



# CHARACTER BUILDING ACTIVITIES

## SOMMER-TIME STORIES

### THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES

#### Story Description

The proud emperor loves to parade before his people with beautiful clothes. When a court official suggests paying the soldiers more money so they don't have to beg for food, the furious emperor is ready to throw him in jail.

Now everyone fears saying anything displeasing to the emperor. When two swindlers decide to take advantage of him by selling him invisible clothes with special powers, none of the emperor's advisors dare to tell him the truth. The emperor parades through the city in his underwear until one young lad is brave enough to speak honestly and opens the emperor's eyes. In this retelling of the Hans Christian Andersen classic folktale, the emperor learns to value honest advisors, even when the truth is unpleasant.



#### Major Objective

To define and present the following character traits so they can be integrated into the life of each student:

- Courage: the determination to do something in spite of being fearful
- Honesty: being free from fraud, deception, cheating, or lying
- Humility: marked by being submissive and teachable, not arrogant or proud; unpretentious

#### Story Time Interaction

Read the story, *The Emperor's New Clothes*, and then write these three character traits on the interactive whiteboard: courage, honesty, and humility. Define and discuss these character traits.

Discuss the characters:

The emperor	Rex	Max
The prime minister	The townspeople	
Fredrick	Fredrick's parents	

#### Activity Objectives

To use the following activities to reinforce the character traits of courage, honesty, and humility. To guide students to consider the importance of assertiveness, fairness, listening, proper work ethic, respect for leaders, responsibility, self-control, and unselfishness.

## **Make an Explosion**

Remind students that pride puffs a person up and will eventually explode. In other words, the pride will eventually cause a person's destruction. Here is a science experiment to help students remember that pride is harmful. This experiment should be conducted outside. You will need a quart size freezer bag that zips, 3 t. baking soda,  $\frac{1}{4}$  c. warm water,  $\frac{1}{2}$  c. vinegar, and a tissue. Put  $\frac{1}{4}$  c. of warm/hot water into the bag. Add  $\frac{1}{2}$  c. vinegar. Put 3 teaspoons of baking soda into the middle of the tissue and fold the tissue around it. Quickly put the tissue with the baking soda into the bag that contains the water/vinegar solution. Zip it completely shut. Place it on the ground and step back about 10-12 feet. The bag will begin to expand and expand, and then the bag will explode!

## **A Bag of Weeds**

Bring in a bag of weeds or show pictures of weedy gardens. Explain to students that weeds will overtake good plants if allowed to. In fact, weeds will choke out flowers and grass if nothing is done to prevent them. People must either dig out weeds by the roots or put weed killer on them in order to get rid of them. Pride is like a weed. If left to grow, it will choke out and overcome good character traits. Encourage students to examine their lives for pride and determine to get rid of it. In other words, they should not brag or boast, they should not put anyone down, they should not be selfish, and they should not compare themselves to others. They should accept correction and admit it when they are wrong. It is not easy to do these things, but we must all try.

## **Overconfidence Hurts—Ouch!**

Overconfidence (a form of pride) is a killer. Any coach will tell you that. A really good team can go into a game with a team that is not very good. If the good team is really confident that they are going to win, they can and probably will lose the game. They let their guard down, they get sloppy, and they lose their focus. Instead of focusing on doing the important things that help them win, they focus on themselves and try to show off. A team that is not very good can do very well by focusing on the important fundamentals and on what the coach tells them to do, and in this way may win the game! This is even true in warfare. It is known as the victory disease. If a commander wins a number of battles, he may get overconfident. This can cause him to disregard information that his men are giving him. It can also cause him to think that he is invincible and that normal procedures are not necessary. For example, in World War II, Japan attacked the U. S. at Pearl Harbor and then won a number of battles, so instead of defending themselves when they should have, Japan had four aircraft carriers sunk which hurt them immeasurably.

Another example is the overconfident Hitler who in 1941 declared war on the United States and also invaded Russia without considering the Russian winter or the mud season which made traveling almost impossible.

Also, in the United States in 1876, the entire 7th Cavalry of Lt. Colonel Custer was almost completely wiped out by the Sioux Indians at the Battle of the Little Bighorn. This was largely due to the fact that Custer expected a duplication of a recent battle

victory. Custer ignored the warnings by his Crow scouts. He thought they would be fighting about 800 Indians, but in reality the number was between 1,500 and 2,500. Also, worth noting is the fact that Custer turned down the use of a Gatling gun and the reinforcement of an additional battalion. He stated that he didn't need the reinforcement and that his 7th Cavalry "could handle anything." This battle has become known as Custer's last stand. Two hundred sixty-eight men were killed out of 700 men, including Custer and over half of the 7th Cavalry.

### **Contrast a Humble Person and a Proud Person**

Students will discuss the difference between being humble and proud. Students will make a list contrasting what a humble person might say and what a proud person might say. Write the list on the interactive whiteboard. Be sure to include what a humble and proud person would say when they receive a compliment.

