

## The Emperor's New Clothes

by Hans Christian Andersen

This selection also appears in *Elements of Literature*.

### LITERARY FOCUS: THEME—GETTING THE MESSAGE

You know that most stories contain a **plot**, a series of related events. Did you also know that most stories contain messages? These messages about life, called **themes**, help us connect what we read with our observations about real life. Most times, writers don't come out and directly state a story's theme. Instead, you think about the characters and their experiences to come up with a statement of theme. As you read "The Emperor's New Clothes," look for its theme, or message about life.

### READING SKILLS: MAKING GENERALIZATIONS

You've probably made or heard **generalizations** such as "Most kids like sports" or "Most TV shows are a waste of time." A generalization is a broad statement that is based on examples or evidence. To come up with the theme of a story, it's useful to use the skill of generalizing. Here's how to do it:

- Think about the main events and conflicts in the story.
- Decide what the characters have discovered by the end of the story.
- State the idea in a general way so that it applies not just to the story but to real life.

### SKILLS FOCUS

**Literary Skills**  
Recognize the difference between theme and plot.

**Reading Skills**  
Make generalizations.

# The Emperor's New Clothes

Hans Christian Andersen

## INFER

Pause at line 7. Underline the emperor's biggest interest in life. What does that major interest reveal about the type of person the emperor is?

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## WORD STUDY

A swindler (line 9) is a person who cheats or tricks others. What **context clue** in lines 9–11 helps you understand that swindlers are untrustworthy?

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Many years ago there lived an Emperor who was so fond of new clothes that he spent all his money on them. He did not care for his soldiers, or for the theater, or for driving in the woods, except to show off his new clothes. He had an outfit for every hour of the day, and just as they say of a king, "He is in the council chamber," so they always said of him, "The Emperor is in his dressing room."

The great city where he lived was very lively, and every day many strangers came there. One day two swindlers  
10 came. They claimed that they were weavers and said they could weave the finest cloth imaginable. Their colors and patterns, they said, were not only exceptionally beautiful, but the clothes made of this material possessed the wonderful quality of being invisible to any man who was unfit for his office, or who was hopelessly stupid.

"Those must be wonderful clothes," thought the Emperor. "If I wore them, I should be able to find out which men in my empire were unfit for their posts, and I could tell the clever from the stupid. Yes, I must have this  
20 cloth woven for me without delay." So he gave a lot of money to the two swindlers in advance, so that they could set to work at once.

They set up two looms<sup>1</sup> and pretended to be very hard at work, but they had nothing on the looms. They asked for the finest silk and the most precious gold, all of which they

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1. **looms** *n.*: machines used for weaving thread into cloth.



Suzanne Duranceau/HRW Illustration.

### INFER

Pause at line 33. Write three words that describe what you know about the emperor's **character** so far.

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put into their own bags, and worked at the empty looms till late into the night.

30 "I should very much like to know how they are getting on with the cloth," thought the Emperor. But he felt rather uneasy when he remembered that whoever was not fit for his office could not see it. He believed, of course, that he had nothing to fear for himself, yet he thought he would send somebody else first to see how things were progressing.

Everybody in the town knew what a wonderful property the cloth possessed, and all were anxious to see how bad or stupid their neighbors were.

40 "I will send my honest old minister to the weavers," thought the Emperor. "He can judge best how the cloth looks, for he is intelligent, and nobody is better fitted for his office than he."

So the good old minister went into the room where the two swindlers sat working at the empty looms. "Heaven help us!" he thought, and opened his eyes wide. "Why, I cannot see anything at all," but he was careful not to say so.

### PREDICT

Pause at line 40. Will the minister be able to see the cloth? What will he tell the emperor about it?

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not see, and expressed his pleasure at the beautiful colors and the fine pattern. “Yes, it is quite enchanting,” he said to the Emperor.

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Everybody in the whole town was talking about the beautiful cloth. At last the Emperor wished to see it himself while it was still on the loom. With a whole company of chosen courtiers, including the two honest councilors who had already been there, he went to the two clever swindlers, who were now weaving away as hard as they could but without using any thread.

“Is it not magnificent?” said both the honest statesmen. “Look, Your Majesty, what a pattern! What colors!”

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And they pointed to the empty looms, for they imagined the others could see the cloth.

“What is this?” thought the Emperor. “I do not see anything at all. This is terrible! Am I stupid? Am I unfit to be Emperor? That would indeed be the most dreadful thing that could happen to me!”

“Yes, it is very beautiful,” said the Emperor. “It has our highest approval,” and nodding contentedly, he gazed at the empty loom, for he did not want to say that he could see nothing. All the attendants who were with him looked and looked, and, although they could not see anything more than the others, they said, just like the Emperor, “Yes, it is very fine.” They all advised him to wear the new magnificent clothes at a great procession that was soon to take place. “It is magnificent! beautiful, excellent!” went from mouth to mouth, and everybody seemed delighted. The Emperor awarded each of the swindlers the cross of the order of knighthood to be worn in their buttonholes, and the title of Imperial Court Weavers.

