Lesson 6

The Emperor’s New Clothes*

Once there was an emperor who was very vain. He spent hour after hour peering at himself in the mirror. Whenever he got new clothes, he would gather his ministers around him so that they could tell him how wonderful he looked.

One day, two men came to see the emperor. They said they were master tailors. They told the emperor they could make him a suit of clothes so magnificent that everything else he owned would seem drab. The cloth would be so unusual that only those with the most refined taste would be able to see it. The emperor was foolish enough to believe them. He agreed to pay whatever they asked.

The “tailors” started work at once. Every day the emperor sent his ministers to check on their progress. Of course, they could see perfectly well that the crafty pair were only pretending to weave the cloth, and cut it, and stitch it. But they didn’t dare disclose the truth to the emperor. Disagreeing with the emperor would be like confessing that they had poor taste. They felt uneasy about lying, but they believed they had no choice. They told the emperor only what he wanted to hear: that his new clothes were the most exquisite they had ever seen.

Finally the two scoundrels told the emperor that their work was complete. Excited by the news, the emperor announced that the next day would be a public holiday. He intended to walk through the streets of the town in his new clothes so that everyone could admire him. The next morning, the “tailors” carefully laid out the emperor’s new clothes and helped him dress. The ministers gathered around to watch. And when at last the emperor stood proudly before them, turning this way and that, they forced out loud exclamations of delight. But of course the emperor was wearing only his underwear.

Meanwhile, officers of the palace guard had been up since before dawn. They were busy making sure that the townspeople turned out to applaud the emperor as he went by. Now the entire town lined the streets to see him. Under the watchful eyes of the officers, the people cheered and waved flags. The emperor loved every minute of it. But then something unexpected

* This passage is a retelling of the popular fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen.
happened. Above the roar of the crowd, the emperor heard a child’s voice. A little boy shouted, “Look! The emperor has no clothes!” The cry was at once taken up by the crowd. “THE EMPEROR HAS NO CLOTHES! THE EMPEROR HAS NO CLOTHES!”

The emperor looked down at himself and saw that it was true. He knew that he had been tricked. Feeling very foolish, he ran back to the palace as fast as he could, the jeers of the crowd ringing in his ears.

► Answer each of the following questions in the form of a sentence. If a question does not contain a vocabulary word from the lesson’s word list, use one in your answer. Use each word only once.

1. What did the emperor do with his time?

2. Why might the emperor have been tempted to get rid of all his old clothes after he talked to his tailors?

3. How would you describe refined taste?

4. Why was it impossible to judge how the tailors’ work was progressing?

5. Why does the passage refer to the two tailors as scoundrels?

6. Who finally disclosed the truth to the emperor?
7. Why were the ministers uneasy?
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8. What did the ministers tell the emperor?
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9. What do you think the ministers thought of the two tailors?
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10. What do you think was the tailors’ intention in tricking the emperor?
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11. Why did the ministers exclaim in delight?
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12. Why do you think the child might have deserved the crowd’s applause?
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13. Why did the entire town show up to see the emperor?
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14. Why did the emperor run back to the palace?
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15. What vocabulary word describes the emperor perfectly? Why?
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• The adjective **drab** is also the name of a color—a light, green-brown. (U.S. soldiers wear olive-drab clothing.) **Drab** is also a noun meaning “a small amount,” but it is found only in the phrase “in dribs and drabs,” meaning a little bit at a time. (Instead of paying me the money all at once, they gave it to me in dribs and drabs.)

• **Vain** and **vein** are homophones. They sound alike but have different meanings and spellings. A **vein** is a blood vessel that carries blood to the heart.

• **As well as being a verb, peer** is also a noun. It means “an equal; a person of the same rank or position as another.” For example, “Those sixth graders are my peers. We all are in the same class.” Or, to say that Daniel Webster had no peer as a public speaker is to say that no one could equal him in the art of public speaking. A **peer** is also the name for a member of the British House of Lords.

Like **vain** and **vein,** note that **peer** and **pier** are homophones.