IDEAS PACKET

Prepared for the Blackfriars of Agnes Scott College production of “The Emperor’s New Clothes” by Meg Bryant Davenport and Jeanine L. Henry

Directed by Shannon Allen

Scenic, Lighting, and Costume Designs by Dudley Sanders

Performance Dates February 3-5, 2000

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A Note To Teachers

Thank you for your interest in the Theatre program at Agnes Scott College. Your participation actively involves you in several facets of life on our campus. Attendance at one of our productions brings you into contact with Blackfriars, the oldest theatrical production organization in the Atlanta area, the production season of the Theatre program, the results of the curricular offerings of the Department of Theatre and Dance, and the grounds and facilities of Agnes Scott College. Providing this packet offers one means of demonstrating our appreciation.

The items in the packet reflect themes drawn from the script (selfishness, vanity, honest) as well as some ideas related to theatre (art, interpretation, creativity). Whenever possible the items are grouped according to category. However, many items may fall into multiple categories. Teachers should take the categories as representative, not exhaustive. You may wish to shuffle items among categories or create your own.

When reviewing the Ideas Packet for “The Emperor's New Clothes,” please take the name literally. The collection of questions and statements that follow should serve as a source of ideas to help stimulate the imagination of your students. The ideas generated from the packet could serve as the basis for a wide range of activities including classroom discussions, creative writing opportunities, art projects, and storytelling. You may even elect to stage your own version of our production.

Similarly, please do not feel limited by the items in the Ideas Packet. Our intent involves providing you with material that will expand the world of your classroom, not limit it. For example, some items may seem more appropriate for use prior to attending the performance while others may facilitate post-production activities. If a given question or activity suggests a new direction, explore it as you see fit. Feel free to add, subtract or alter items as you desire.

In short, the Ideas Packet is meant as a beginning, not the end. You remain in the best position to gauge the level and direction of your curriculum. The pages that follow represent a tool. Like any tool, each user must find the appropriate technique for its use.
Emperor’s New Clothes
Character Analysis

The Emperor: Enthusiastic, bouncy, and childlike. The Emperor is unbelievably vain, selfish, naïve, and gullible. She has a terribly fragile ego almost to the point of being babyish. Students will love her because she’s the biggest kid in the whole play. She’s the one that makes a change at the end of the play so students need to understand, and we hope, relate to her transformation. She needs to be like a kid that throws tantrums, pouts, jumps and plays and is full of energy.

Minister Puckering: Plays “yes man” to the Emperor, always saying what she thinks the Emperor wants to hear. Minister Puckering worked hard to get this job and plans to keep it the same way she got it, by always agreeing with the Emperor. She has a strange quirk—she puckers when she gets nervous. She is a royal servant and carries a hand mirror around her neck to hold up to the Emperor and remind her of how great she looks. Minister Puckering has the opening line of play and has the responsibility of setting the fun tone right away. She is the minister in charge of making announcements to the kingdom so she must have a great booming voice. She is in charge of getting the audience to do the drum noise, so she is quite a drummer. She is in charge of the best dressed list for the Emperor. She truly is a servant and in the end has to bring the phony weavers Kool-Aid on a silver tray.

Minister Timely: Punctual, always watching the clock. Tries to keep the Emperor on schedule, but without much success. Minister Timely takes her job too seriously and that is part of her charm. She is always carrying a clip board and a pencil. She wears a stop watch around her neck and keeps up with all the Emperor’s appointments accurately. She is in charge of getting the audience to do the horns, so she is quite a good noise maker. She has a sarcastic tone, especially when dealing with Puckering and later with Sly.

Sylvester Schemes (AKA Sly): The leader of the con-artist duo. Sly is a tricky character with impeccable timing. She must be convincing and have persuasive speech. All her thought processes must be transparent to the audience. The audience must know immediately that she is bad news. Her dress, her voice, her movement, everything tips them off that she should not be trusted. At times she may even look or sound a little evil.

Demetrius Witt (AKA Dim): The slow partner in of the con-artist duo. Dim is really the innocent one in all this mess. She just tries to keep up with her sister, Sly. She’s not too bright, but she does try hard to keep thinking and keep up with what’s going on. Fortunately she’s slow, silly and goofy, and loads of fun to watch.
Emperor’s New Clothes

Script Analysis

The Emperor, vain, selfish, and giddy, feels that her appearance is the determining factor in her fitness for her position as Emperor. The better she looks the better job she does as Emperor and the more confidence she gains from her loyal subjects.