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### RETELL

Pause at line 80. Describe the important events that have happened in the story since the strangers came to town.

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### PREDICT

Pause at line 108. What will the emperor do when it's time to wear his new clothes? Will anyone dare to tell him the truth?

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### FLUENCY

As you read the boxed passage aloud, imagine that you're the emperor reacting to the "invisible cloth."





“Oh, how well they look! How well they fit!” said all.  
“What a pattern! What colors! Magnificent indeed!”

“They are waiting outside with the canopy which is to be borne over Your Majesty in the procession,” announced the master of ceremonies.

“Well, I am quite ready,” said the Emperor. “Doesn’t my suit fit me beautifully?” And he turned once more to the mirror so that people would think he was admiring his garments.

140 The chamberlains, who were to carry the train, fumbled with their hands on the ground as if they were lifting up a train. Then they pretended to hold something up in their hands. They didn’t dare let people know that they could not see anything.

And so the Emperor marched in the procession under the beautiful canopy, and all who saw him in the street and out of the windows exclaimed: “How marvelous the Emperor’s new suit is! What a long train he has! How well it fits him!” Nobody would let the others know that he saw nothing, for then he would have been shown to be unfit for  
150 his office or too stupid. None of the Emperor’s clothes had ever been such a success.

“But he has nothing on at all,” said a little child.

“Good heavens! Hear what the innocent child says!” said the father, and then each whispered to the other what the child said: “He has nothing on—a little child says he has nothing on at all!” “He has nothing on at all,” cried all the people at last. And the Emperor too was feeling very worried, for it seemed to him that they were right, but he thought to himself, “All the same, I must go through with the procession.” And he held himself stiffer than ever, and  
160 the chamberlains walked on, holding up the train which was not there at all.

#### CLARIFY

Pause at line 138. What is the emperor actually wearing?

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#### IDENTIFY

Why is the child able to tell the truth that the adults cannot tell (line 152)?

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#### INTERPRET

The emperor continues to march even though he and everyone else know he’s got nothing on. What message does he send by this action?

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#### MAKE A GENERALIZATION

You infer a message or **theme** from what happens in a story. What message about life can you take from this story?

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# The Emperor's New Clothes

SKILLS  
FOCUS

**Literary Skills**  
Analyze theme.

**Theme Chart** A truth about life revealed in a story is its **theme**. One way to find a story's theme is to examine what we and the characters discover in the course of the story. That discovery is usually the same as the story's theme.

Complete this graphic organizer after you read "The Emperor's New Clothes."

Main character(s):

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Key experiences:

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What we discover from those experiences:

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Statement of theme:

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# Skills Review

## The Emperor's New Clothes

### COMPREHENSION

**Reading Comprehension** Write numbers from 1 to 10 to show the order in which the events happened in "The Emperor's New Clothes." Some numbers have already been filled in.

3 The Emperor sends an old minister to see how the weavers are progressing.

\_\_\_\_\_ An honest official assumes that he is unfit for his post because he could not see the cloth.

8 The Emperor awards the swindlers special honors for their service.

\_\_\_\_\_ The Emperor gives the swindlers money to weave new clothes.

\_\_\_\_\_ A child says that the Emperor has nothing on.

9 The Emperor marches under a beautiful canopy.

\_\_\_\_\_ The Emperor brings his courtiers and ministers to see the cloth.

\_\_\_\_\_ The swindlers ask the old minister to admire the cloth.

7 The Emperor's attendants advise him to wear his new clothes at a procession.

\_\_\_\_\_ Before beginning their task, the swindlers ask for fine silk and gold for their looms.

**Statement of Theme:** No matter how great the differences are between cultures, there are also similarities.

## ■ Possible Answers to Skills Review

### Vocabulary and Comprehension (page 100)

- A.**
1. spectacle; context clues: “most remarkable”
  2. lavishly; context clues: “dressed in bright blue and white costumes with gold trim”
  3. etiquette; context clues: “ate with our fingers and slurped and burped”
  4. mortified; context clues: “we were not embarrassed”
- B.**
1. The Lins pull the strings off their celery and bring chairs to the buffet table.
  2. The narrator’s father pulls out a flashlight and a French dictionary to read the menu, and the Lins slurp their soup loudly.
  3. Meg piles food onto her plate and takes food from a second dish before finishing her helping from the first.
  4. Meg slurps her milkshake and tells the narrator that all Americans slurp.

## The Emperor’s New Clothes, page 101

### Page 102

#### **INFER**

Possible answer: The emperor’s biggest interest in life is “new clothes” (line 2). The message the emperor is sending is that he is a foolish and vain man and that he is not a good leader.

#### **WORD STUDY**

The word *claimed* (line 10) makes you think the men must not be telling the truth; therefore swindlers must not be trustworthy.

### Page 103

#### **INFER**

Possible response: Three words that describe the emperor’s character so far are *vain*, *gullible*, and *weak*.

#### **PREDICT**

Possible response: No, the minister will not be able to see the cloth, but he will tell the emperor that he can see it and that it’s beautiful.

