

The Emperor's New Clothes – Kids Version Pre-Costuming and Audition Suggestions

Costuming Ideas

Unlike plays in a traditional months long process where you cast your play and then your costumers get to work, many Plays in Days productions have the option to put a lot of the costuming work ahead of the audition. This can save time and stress and help with casting. Costuming and auditions can be linked.

You may ask, “How, why would I create costumes for kids I haven’t seen or cast yet?” For some of our Plays in Days productions, having the costumes ahead of time actually streamlines the audition process. But in order for pre-costuming to work, you would need to have a basic idea how many actors you will have ahead of time. If you think you’ll have a small cast or have no idea how many children will show up to audition, we suggest you plan to schedule several days between auditions and your first rehearsals and use that time to make the right amount of costumes in the right sizes for the cast you have, rather than making them ahead.

For large casts, however, making the costumes ahead really helps. This was the case for our first production of *The Emperor's New Clothes*. We knew we were going to be working with an elementary school. We went ahead of time and, with permission from the staff, talked briefly to the students in each classroom about the upcoming play. We got a basic indication of how many students of each general age bracket would be interested in participating. There would be more than enough to cast the show.

We had done the most essential thing by pre-casting the two main leads, Stitches and Sewphia, with two multi-talented high school girls, Cindi and Christina respectively, who helped create the play. (More about them in the audition section.) We settled on their costumes early and built the rest of the costume designs around theirs. To save stress during rehearsal time, we spent a couple of days creating the other main characters’ and group parts’ costumes ahead of time. Based on the difficulty of songs, lines, and dances they would need to learn, we knew we would basically cast certain age/size kids in the different group parts.

You will be casting your leads first, but let’s talk about your group character parts and their costumes for now. Why talk about costumes before you even have auditions for your cast? Not only does it get the work out of the way and reduce stress during rehearsal days, it will help you picture the kids as they audition in the parts for which you’ve created the costumes. It really does help you cast the chorus or group parts more quickly. As you follow the audition process, you’re looking for the right talent *AND* the bodies to fit the costumes – two parameters to help narrow down your choices. For a few different production of this play, we followed these basic guidelines:

We allowed for up to six Jokers (athletic and a bit hyper kids ages 9 and up), up to nine Moths (expressive little kids ages 5-7), and up to ten Wardrobe Assistants (a variety of cute singer/dancers ages 7-12). We created the simple tunic costumes (described in the script) ahead of time. A simple tunic will fit most children ages 5 and older. If you make them roomy, you can always pin, belt, fold, tie, or cut off the excess. Some kids wore their own black clothes underneath. Since the school we were working with was in a lower socio-economic area, we built a little extra into the fee we charged the school to have us bring the show in and raided all the local thrift stores. We found various sizes of black T-shirts, turtlenecks and pants for the kids to wear underneath, helping out those families who were unable to provide their own clothes for under the costumes.

We prepared or found cute costumes for Spot and Princess that would fit kids ages 8 – 11 and basically chose from kids who might not be cast as a lead, but who had the right coordination and personality to play

these pets *and* also fit the costumes. (If you casually display the Spot and Princess costumes at the audition, it will also help any actors who might be cast as playing an animal, but may think it isn't as cool as playing a person, to be excited about these two parts. And probably make the other kids envious, but that's okay!)

We allowed for up to nine Laundry Servants (the best singers and dancers of the chorus-caliber kids ages 8 and up.) We found cheap, worn-out looking, long sleeve, white button down shirts (they rolled the sleeves up) and jeans they rolled to the knees. Since the Laundry Servants are worn out and tired, looking a little sloppy and frazzled works well. They wanted to wear colored bandanas. We found those at a dollar store. (If you choose a color other than white for the shirts, we suggest having them *match* as it makes dancing more impressive and minimizes any sloppy moves during the choreography. Also, all of the other groups wear matching outfits.)

For the leads and other main solo characters, we did a combination of preparing costumes ahead of time and finding clothing to fit (or the kids provided their own) once they were cast. The process went something like this for each of the leads:

- Stitches and Sewphia - Originally, these were played by Cindi and Christina, our teen co-producers, as mentioned above. ***It is essential to pre-cast at least these two parts if you want a short rehearsal and production schedule.*** Sewphia originally carried the scenes, lines, and songs that we later spread out between Sewphia, Tempa Cheer, and Missy Buttons. Because the parts were pre-cast, Sewphia's and Stitches' costumes were prepared ahead of time. Costume designs we went with are detailed in the script. (Feel free to create your own designs, of course!)
- The Emperor – We didn't have a fabulous - or magical ☺ - tailor on our crew, so we went to a local community theater as well as thrift stores and begged, borrowed, or bought the fanciest 1700s royalty-looking jackets (or ones that could be fancied up), capes, shoes, and hats we could find. Combined with making or adapting other cheap hats and pieces of clothing, cloth, feathers, and adding fancy accessories, we were able to come up with all the outfits he needed for his many changes. We determined ahead of time what basic size actor we thought would work to play the Emperor and went with clothing about that size. Since he only has to be overly expressive, move with a flourish, be able to change clothes quickly, and doesn't have to sing or dance, it was likely that a variety of actors could play this part and that it would be fairly easy to cast the actor to fit the costumes we came up with. He's all about the clothes anyway! ☺

As a side note, we took this show on the road to other schools and to our community theater and always found someone the right size to play the Emperor. One production we had a girl with a very low voice play the part. We drew a thin mustache on her and she fooled everyone and did a great job. You can also pre-cast the Emperor (or any other part) if you have fabulous costumes that fit an actor you want. The Emperor's costumes we used are described in detail in your script. You can probably come up with even better ones!