She has two ministers to keep her in line. Minister Puckering is in charge of making sure the Emperor gets everything she wants. She is basically a “yes man” so to speak. Minister Timely is in charge of making sure the Emperor makes it to all of her engagements on time. She takes her job too seriously. The Emperor is only concerned about how she looks and receiving surprise gifts.

At the beginning of the play the Emperor receives a tie as a gift and insists on having a parade to show it off and to remind her loyal subjects of how great she is (vanity at its finest). At the end of the parade the con-artist duo enters. They see the Emperor and the crowds. They ask Puckering what the big deal is and Puckering explains that the Emperor was just showing everyone her new tie.

The con artists—Sly, the brains of the operation, and Dim, the not very bright partner—plan to scam the Emperor out of a lot of money by pretending to make her super special invisible clothes. Sly pretends to be smart while and Dim is just plain silly, rather than outright stupid. The con artists promise that the fabric they will use is so special that anyone who can actually see the fabric is honest and fit for their job. Consequently anyone who is unable to see the Emperor’s new clothes is surely not an honest person and ultimately not fit for their job.

The con artists propose to weave the invisible outfit. The proposition is readily accepted by the ever-vain Emperor. Large sums of money are exchanged and the con artists, in their guise as weavers, are invited into the castle to do their weaving.

The Emperor wants the outfit to be a surprise, but she is nervous. What if she can’t see the fabric? What if she is unfit for her job? She plans to have the ministers describe the fabric in detail, so just in case she can’t see the outfit she can pretend to see it and nobody will know that she is unfit to be Emperor. She sends her ministers in, one at a time, to see how the con artists (now weavers) are doing and to describe her special new clothes to her.

The ministers are in a quandary because neither one of them can see the fabric. They have to decide whether to be honest or pretend they are honest and lie about being able to see the clothes. Eventually, with the help of the audience, the Emperor realizes that they have been cheated by the con artists and that there is no fabric and no new clothes. In the end the Emperor and ministers learn a valuable lesson about honesty and vanity, and the two con artists are punished.
Emperor’s New Clothes
The Lessons

High entertainment factor is essential, but the lessons are ultimately the key. Honesty, vanity, and selfishness are all topics addressed in this play. This play asks whether honesty or vanity and selfishness are traits that are good to have. The play answers this question and says that honesty is the best policy and vanity or selfishness are not cherished character traits, by making the vain characters look silly and by punishing the dishonest characters. The Emperor ends up in her underwear in front of everyone and the ministers and the con artists are forced into honest manual labor.

1. If you were Emperor, what kind of Emperor would you be? What would you do? How would you feel? How would you behave?

2. What does it mean to be selfish? Vain?

3. Do you know someone who is selfish? Vain?

4. How do vain people behave? Do you like to be around them?

5. What does it mean to be honest?

6. Do you know someone who is honest?

7. How do honest people behave? Do you like to be around them?

8. Can you think of a time when you were vain? What did you do? How did you feel?

9. Can you think of a time when you were selfish? Did you act silly? How did you feel?

10. Can you think of a time when you were honest? Was that a good choice? How did you feel?
Emperor’s New Clothes
Production Aspects

The directing style:

Each character should constantly be aware of the audience. There should never be a fourth wall. The audience should always be a part of the play from every sneaky plan, to each fun discovery and funny decision.

1. Do you know what a fourth wall is?
   It is the imaginary wall that separates the audience from the action on stage. In some plays the actors pretend that there is no audience.

2. Have you every watched TV?
   It seems like they don't know you are watching. But in this play the characters are aware of the audience and talk to them.

3. How does it feel to be a part of the action on stage? Do you like it when the characters talk to you?

4. How is watching television or a movie different from watching a play? Which do you like better? Why?

The scenic design:

This is a kid's world since the Emperor is the biggest kid ever.

1. What aspects of the set, the paint, the props, etc. help make this a kid’s world?

2. Can you name a few of the props you saw on stage?

3. Why do the characters need props?

4. Why is the set important?
The costumes:

1. Why are costumes important?
2. Did the costumes help emphasize the Emperor’s view of a childlike world?
3. Did they match the characters? How?

The acting:

1. Describe what it means to act on stage in a play.
2. Did the characters seem real? Did they seem more like a fairy tale?
3. Did the characters look like they were having fun? How did that make you feel?