



CHARACTER BUILDING LESSONS

SOMMER-TIME STORIES

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THE EMPEROR AND THE SEED



Story Description

The richly colored illustrations in this book beautifully reflect the majesty of this timeless retelling of this ancient oriental tale. When an aging emperor begins the search for his successor, he wisely listens to an elderly advisor and creates a test to find a courageous boy of character and integrity. To choose a worthy successor, he gathers seven of the best students in the land and gives them each a seed to cultivate and return to the palace.

Even with careful research and tending, Ming's seed does not grow. While many urge him to use another seed, he refuses to be dishonest. When it is time to return the pots, six students display vibrant plants, but Ming's pot is barren. Does Ming even have a chance to become the next emperor? This clever fable highlights the importance of honesty, courage, and integrity.

Main Character Traits

Courage/Honesty/Listening to Good Advice

Other Character Traits

Wisdom, integrity, responsibility, respect for parents, and diligence

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Responsibility, Diligence	Respect for Parents

Listening to Good Advice, Wisdom

Once there was an emperor who ruled a great kingdom. One day he said to his wife, “We are getting old, and we do not have a son to become the next emperor. What should we do?”

“Why don’t you ask your trusted advisors?” suggested the queen.

“Excellent!” exclaimed the emperor.

The emperor called his seven most trusted advisors. When the seven advisors came, they bowed before him and asked, “How may we serve you?”

“As you know,” the emperor said, “I have no son. I have called you to advise me on the best way to choose a ruler for our kingdom after I am gone.”....

When the others were finished, Sun Han, the oldest advisor spoke, “For our kingdom to prosper, we need an emperor who is wise, courageous, and honest.”

“I agree,” said the emperor. “Just because a man is a relative or wealthy or the general’s son, does not mean he is courageous and a lover of truth and wisdom. But how can we find such a young boy whom we can train as the kingdom’s future emperor?”

“Your Majesty,” said Sun Han, “I suggest the advisors get seven of the best students in the kingdom and give them a test.”

“What kind of test?” asked the emperor.

“It is a test that no one will know, but you, the emperor,” said Sun Han.

“Come and tell me,” said the emperor.

Sun Han went before the emperor and whispered into his ear what he should do.

“Excellent!” exclaimed the emperor. “This test will show who is courageous and a lover of truth and wisdom.” Immediately, the emperor ordered his advisors, “Each of you is to go to the towns and villages that you rule and choose a bright, courageous student who loves truth and wisdom. I will give you one month to find such a lad. I will give a test to the boys you choose.

The emperor demonstrated wisdom by being willing to listen to his advisors. Furthermore, he showed wisdom by looking for a future emperor who would be wise, honest, and courageous.

Responsibility, Diligence

When the boys returned to their homes, each hoped to become the next emperor. They went to the library and spent much time researching about the best soils and the right amount of water so their seed would become the greatest plant.

Ming, one of the boys, carefully planted the seed and watered it with the best water. Eagerly he watched for the plant to sprout. But nothing happened!

After two months, Ming heard that the other boys' seeds were growing. "This seed should have sprouted in one month," Ming said to his dad. "Maybe my soil is bad. I'm going back to the library and do more research. I'll try another soil."

After another two months, the seed still did not sprout. "Dad," groaned Ming, "what can I do? My seed still isn't growing."

Dad felt sorry for Ming. "You have done lots of research and have carefully obeyed the emperor's command," Dad said. "You have done your best. There's not much else you can do."

Ming showed responsibility by doing all that he could to grow the seed. He researched and took excellent care of the seed. He was diligent in taking care of it despite the fact that he saw no results. Sometimes we become discouraged if we don't see results, but we need to continue doing our best no matter what.

Honesty, Courage, Integrity

Word spread that Ming's seed was not growing. When one of his friends looked at his pot, he asked, "Why don't you plant another seed? No one will ever know."

"I can't do that!" exclaimed Ming. "That would be cheating. The emperor warned us not to use another seed."

In Ming's school many of the students laughed at him and called him names for not planting another seed. "Why are you so foolish?" a boy yelled out. "The emperor would never know if you used another seed."

"It's not right," replied Ming. "I will not use another seed. That would be dishonest."

"Then be a fool!" yelled the boy. "But you can be sure of one thing. You'll *never* be the next emperor!"

Ming showed amazing courage and integrity when he refused to cheat and use another seed, especially when the other students were laughing at him. Many times in life we must do the right thing even when others make fun of us.

