The Emperor’s New Clothes

by Hans Christian Andersen

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.
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 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 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 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

1. looms n.: machines used for weaving thread into cloth.
put into their own bags, and worked at the empty looms till late into the night.

“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.

“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.
Both swindlers bade him be so good as to step closer and asked him if he did not admire the exquisite pattern and the beautiful colors. They pointed to the empty looms, and the poor old minister opened his eyes even wider, but he could see nothing, for there was nothing to be seen.

“Good Lord!” he thought, “can I be so stupid? I should never have thought so, and nobody must know it! Is it possible that I am not fit for my office? No, no, I must not tell anyone that I couldn’t see the cloth.”

“Well, have you got nothing to say?” said one, as he wove.

“Oh, it is very pretty—quite enchanting!” said the old minister, peering through his glasses. “What a pattern, and what colors! I shall tell the Emperor that I am very much pleased with it.”

“Well, we are glad of that,” said both the weavers, and they described the colors to him and explained the curious pattern. The old minister listened carefully, so that he might tell the Emperor what they said.

Now the swindlers asked for more money, more silk, and more gold, which they required for weaving. They kept it all for themselves, and not a thread came near the loom, but they continued, as before, working at the empty looms.

Soon afterward the Emperor sent another honest official to the weavers to see how they were getting on and if the cloth was nearly finished. Like the old minister, he looked and looked but could see nothing, as there was nothing to be seen.

“Is it not a beautiful piece of cloth?” said the two swindlers, showing and explaining the magnificent pattern, which, however, was not there at all.

“I am not stupid,” thought the man, “so it must be that I am unfit for my high post. It is ludicrous, but I must not let anyone know it.” So he praised the cloth, which he did

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2. *ludicrous* (lʊdɪˈkrʌs) adj.: ridiculous; laughable.
not see, and expressed his pleasure at the beautiful colors and the fine pattern. “Yes, it is quite enchanting,” he said to the Emperor.

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!” 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.
Throughout the night preceding the procession, the swindlers were up working, and they had more than sixteen candles burning. People could see how busy they were, getting the Emperor's new clothes ready. They pretended to take the cloth from the loom, they snipped the air with big scissors, they sewed with needles without any thread, and at last said: “Now the Emperor’s new clothes are ready!”

The Emperor, followed by all his noblest courtiers, then came in. Both the swindlers held up one arm as if they held something, and said: “See, here are the trousers! Here is the coat! Here is the cloak!” and so on. “They are all as light as a cobweb! They make one feel as if one had nothing on at all, but that is just the beauty of it.”

“Yes!” said all the courtiers, but they could not see anything, for there was nothing to see.

“Will it please Your Majesty graciously to take off your clothes?” said the swindlers. “Then we may help Your Majesty into the new clothes before the large mirror!”

The Emperor took off all his clothes, and the swindlers pretended to put on the new clothes, one piece after another. Then the Emperor looked at himself in the glass from every angle.
“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.

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 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 the chamberlains walked on, holding up the train which was not there at all.
**The Emperor’s New Clothes**

**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.”

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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.

8. 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.

4. The Emperor gives the swindlers money to weave new clothes.

5. A child says that the Emperor has nothing on.

9. The Emperor marches under a beautiful canopy.

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

6. 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.

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.

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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).

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.”

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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 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