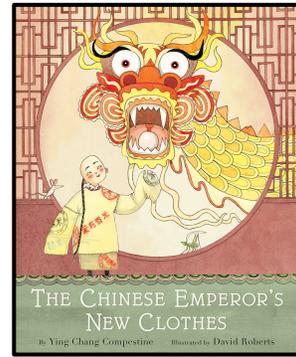


A Reader's Theater Script for  
***The Chinese Emperor's New Clothes***  
Written by Ying Chang Compestine, illustrated by  
David Roberts

Reader's Theater adaptation by Judy Freeman  
([www.JudyReadsBooks.com](http://www.JudyReadsBooks.com))

(For grades 2-5)



From **THE CHINESE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES**, written by Ying Chang Compestine, illustrated by David Roberts (Abrams, 2018). Text © 2018 by Ying Chang Compestine, illustrations © 2018 by David Roberts. Used with Permission from Abrams Books for Young Readers.

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**ROLES:** Narrators 1-5, Emperor Ming Da, Agriculture Minister 1, War Minister 2, Trade Minister 3, Old Tailor, Young Tailor, Child 1- 3, Citizen 1-3

**HELPFUL ADVICE:** When you photocopy this script, be sure to number the pages and run it single-sided so actors have an easier time keeping their places when it's time to turn the page. Double-sided scripts are confusing for children to follow. Be sure to explain to your students how stage directions are written in parentheses and in italics, to be followed by the actors but not to be read aloud. If you need more parts, add more narrators. (When you hand out parts, say, "You are Narrator 1 on pages 1-4, and you are Narrator 1 on pages 5-8," etc.)

**NARRATORS 1-5:** **Welcome!**

**NARRATOR 1:** Our story today comes from the picture book, *The Chinese Emperor's New Clothes*.

**NARRATOR 2:** It was written by Ying Chang Compestine and illustrated by David Roberts

**NARRATORS 1-5:** We are the narrators.

**MING DA:** I'm the boy emperor, Ming Da. (*bows to audience*)

**MINISTERS 1-3:** We are the emperor's ministers. (*bow to each other and rub hands together greedily*)

**TAILORS 1-2:** We are the emperor's tailors. (*pantomime sewing with needle and thread*)

**CHILDREN AND CITIZENS:** We are citizens of Ming Da's empire here in China. (*bow to Ming Da*)

**NARRATOR 3:** By now, you have probably heard the old folktale about the emperor's new clothes.

**NARRATOR 4:** The one where two sly tailors fool a vain emperor into believing he is wearing magical clothes, when in fact he is parading through town buck naked.

**NARRATOR 5:** The truth is that the story took place here in China, and without any tricky tailors.

**NARRATORS 1-5:** **Here is the real story.**

**MING DA:** When I was nine, I became the emperor of China. My ministers thought I was too young to rule. They took advantage of me.

**MINISTER 1:** Look at all this beautiful silk. (*rubs hands greedily*) The boy doesn't need all this! I can make myself the finest clothes with it.

**MINISTER 2:** Look at all these bags of rice in the warehouse. (*rubs hands greedily*) The boy doesn't need all this. I'll just sell them for him.

**MINISTER 3:** Oohh. Look at all this lovely gold and precious stones. (*rubs hands greedily*) The boy doesn't need all this. I'll just sell them for him.

**NARRATOR 1:** The three dishonest ministers robbed his treasury and kept the money for themselves.

**MING DA:** They left me with no cloth to dress the poor, no food to feed the hungry, and no money to run my kingdom.

**NARRATOR 2:** Ming Da knew if he fired his corrupt ministers, they would rebel against him.

**NARRATOR 3:** Day and night the boy emperor searched for a way to save his kingdom, but he couldn't think of anything.

**NARRATORS 1-5:** **UNTIL . . .**

**NARRATOR 4:** A month before Chinese New Year.

**NARRATOR 5:** Traditionally, people dress in new clothes on New Year's Day so evil spirits won't recognize them.

**MING DA:** I was gazing out my window at children begging on the streets.

**CHILD 1:** Please, kind sir, we are so hungry.

**MINISTER 1:** Get away from us, you little urchins.

**CHILD 2:** Could you give us some food for our bowls.

**MINISTER 2:** Certainly not. It is not our job to feed you.

**CHILD 1:** But we are so very hungry.

**MINISTER 3:** Move on, move on, I say!

**NARRATOR 1:** Just then, the emperor's loyal tailors arrived with cloth designs for his new clothes.

**OLD TAILOR:** Look at the new embroidered cloth we have brought you. You will look magnificent in the New Year's parade!

