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The Emperor's New Clothes

By HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN



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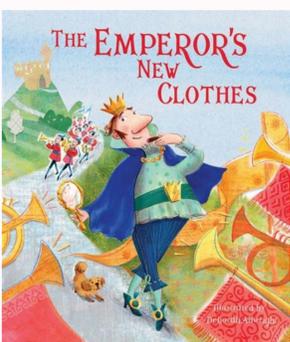
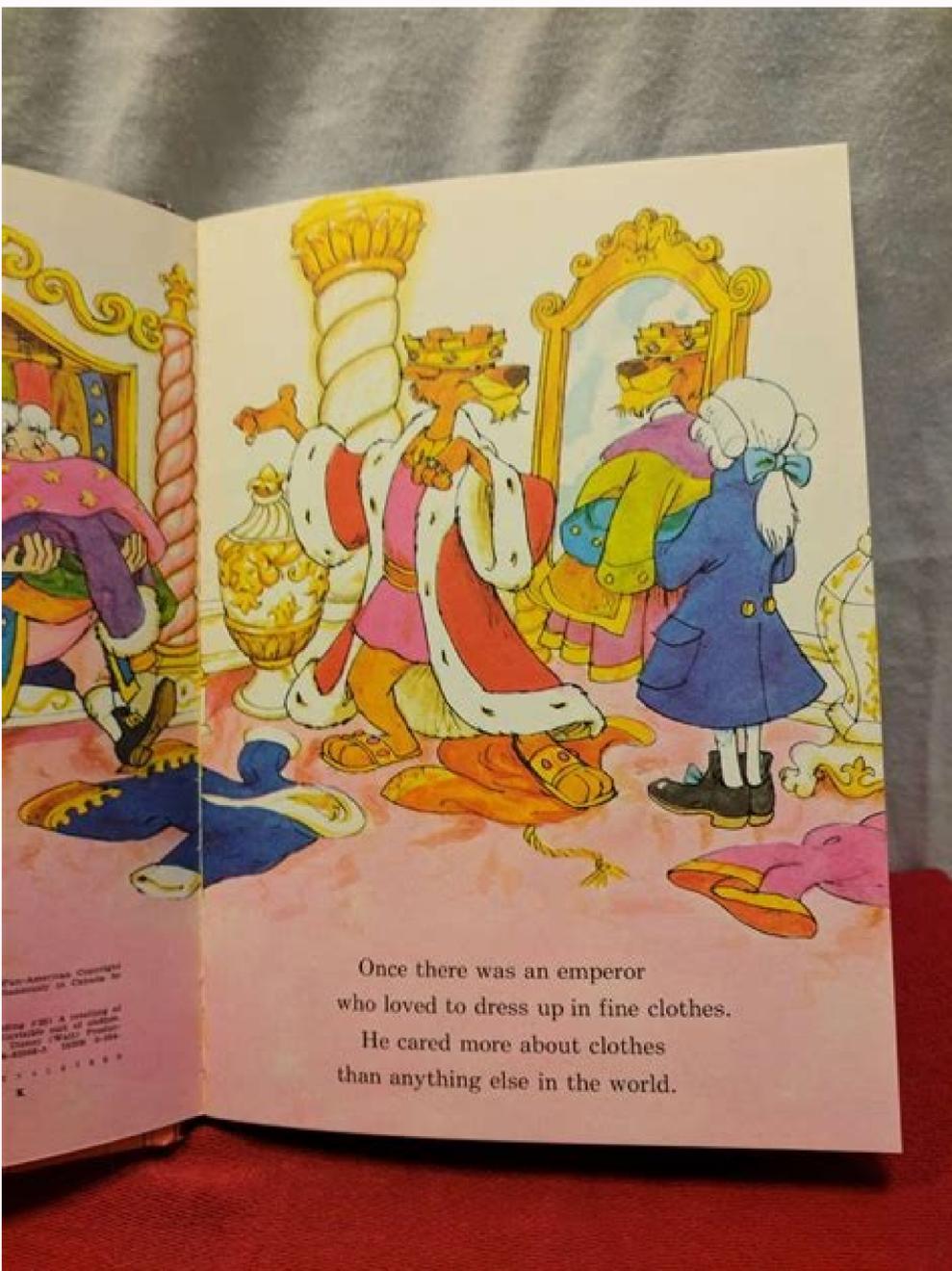
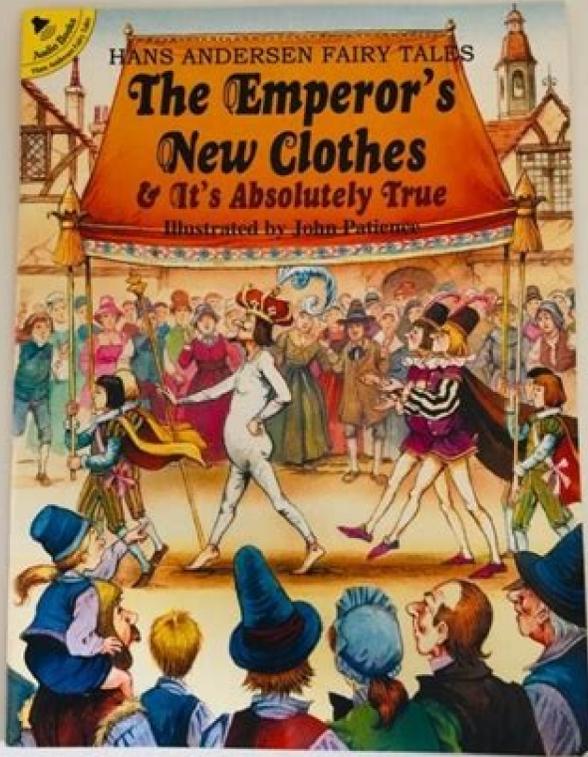
The Emperor's New Clothes