### **Fake Jewels**

Go to a craft store and buy some fake jewels. They will look like rubies, diamonds, sapphires, etc. Cover each one individually with mud, making a mud ball (let them harden and they will resemble a clod of dirt when dry). Place them in a box. Tell the children you have a gift for them. Open the box and offer them one. The kids will probably exclaim that they don't want dirt. Then put one in a glass of water and let the dirt dissolve off. Show the jewel to the students. Discuss the fact that to say that something is real when it is really fake is lying. How did the students feel about getting dirt instead of a real gift? They probably did not feel very good about it. (Explain that you were not lying, but giving an example and quickly showed them that the jewels were not real).

### **Do You Want to Drink Clear, Fresh Water or Black, Murky Water?**

Show a glass of water to the students. Explain that this glass of water represents a person who has not told a lie. Unfortunately, the person wanted to get out of trouble and told a lie. (Put one drop of food coloring in the water). Put another drop in of varying colors each time the person lies. As more and more drops go in of the various colors, the water will turn dark and ugly. Explain that this is how it is in life—more and more lies continue to make more problems and make an ugly reputation for a person.

### **Role Play**

Have two students act out a role play. One student will be a cashier and the other will buy a book. When he receives his change, he gets back \$5 dollars too much. He tells the cashier, "You gave me \$5 too much. Here it is." The cashier says, "Thank you! I would have had to put the money back out of my own money. Thank you so much! I'm raising a family by myself, and every dollar matters!"

For the second role play, two students will pretend to be friends. The first says to the other, "I heard you were telling people that I don't like Mary. That's not true. Did you say that?" The second student answers by saying, "Well, I might have said

something like that." The first student says, "We can't be friends if you are going to be lying about me." The second student replies, "I'm sorry. I will tell them that you did not say that about Mary. I want to be your friend. I should not have said that." The first student then replies, "OK. I forgive you." Talk about how important it is not to talk about other people; that is called gossiping and is wrong. In addition, the second student was wrong for lying. If she continues to lie and gossip, she will have a hard time keeping friends. No one will be able to trust her, and we must be able to trust our friends.

## **Don't Wear Down your Conscience**

Discuss how it took a lot of courage for Fredrick to be able to stand up to the emperor and tell him the truth. The emperor was known for having a bad temper and for getting upset when anyone told him something he didn't like. In addition, the emperor was very proud of his clothes, so he was sure to be sensitive about any criticism of them. However, Fredrick's parents had taught him the importance of always telling the truth, even in difficult situations. You must remember that as you tell the truth, you build up a reputation for being truthful, but if you continually lie, you become known as a liar. When adults know you can be trusted to tell the truth, they will give you more responsibility and opportunities to do things. Remember, you do not want to trust someone who lies, and neither does anyone else, so tell the truth! It takes courage, but you can do it!

Explain that we each have a little voice inside us called our conscience that helps us know what is right and what is wrong. Your conscience is like a triangle inside your heart. If you do something bad, the triangle spins around and hits the inside of your heart, telling you not to do that bad thing. That's why sometimes when you do something you know is wrong, you feel really bad and can't stop thinking about it, worrying and wishing you hadn't done it. However, if you keep on doing wrong things, the corners of the triangle wear off and don't hurt your heart as much. This makes it easier for you to continue making bad decisions which is not good. You need the sharp corners of your conscience to help you make good decisions. Have students trace and cut out a heart and triangle from construction paper. Use red for the heart and yellow for the triangle. The triangle should just barely fit inside the heart, so that it can hit the edges of the heart when spun around. Attach the triangle to the heart using a metal brad so that it can spin around. This will help remind students the importance of doing right and not wearing off the corners of their conscience.

## **Wearing Costumes**

Explain that wearing beautiful clothes made the emperor feel special. Unfortunately, he did not realize that what is on the inside is more important than the clothes he wore. To illustrate this point, have about five of the students dress up in costumes that you provide. Some examples could be: a doctor, a fireman, a policeman, a clown, a pirate, a queen, a maid, a ballerina, or a cowboy. After each is identified as a doctor or queen, etc., ask if that is who the child really is. The students will answer, "No!" Then continue to explain that just like the clothes or costume did not really make Susan a doctor or a queen, clothes do not make anyone into something and do not make anyone better than someone else. What really matters is

who you are on the inside, and we can see who people are on the inside by looking at what they do. Your actions show others the kind of person you really are. Do you help others, even someone who is unpopular? Do you tell the truth even when you may get in trouble or look foolish? Do you do your job, even when you don't want to? Are you kind to others even when they aren't kind to you? Do you obey and show respect to your parents and teachers? Do you take care of your things? Do you do the right thing even when everyone else is doing something that seems like fun, yet you know it is wrong? All of these things and others like them show people who you really are; it is not your clothes or your face or where you live that says who you are. Who are you inside? What are you doing and showing people with your actions?

### **Tying It All Together**

Always remember that the character traits you have inside are what's important. If you are honest, fair, loyal, humble, kind, and diligent, you will go far in life. What you wear, what you have, or where you live are not what really matter. Sometimes it can be very difficult to do the right thing, but doing right will help you be successful in all that you do.