as cubes or chairs). S/He also decides where all the different locations will be on stage. The designer drafts diagrams so the carpenter can build the set and then the designer will return to paint everything.

- **Costume Designer:** the person who chooses what clothes the actors will wear. The costume designer decides how each actor should look to represent the character and time period. The designer will sometimes shop for clothing or may create some costumes from scratch.
- **Props Designer:** the person who provides all of the objects used during the play. This person either buys or creates everything that the actors might need to convey the story.
- **Sound Designer:** the person that creates all of the sound effects and music for the play. The sound designer creates the noises that are heard when someone rings a doorbell or a telephone rings.
- **Lighting Designer:** the person that provides the lighting for the play. The designer will decide what color the lights should be to complement the sets and costumes.

RECOMMENDED READING FROM THE CLEVELAND PUBLIC LIBRARY

The Emperor's New Clothes by Hans Christian Anderson

Two rascally weavers convince the emperor they are making him beautiful new clothes, visible only to those fit for their posts, but when he wears them during a royal procession, a child recognizes that the emperor has nothing on.

The Little Mermaid by Hans Christian Anderson

A little sea princess, longing to be human, trades her mermaid's tail for legs, hoping to win the love of a prince and earn an immortal soul for herself.

Thumbelina by Hans Christian Anderson

After being kidnapped by an ugly toad, a beautiful girl no bigger than a thumb has a series of dreadful experiences before meeting a fairy prince just her size.

The Wild Swans by Hans Christian Anderson

In this newly illustrated edition of the Andersen classic, eleven brothers who have been turned into swans by their evil stepmother are saved by their beautiful sister.

The Principal's New Clothes by Stephanie Calmenson

In this version of the Andersen tale the vain principal of P.S. 88 is persuaded by two tailors that they will make him a suit that will be visible only to intelligent people who are good at their jobs.