and other stories



Retold by
Mary Hoffman

Illustrated by
Anna Currey



Meaning emperor's new clothes. The emperor's new clothes book report.

This story is a classic tale written by the Danish author Hans Christian Andersen, who wrote many famous children's fairy tales in the 1800s that are still prominent today, such as The Little Mermaid, Thumbelina, and The Ugly Duckling. Like most stories of such age, this tale has multiple versions and translations, among various authors and story collections. Feel free to use any version that is available to you if you cannot acquire the one used in this module. All versions and translations typically follow the same basic plot, have the same basic elements, and present the same issues. This story has great potential in being a prompt for philosophical discussion. When each character within the story is confronted with the invisible suit, they are also confronted with a complex moral dilemma. Should they tell the truth (not being able to see the suit) and accept their own supposed inadequacy, or lie and save themselves from social ridicule? This dilemma combines multiple philosophically interesting issues. Self-deception Self-deception is a process of denying or rationalizing away the relevance, significance, or importance of opposing evidence and logical arguments. This occurs very obviously in the story. The "rationalizing away" is seen when the characters convince themselves that they can see the suit. The "opposing evidence" is the fact that they cannot actually see the suit. This process of self-deception is used by virtually every character in the story in order to shelter themselves from the inconvenience of the truth. Reasons for their employment of self-deception are discussed further in the sections dealing with conformity and honesty. The "logical argument" that the characters are purposefully avoiding is presented at the end of the story by the young and innocent boy. The boy breaks the others out of their self-deception, with his proclamation that "the Emperor isn't wearing anything at all!" Honesty Each character's choice of whether to admit that they can't see the suit or not is a good prompt for a discussion of honesty. Every character in the story, except for the young boy, chooses to lie rather than tell the truth about not being able to see the suit. The reasons they chose to be dishonest is a good topic for discussion. Kids can analyze the psychology behind the characters lying. A prominent reason is the social fear and anxiety that the suit dilemma presents: that is, if one cannot see the suit, one is stupid and doesn't deserve a position in society. Reasons rooted in social status, conformity, judgment, trust, and individual morality can all bloom from discussion. After discussing the possible reasons for being dishonest, kids can be led into the deeper philosophical questions behind these reasons. Ask the kids why honesty is important or whether or not you

