The Emperor's New Clothes

Characters

Narrator 1  Old Official
Narrator 2  Young Official
Emperor  Villager 1
Emperor's Wife  Villager 2
Swindler 1  Young Boy
Swindler 2

Narrator 1: Many, many years ago there lived an emperor who loved new clothes. He spent all of his money on the latest hats, coats, gloves, jackets, trousers, and shoes. Of course, every article was made of the finest leather or the softest silk. Only the best materials would do! Even the hems on the emperor's robes were stitched with thread spun from gold.

Narrator 2: Every hour of every day, the emperor put on a new outfit. He couldn't bear for anyone—not even his loving wife—to see him dressed the same way twice. While other monarchs were busy with affairs of state, the emperor spent all his time riding about in his carriage, showing off each new suit of clothes. He sometimes went to the theater, but he was never interested in the play. He only wanted to be seen and admired for his spectacular fashion sense.

Narrator 2: An annual village festival was close at hand, and the emperor wanted a stunning new outfit.

Emperor: (to his wife) My dear, the procession along the town lane is next Saturday, and I don't have a thing to wear!

Emperor's Wife: Don't worry. I'm certain that the village tailor can design something you'd like.

Emperor: (rolling his eyes) Oh, please! The village tailor? He has already made hundreds of robes. Between you and me, I don't think he can come up with anything new. I want clothes that are really different, really stylish—something no one has seen before!
Narrator 1: It just so happened that two swindlers had come to the emperor's village. They had heard about the emperor's fascination with clothes, and had devised a way to cheat him out of a great deal of money.

Narrator 2: When they heard that the emperor wanted new clothes for the festival, the two swindlers wasted no time requesting an audience with the emperor and his wife.

Narrator 1: Posing as weavers, the swindlers strolled confidently into the palace.

Emperor: (to the swindlers) Welcome! We are honored to be in the presence of such famous world-class weavers. I understand you two are capable of creating the most exquisite cloth.

Swindler 1: (pretending to be modest) You are too kind, Your Majesty. My associate and I are simple weavers, though we do have, um, special skills.

Emperor's Wife: Special skills, eh? My husband requires a new suit of clothes for the upcoming festival. Would you be able to create something unique for him? Something truly spectacular?

Swindler 1: (smiling) Oh, most certainly, Your Majesty!

Narrator 2: The first swindler leaned over and whispered in the ear of his compatriot. He then turned and addressed the emperor.

Swindler 2: Your Highness, my partner and I can create a most exquisite robe for you. Not only are the colors and the patterns extraordinarily beautiful, but the material also has a rather remarkable attribute.

Emperor: (intrigued) Oh, do tell me! What is it?

Swindler 1: (smiling) This cloth is invisible to anyone who is incompetent or stupid.

Emperor: (to his wife) My dear, just imagine how valuable such cloth would be. If I had clothes made from such material, I would be able to see which of my officials is incompetent, and I would be able to tell the clever from the stupid!
Emperor's Wife: *(thinking)* Hmmm. It would be nice to know who in our court is smart and who is foolish . . .

Emperor: Then it is settled! *(to the swindlers)* I want you to begin immediately. I must have clothes made from your special cloth. Money is no object!

Narrator 2: And so the two swindlers set up their equipment in the weaving room and pretended to go to work, although there was nothing at all on the looms. They asked for the finest silk and the purest gold, all of which they hid away. The two worked for hours on the empty looms—often late into the night.

Narrator 1: With each passing minute, the emperor became more and more anxious.

Emperor: *(to himself)* I would really like to know how they are coming with the cloth. Of course, I shouldn’t go down and bother them myself . . . Perhaps I’ll send my honest old official. He will certainly be able to see the cloth: he is very clever, and he is quite competent in his position.

Narrator 2: So the emperor sent his honest official to the weaving room. When the old man entered the room, he saw the two swindlers working on an empty loom.

Old Official: *(to himself)* Goodness! I cannot see a thing!

Swindler 1: *(to Old Official)* Welcome, good sir! Tell us, how do you like the cloth?

Narrator 1: The swindlers pointed to the empty loom.

Swindler 2: Isn’t it a beautiful design?

Swindler 1: Aren’t the colors magnificent?

Old Official: *(to himself)* Is it possible that I am stupid? I have never thought so. Am I incompetent and unfit for my position? If anyone finds out, I’ll be out of a job! No one must ever know this. No, it will never do for me to say that I was unable to see the material.
Swindler 2: Excuse me, sir? You aren’t saying anything.

Old Official: *(raising his arms animatedly)* Oh, it is magnificent! It is the most exquisite of cloths! It is truly fabulous! Oh, my! The colors and the pattern are extraordinary! Yes, I will tell the emperor that I am very satisfied with it.

Narrator 2: The old official reported back to the emperor that the cloth was the finest imaginable. But the emperor was not satisfied. He sent another trusted official to see the cloth.

Narrator 1: The young official proceeded to the weaving room, where he saw the two swindlers working on an empty loom.

Young Official: *(to himself)* Oh no! The old official saw the cloth, and he said it was magnificent. But I can see nothing! Is it possible that I’m stupid? No one must know. I’ll simply go along with what the old official said. That way, no one will find out that I’m incompetent.

Narrator 2: The young official told the emperor that the cloth was the most incredible that he had ever seen.

Young Official: *(to the emperor)* Your Majesty, the cloth is truly spectacular. You will be much admired by your subjects at the festival.

Narrator 1: The swindlers pretended to work day and night. They cut through the air with scissors, and they sewed with unthreaded needles. Finally, on the morning of the procession, they announced that they were done.

Narrator 2: The emperor and his wife welcomed the weavers to the royal dressing room.

Swindler 1: *(to the emperor)* Behold! The clothes are finished.

Narrator 1: The two swindlers raised their arms as though they were holding something.

Swindler 2: Your Highness, just look at these trousers. And here is the jacket and your robe!
Swindler 1: The cloth is as light as feathers. You might think you don't have a thing on, but that is one of the wonderful qualities of such fine cloth.

Emperor's Wife: (to herself) I cannot see a thing, but I mustn't let anyone know. I will simply go along with what the two officials said. (to the Emperor) My darling! It is truly unique! It is indeed perfect for you!

Emperor: (to himself) Oh no! My wife sees the cloth, but I cannot! I never thought I was stupid. No one must know. (to his wife) Yes! The cloth is amazing! I cannot wait to wear it in the procession!

Narrator 2: The emperor took off all his clothes, and the swindlers pretended to dress him, piece by piece. Then the emperor turned and looked into the mirror.

Swindler 2: (fawning) Oh, Your Highness! The clothes suit you so well. You look positively magnificent.

Narrator 1: With his wife on his arm, the emperor made his way down the town lane. Each person who saw him pretended to be amazed by the emperor's new clothes.

Villager 1: Look at that pattern on the robe! Isn't it wonderful?

Villager 2: Yes, but look at the colors on the jacket. How bold!

Narrator 2: Suddenly, a young boy's voice was heard as the procession passed by.

Young Boy: But he doesn't have anything on!

Narrator 1: A hush came over the crowd.

Villager 1: The boy's right. The emperor has no clothes!

Villager 2: It's true! The emperor has no clothes!

Narrator 2: And so an entire village was humbled by the sincerity of a child. Each person learned that it is better to be alone and honest, than to be with a crowd—and false.