**YOUNG TAILOR:** See the dragon above the fluffy clouds. Notice the crow, monkey, and rat fleeing from him. Do you like it?

**NARRATOR 2:** Ming Da stared at the scene on the beautiful cloth. It gave him an idea.

**MING DA:** My ministers are stealing from me. Will you help me outwit them?

**TAILORS:** Of course!

**NARRATOR 3:** Ming Da told them his plan.

**NARRATOR 4:** The next day, Ming Da summoned his three ministers.

**MING DA:** I want to show you the magical new clothes these fine tailors made for me for the New Year's parade.

**MINISTER 1:** Magical?

**YOUNG TAILOR:** Yes! Honest people will see their true splendor, while the dishonest will see only burlap sacks.

**MINISTER 2:** Really?

**MINISTER 3:** Please show us.

**OLD TAILOR:** Certainly.

**NARRATOR 5:** Ming Da hopped off his throne and stepped behind a screen.

**NARRATOR 1:** The tailors helped him put on an old rice sack painted with ink and vegetable juices.

**NARRATOR 2:** When Ming Da stepped out from behind the screen wearing what looked like an old burlap rice sack, the ministers stared at the boy emperor, their mouths agape.

**MING DA:** Most excellent, don't you think? (*holds out arms*) Feel these sleeves!

**NARRATOR 3:** The trade minister broke into a cold sweat. He stroked the rough sack.

**MINISTER 3:** (*strokes Ming Da's sleeve*) Um, it's softer than the softest silk.

**MINISTER 2:** Th-th-the dr-dragon's eyes are so alive!

**YOUNG TAILOR:** We used the finest black pearls from the South China Sea.

**NARRATOR 4:** The ministers exclaimed their approval, each louder than the last.

**MINISTER 1:** Unbelievable!

**MINISTER 2:** Astonishing!

**MINISTER 3:** Magnificent!

**MING DA:** These fine tailors are at your service. Who wants magical new clothes?

**MINISTER 1:** (*raises hand*) I do!

**MINISTER 2:** (*raises hand*) So do I!

**MINISTER 3:** (*raises hand*) I do, too  
!

**MING DA:** Excellent! Tailors, get to work!

**OLD TAILOR:** We shall begin at once!

**NARRATOR 5:** So the tailors set up cutting tables, coffers, and trunks behind a large screen.

**NARRATOR 1:** They "worked" day and night!

**NARRATOR 2:** The news about the magical clothes spread like fire in a dry field.

**CITIZEN 1:** Did you hear about our new emperor's new clothes?

**CITIZEN 2:** Indeed, I did. His tailors say the robes they are making for the boy emperor and his ministers are not just lavish and beautiful—they are supposed to be magical as well.