have to be honest to be good. Asking them they have lied can relate their personal experiences to the situation of the individuals in the story, and help them understand the characters in the story. The characters in the story felt that they were making a magical suit when they were not weaving anything at all. Then they tell the supplementary lie that the suit will be invisible to stupid people. The other characters in the story believe these lies as the truth, causing them to lie themselves to support the weavers' lies in order to save their own reputations. Were the characters who were tricked just as morally and ethically wrong in lying as the weavers? Were they bad guys too? This is an interesting discussion. It can be said that the weavers lied maliciously to seek personal gain and that the tricked characters lied out of fear and sought personal security. The question of when it is appropriate to lie can arise from discussion. Is it alright to lie to benefit yourself? What about in order to benefit the group or society at large? This can make for a great controversial discussion between kids. The discussion will reflect greatly on the kids' opinions of morality and right versus wrong. Conformity is the act of matching attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors to what individuals perceive as normal to their society or social group. This story does a good job of demonstrating the power of social pressures in influencing conformity. When each character confronts their inability to see the suit, they begin to fear for their reputation. Every character, including the Emperor, changes their perception to match that of the dominant group in order to fit in with that group. The dominant group is everyone who holds the false perception of being able to see the suit. Simply put, the characters changed their perspective to match that of the group's, illustrating conformity. The desire to conform is also present in the real world. The Soloman Asch Experiments provide great insights behind the nature of conformity, and I encourage you to give them a look. One experiment can be seen here. In general, there are two types of social influence that can cause people to conform. Both can be spotted in the story. The first is called informational influence and the second is called normative influence. Informational social influence occurs when one turns to the members of one's group to obtain accurate information. Some characters in the story conformed simply because they believe in the group's ability to determine what is true over their own perspective. Characters such as the Emperor's ministers felt this influence because they supposed "if all my colleagues see the suit surely it must exist!" Normative influence: Normative social influence occurs when one conforms in order to be liked or accepted by the group members. It usually results in public compliance, doing or saying something without believing in it. Practically every character in the story felt this pressure. They did not want to cause trouble within the group, so they chose to accept the suit's public perception (even if they believed differently) so they would not be appear as an outsider. This influence was propelled even further in the story because of the added condition that not being able to see the suit made you inadequate in your peers' eyes. I can vividly remember the first time I read The Emperor's New Clothes, as a small child. I remember how excited I felt at opening the slim envelope, which was addressed to me personally ... and had come all the way from the North Pole! I could barely contain myself. My parents swore that they had had nothing to do with it. I had written a letter to Santa Claus and posted it in the post box, as they showed me. Now here it was, an actual reply from Father Christmas himself. And not only that, but I can vividly remember the first time I read The Emperor's New Clothes, as a small child. I remember how excited I felt at opening the slim envelope, which was addressed to me personally ... and had come all the way from the North Pole! I could barely contain myself. My parents swore that they had had nothing to do with it. I had written a letter to Santa Claus and posted it in the post box, as they showed me. Now here it was, an actual reply from Father Christmas himself. And not only that, but he had sent me a story in a little booklet. It was sheer magic!The story was well chosen. Hans Christian Andersen has a way of making a child feel that he is sitting next to them and speaking to them personally and to them alone. I loved this story. It made me giggle, and I read it over and over again in wonder at being especially singled out. (I was very young!)Everyone knows the story about an Emperor, who is so vain that he cares about nothing except wearing and displaying his fine fashionable clothes. He is conned by two scoundrels, who pretend to be weavers, and who promise to make him the most wonderful suit of clothes ever. They demand the finest silks and gold thread, claiming that their fabric will be incredibly beautiful – the best he has ever seen – but so fine that it will