Respect for Parents

Now Ming hated to go to school because of being teased. "What's wrong with me?" Ming asked his mother. "I can't make my seed grow."

"There's nothing wrong with you," Mom said. "You tried your best. That's all you can do."

"When the emperor calls us back to the palace," said Ming, "I'm not going! I'm a big, big failure! I'm *not* bringing an empty pot!"

Dad put his arm around Ming and said, "You never have to be ashamed when you do what is right. I want you to go to the emperor with your empty

pot.”

“Okay,” whispered Ming. “I’ll bring my empty pot. But I know I’m a big, big failure.”....

When the emperor came to Ming’s pot, he stopped and asked, “What happened here?”

With his head down, Ming walked slowly from the back of the room. When he came to the emperor, he picked up his pot, bowed, and with tears flowing said, “Your Majesty, I have tried my best to do what you told us. I went to the library and searched for the best soil to make your seed grow. I watered the soil when it needed water. But the seed would not grow. Many of my friends made fun of me. I am so sorry for being such a big, big failure.”

“Son, what is your name?” asked the emperor.

“My name is Ming.”

“Men and women,” the emperor proclaimed, “I am happy to say that I have found the next emperor.” Then after a long pause, “It is Ming!”

Everyone was in shock, above all, Ming. Then the emperor explained, “The seeds I gave to the boys had all been cooked. They could not grow. Only this courageous lad, in spite of being made fun of by his friends, refused to cheat and plant another seed. Ming, you have shown that you love truth, and you are courageous and honest. I ask you and your family to come to the throne.”....

Ming the next ruler. Ming, true to his word, became a courageous and wise emperor. Everyone loved him, for they knew that he would always be honest and do what was best for the kingdom.

Even though Ming felt like a failure, he went to the palace because of his respect for his parents. Once he was before the emperor, he admitted his failure. Then the emperor announced that only Ming had been courageous and honest. It had been difficult to do, but Ming’s honesty had paid off; he would become the next emperor!

Questions

1. Why did the Emperor want to find a boy to be the next emperor? *The Emperor was getting old and he did not have a son to take his place.*

2. Who did the first three advisors suggest as the future emperor? *The first advisor suggested the Emperor’s nearest relative. The second advisor suggested the son of the richest man. The third advisor suggested the general’s son.*

3. What qualities did the Emperor want the next emperor to have? *The next emperor should be wise, courageous, and honest.*

4. How did the Emperor come up with a test? *Sun Han suggested a test to the emperor.*

5. How did the Emperor's advisors choose boys for the test? *The advisors went to their villages and found the wisest and most courageous boys who also loved truth.*

6. What did the advisors think about the Emperor's plan? *They questioned the wisdom of the plan.*

7. What did some people in the kingdom think about the Emperor's plan? *At first they thought it must be wise, but when they heard what it was, they thought it was foolish.*

8. What did the seven young boys have to do? *They were to take a container with a seed and try to grow it for one year. Then the Emperor would examine the plants and determine a new emperor.*

9. When the boys got home, what did they do? *They went to the library and researched the best soils and how much water to use.*

10. After two months how did the boys' plants do? *Everyone's plant was growing well except Ming's plant which had not sprouted at all.*

11. Since Ming's seed had not sprouted at all, what advice did his father give him? *His father said, "You have done lots of research and have carefully obeyed the Emperor's command. You have done your best. There's not much else you can do."*

12. What did friends and schoolmates suggest that Ming do? *They suggested that Ming plant another seed.*

13. What did Ming's friends and schoolmates call him when he refused to plant another seed? *They called him foolish.*

14. Why didn't Ming plant another seed? *He felt that doing so would be cheating and dishonest.*

15. Why didn't Ming want to go to school? *He didn't want to face being teased by the other students.*

16. Why didn't Ming want to take his empty pot before the Emperor?

He felt like a failure and was ashamed that he wasn't able to grow the seed.

17. How did the six boys feel when the Emperor announced the winner and why? *The six boys were ashamed because now everyone knew that they had cheated.*

18. How did Ming feel about winning? *He was shocked and happy.*

19. Why hadn't any of the seeds grown? *The seeds had been cooked, so they could not grow.*

20. How was Ming rewarded? *He and his family moved to the palace for his training, and eventually he became the new emperor.*

21. What kind of emperor did Ming become? *He became a courageous, wise, and honest emperor who always did what was best for the kingdom.*