### Page 104

#### **IDENTIFY**

The two questions the minister asks himself are (1) “Can I be so stupid?” (line 50) and (2) “Is it possible that I am not fit for my office?” (lines 51–52).

#### **INFER**

Possible response: The minister does not question the weavers’ honesty because that would mean contradicting the emperor or admitting that he cannot see the cloth. He is afraid that he will be considered stupid.

### Page 105

#### **RETELL**

The strangers claim to be able to weave a set of clothes for the emperor that are magically invisible to those people who are stupid and unfit for office. The emperor wants these clothes, and he pays the swindlers, who pretend to weave and sew an outfit for him. The emperor sends in his minister to monitor the progress of the new clothes. Fearing that he will be judged unfit or stupid, the minister claims that the clothes are beautiful.

#### **PREDICT**

Possible response: The emperor will wear the new clothes. No one will have the courage to admit to seeing nothing. The emperor will appear in the parade with no clothes, and the people will be shocked.

### Page 106

#### **VISUALIZE**

Circled text that helps you picture the swindlers: “the swindlers were up working”; “People could see how busy they were”; “They pretended to take the cloth from the loom, they snipped the air with big scissors”; “they sewed with needles without any thread.” The swindlers’ answer to the question no one dares to ask: “See, here are the trousers! Here is the coat! Here is the cloak!” The question is: Where are the clothes?

### Page 107

#### **CLARIFY**

The emperor is actually wearing nothing.

#### **IDENTIFY**

The child is able to tell the truth because he or she is innocent and not hindered by pride; the child is honest and says exactly what he or she sees. He or she is not influenced by what others might think.

#### **INTERPRET**

Possible response: The emperor is too proud and vain to admit the truth, so he keeps up the march; he feels that he must try to maintain his dignity. He is sending the message that he is unable to admit a mistake and that vanity is more important than truth.

#### **MAKE A GENERALIZATION**

Possible response: Trust your own judgment, and do not be afraid of what others might think about you.

## ■ Possible Answers to Skills Practice

### Theme Chart (page 108)

**Main character(s):** Emperor, swindlers, Emperor’s officials, child

**Key experiences:** Swindlers say their cloth is invisible to anyone unfit for office; everyone pretends to see the cloth because they do not want to be thought stupid or unfit for office; the emperor listens to his advisors and wears the invisible cloth on parade; only a child tells the emperor he has no clothes on.

**What we discover from those experiences:** People who work for powerful people can’t be trusted to be honest if they think the truth might hurt them. The child had nothing to lose, so he or she could tell the emperor the truth.

**Statement of theme:** People often fear telling someone in power the truth because they don’t want to lose their jobs. Only a child is innocent enough to tell the truth to the powerful.

## ■ Possible Answers to Skills Review

### Comprehension (page 109)

- 3 The Emperor sends an old minister to see how the weavers are progressing.
- 5 A high official assumes that he is unfit for his post because he could not see the cloth.
- 8 The Emperor awards the swindlers special honors for their service.
- 1 The Emperor gives the swindlers money to weave new clothes.
- 10 A child says that the Emperor has nothing on.
- 9 The Emperor marches under a beautiful canopy.
- 6 The Emperor brings his courtiers and ministers to see the cloth.
- 4 The swindlers ask the old minister to admire the cloth.
- 7 The Emperor’s attendants advise him to wear his new clothes at a procession.
- 2 Before beginning their task, the swindlers ask for fine silk and gold for their looms.

## Atalanta and Hippomenes, page 110

### Page 112

#### IDENTIFY

Words that describe an important characteristic of Atalanta include “run faster” (line 1); “outrun the winds” (line 2); “swiftly” (line 4); and “fleet-footed” (line 5).

### Page 113

#### PARAPHRASE

Hippomenes gives the word, and the race begins. As Atalanta runs far ahead of her suitors, Hippomenes realizes how beautiful she is. Hippomenes shouts praises to Atalanta when she finishes the race. Forgetting that failure to beat Atalanta in a race means death, Hippomenes decides that he loves her and must race her himself.

### Page 114

#### IDENTIFY

Venus says that Hippomenes should throw the apples in Atalanta’s path during the race.

#### PARAPHRASE

Responses will vary. Possible response: Atalanta stops to pick up two golden apples but cannot handle the third one, so Hippomenes passes her.

### Page 115

#### EVALUATE

Possible response: Atalanta is really faster; Hippomenes uses the apples to trick and distract her.

#### INTERPRET

Possible responses: People should express gratitude for the good things others do for them.

## ■ Possible Answers to Skills Practice

### Word-and-Theme Diagram (page 116)

**Word:** love; **Theme:** Love can make us lose our good sense.

**Word:** beauty; **Theme:** People are attracted to the beauty of others.

**Word:** thoughtless; **Theme:** Thoughtlessness can have grave consequences.

## ■ Possible Answers to Skills Review

### Vocabulary and Comprehension (page 117)

- A.**
1. stooped
  2. suitors
  3. scorn
  4. penalty
  5. envious

Words with multiple meanings: *pick, show, might, contest, court*

- B.**
1. c
  2. j
  3. c
  4. h