be invisible to anyone who is very stupid, or unfit for his position. Of course the reader is in the know all along. The weavers industriously weave their imaginary thread, and the Emperor sends his trusted ministers along, one at a time, to check on its progress. So we see the same confidence trick being played, over and over again. Nobody can bear to admit that they can see nothing. They all praise the thread highly, becoming more and more extravagant in their compliments. Nobody want to appear stupid, or to be deemed unfit for their position. The Emperor can't see anything either, obviously, but feels he has no choice but to do the same, or his shortcomings might be exposed. Eventually the tricksters say that they have finished weaving the thread, and they make a great show of making the suit. When all is ready, they continue the exaggerated mime, dressing him with great ceremony. Everyone involved at court plays along, paying flattering compliments. All the Emperor's subjects have by now heard of this wonderful fabric, and so they line the roads, waiting for him to parade before them. And on the day of the grand procession, yet again, the townsfolk play along with the pretence. Nobody wants to admit that they can't see anything, for fear that they will appear stupid, or unfit for their position.Illustration by Vilhelm Pedersen, Andersen's first illustrator(view spoiler)[However, a young child in the crowd, too young to conceal the truth, indignantly blurts out,"But he hasn't got anything on!"And after a great pause, and some whispering, the cry is taken up by others. A great cry then goes up in the crowd, that that the Emperor hasn't got anything on. And even though the Emperor secretly fears that this may be true, he has to go through with it all, and walks proudly on. (hide spoiler)]Hans Christian Andersen published this tale in 1837, along with "The Little Mermaid", as the third and final instalment of his "Fairy Tales Told for Children." The Emperor's New Clothes has been translated into over 100 languages, and adapted many times. As with most of these early tales, he did not invent the story. Instead, he based this one on a story from a medieval Spanish collection of cautionary tales rooted in Aesop, and in some Persian folktales. He had come across it as a German translation, "So ist der Lauf der Welt" ("So is the Running of the World.") This source tale is very similar: A king is duped by two weavers, who claim to be able to make a suit of clothes which is invisible to any man who is not the natural son of his father, but who instead is the result of adultery.Hans Christian Andersen's genius lay in altering the focus, so that the story is about pride and vanity, both in appearance and of intellect. It was also an inspiration to change the ending, (view spoiler)[so that it was a child who spotted the truth - and told it. We nearly did not have this ending, in fact, as Hans Christian Andersen's manuscript had got as far as the printer's before the brilliant idea suddenly hit him. He realised that a child's cry of truth would make for a much more powerful ending, exposing all the hypocrisy and snobbery, rather than just the admiration of the Emperor's subjects. (hide spoiler)]This increases the satire, and makes the story one of those rare creatures; a hilariously funny story by Hans Christian Andersen.The Emperor's New Clothes is one of the author's most straightforward and lighthearted stories. It established Hans Christian Andersen's reputation as an author whose children's stories taught valuable moral lessons to his audience. (view spoiler)[They often subsequently featured children who had the courage to challenge authority, and become empowered by speaking the truth. This feature also ensured that his stories often had particular appeal to children, who naturally empathise with such a romantic notion. (hide spoiler)]The phrase "Emperor's new clothes" is now in common use as a metaphor for anything which smacks of pretentiousness, pomposity, or hollow ostentatiousness. It is used to refer to social hypocrisy, or any collective denial. In this way, the story speaks to adults too, and can be extended to many of life's situations. I am put in mind of politicians' or diplomats' skill in selecting and obfuscating the truth. But also, in a subjective sense, one critic has pointed out the additional interpretation of the metaphor: that "whatever words we may use to clothe our fears, the fabric cannot protect us from them." And there is a third, oddly spiritual level to this comic satire. Every time in the story that the trick is played, and we read the heightened description of the wonderful, almost miraculous, cloth, it becomes more "real" in our imagination. It seems more palpable and substantial. It becomes perfect; a thing of immaculate beauty for us, even though it is a mere idea and has no material existence.The fact that this tale can thus be read with wonder and pleasure both as a child, and also speak to the reader as an adult, confirms to me that it is one of Hans Christian Andersen's true masterpieces. ...more

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