**CITIZEN 3:** They say that only honest people will see the clothing’s true splendor.

**CITIZEN 1:** And if you are dishonest, you will see only burlap sacks.

**CITIZEN 2:** I’m an honest person. I’m sure I’ll see the true splendor of the robes.

**CITIZEN 3:** I can’t wait to see the four of them at the New Year’s Day parade!

**NARRATOR 3:** Soon came the fitting for the ministers.

**NARRATOR 4:** Ming Da skipped his daily visit to the orphanage and hid behind a screen to watch.

**NARRATOR 5:** The Trade Minister arrived first. The young tailor held up a rice sack.

**YOUNG TAILOR:** See how the rubies and pearls in the crow’s eyes and beak sparkle in the light?

**MINISTER 3:** *(glares at tailors)* Why is there only one crow?

**OLD TAILOR:** We ran out of jewels.

**MINISTER 3:** I will supply all the jewels you need. Just make mine more splendid than the others!

**NARRATOR 1:** He stormed out without even trying on his new clothes.

**NARRATOR 2:** When the War Minister entered, the young tailor held up a rice sack.

**YOUNG TAILOR:** Don’t you love the extravagant details of the clever monkey?

**NARRATOR 3:** The minister squinted his eyes at the drawing of a sly monkey stealing gold.

**MINISTER 2:** It is unbelievable! Let me try it on!

**NARRATOR 4:** The tailors helped him into his robe and tightly wrapped a straw rope around his chubby waist.

**OLD TAILOR:** How does it fit?

**MINISTER 2:** *(gasps for air and waves his arms about)* Can you make it bigger?

**YOUNG TAILOR:** Yes, but we ran out of silk.

**MINISTER 2:** I will pay with the purest gold. Just make mine more splendid than the others!

**NARRATOR 5:** When the Agricultural Minister entered, the old tailor was busy trimming the bottom of a rice sack with scissors.

**NARRATOR 1:** The minister looked at it from all angles. Beads of sweat rolled down his face.

**OLD TAILOR:** *(holds up the rice sack)* See how the rat's shiny eyes look alive?

**MINISTER 1:** Yes, it's astonishing!

**NARRATOR 2:** The minister stared at the drawing of a long-whiskered rat stealing rice.

**NARRATOR 3:** The tailors helped him into his robe.

**YOUNG TAILOR:** How does it fit?

**NARRATOR 4:** The minister looked down at his bare legs and rubbed his knobby knees.

**MINISTER 1:** Can you make it longer?

**OLD TAILOR:** We ran out of silk.

**MINISTER 1:** I will pay you with the best rice that you can trade. Just make mine more splendid than the others!

**NARRATOR 5:** In the days that followed, the ministers delivered baskets of precious gems, gold, and rice to the tailors who passed them along to the boy emperor.

**MING DA:** With the jewels and the gold, I was able to buy cloth to dress the poor.

**CITIZEN 1:** Thank you, kind sir.

**CITIZEN 1:** And such nice fabric.

**CITIZEN 3:** Now we will have new clothes for the New Year's parade!

**MING DA:** With the rice, I was able to feed the hungry children.

**CHILDREN 1-3:** **Food!**

**CHILD 1:** Thank you, kind Emperor.

**CHILD 2:** We were so very hungry.

**CHILD 3:** We will not forget this.

**NARRATOR 1:** Soon came the morning of the New Year's Parade.

**NARRATOR 2:** When Ming Da entered the hall in his new clothes, he found his ministers examining each other's outfits and loudly praising each other.

**MINISTER 3:** Unbelievable!

**MINISTER 2:** Astonishing!

**!**

**MINISTER 1:** Magnificent!

**MING DA:** You all look splendid! Let the parade begin!

**NARRATOR 3:** Lion dancers led the way.

**NARRATOR 4:** Firecrackers popped and exploded, martial artists punched and kicked, and acrobats jumped and tumbled.

**NARRATOR 5:** At last the three ministers came marching behind Ming Da, proudly showing off their new robes to the crowd.

**CITIZEN 1:** *(looking confused)* Oh, those robes are, um, spectacular.

**CITIZEN 2:** So true. And such beautiful fabric!

**CITIZEN 3:** Not to mention the lovely design!

**CHILD 1:** Can you not see? They're wearing rice sacks!

**NARRATOR 1:** All the children roared with laughter.

**NARRATOR 2:** They sang and pointed.

**CHILDREN:** Itchy sacks! Itchy sacks!

**NARRATOR 3:** The rest of the crowd joined in

**CHILDREN AND CITIZENS:** **Ha ha ha! Itchy sacks! Itchy sacks!**

**MING DA:** *(smiles and waves)*

**MINISTER 2:** *(to Ministers 1 & 3)* You two *are* wearing rice sacks!

**MINISTER 3:** So are *you*!

**MINISTER 1:** **We have been tricked!**

**MINISTERS 1-3:** **RUN!**

**NARRATOR 4:** The ministers fled China.

**NARRATOR 5:** Ming Da replaced them with honest counselors and ruled for many years.

**MING DA:** My people were happy, well fed, and very well dressed.

**NARRATOR 1:** The emperor marched through town in a rice sack to save his country.

**NARRATOR 2:** I don't know how people ended up with that old folktale about two sly tailors fooling a vain emperor.

**EVERYONE:** **Because THIS was the REAL STORY!**