- Tempa Cheer, Missy Buttons – For one production after our original Sewphia went to college, we had a very talented high school girl excited to play the part, but she would be juggling our production with her many jazz band competitions. Because her time was limited, we created Tempa Cheer and Missy Buttons to pick up some of Sewphia's scenes, lines, and songs and then cast our very best sixth graders to carry the parts. It worked great and these two characters became part of the script, creating more lead parts for the kids. Win/win. Costuming these parts was easy as they could wear their own clothes with some adaptations, described in the script.

- The Doubleknit Twins – needed to be our cutest and best singers after Sewphia and Stitches -- and after Tempa Cheer and Missy Buttons once we added them. The first time we did this play, we found the double-knit suits before we cast the play. You will find the story in *The Emperor's New Clothes - Behind the Scenes*. Another time, the two girls who were perfect for the parts (not related but totally looked and sounded like twins) did not fit the costumes we had, so we found matching double-knit pants in their sizes at a thrift store and they wore nice matching blouses and bright scarves.
- Secretary, Chief Advisor – career wear was easily found *after* they were cast.
- The Workers – We had put together most of their necessary identifying costume pieces and props (tool belts, plaid shirt, lab coat, straw hat, overalls, cop shirt and badge, etc.). For each production, we chose six of the best actors and singers to form this group. Then, at their very first rehearsal, right after the auditions, we had a mini-audition to determine which of the worker parts each would play. Every time, the actors themselves instinctively knew what part would make them shine, but we still took into consideration the personalities and voices for the parts first and then the sizes of the costume items we had prepared. If our prepared costume didn't fit an actor who was totally perfect for a part, we figured out a way to find one that would work.

How We Prepared for the Auditions

All charts below are minimized for a general overview.

For more convenient enlarged charts done in landscape orientation, see appendix at back of book

Sewphia and Stitches worked with me, the Director, to figure out blocking for the play. They took notes on their scripts, and memorized every scene they were in. When we went to auditions, they could help cast. Then, for rehearsals, they could help direct. They also were an integral part of the audition process. For later productions, we chose an Assistant Director ahead of time, which was a huge help.

A few main things we did for a successful and smooth audition using the Plays in Days process:

- Got To Know It – Director, Assistant Director, Sewphia and Stitches were extremely familiar with the play, songs, and characters. (We didn't have the advantage of the audio files then, but they will be the perfect tool for your staff).
- Got Clipboards Ready – We prepared clipboards with lists as described below.
- Got a Plan Ready – We created a plan for who was doing what during auditions and rehearsals and followed the guideline below.
- Got Docs Ready – Printed permission slips. Since we did this back in the “Old School” days, we created a rehearsal schedule, copies of the scripts, and made CDs of the songs. Now, with digital copies available, you can put the scripts and rehearsal schedule as well as audio files on several flash drives that volunteers can use for kids or parents to upload on to their devices after auditions, several people at a time. OR if your budget is huge, you can provide flash drives for each family represented. OR you could make a blank list for parents to sign up requesting that you email the documents and audio files to them. You could perhaps make a few hard copies of the scripts and rehearsal schedules along with a few CDs of audio files for folks with no USB compatible devices. We had a grown-up on standby to help the Assistant and Director accomplish the distribution of materials at the end of our auditions.

The Clipboard Lists

11	Worker (Teacher)	
12	Worker (Officer)	
13	To-the-9s, Joker	
14	Chief Advisor	
15	Secretary	
16	Moth, Laundry Servant, Joker	
17	Moth, Laundry Servant, Joker	
18	Moth, Laundry Servant, Wardrobe Assistant	
19	Moth, Laundry Servant, Wardrobe Assistant	
20	Moth, Laundry Servant, Wardrobe Assistant	
21	Joker, Laundry Servant, Wardrobe Assistant	
22	Joker, Laundry Servant, Wardrobe Assistant	

The list below is for reference at the end of casting during auditions (for a large cast). It can also be used for your program later.

We prepared a clipboard with a numbered list like the example below. *This list was kept private between Directors and Assistants.*

Director's Only List					
	Character Name	Actor's Name		Character Name	Actor's Name
1	Tempa Cheer		27	Laundry Servant	
2	Missy Buttons		28	Laundry Servant	
3	Doubleknit Twin		29	Laundry Servant	
4	Doubleknit Twin		30	Laundry Servant	
5	Emperor		31	Laundry Servant	
6	Honest Child		32	Laundry Servant	
7	Worker (Farmer)		33	Laundry Servant	
8	Worker (Psychologist)		34	Laundry Servant	
9	Worker (Doctor)		35	Laundry Servant	
10	Worker (Carpenter)		36	Joker	
11	Worker (Teacher)		37	Joker	
12	Worker (Officer)		38	Joker	
13	To-the-9s		39	Joker	
14	Chief Advisor		40	Joker	
15	Secretary		41	Joker	
16	Spot		42	Wardrobe Assistant	
17	Princess		43	Wardrobe Assistant	
18	Moth		44	Wardrobe Assistant	

19	Moth		45	Wardrobe Assistant	
20	Moth		46	Wardrobe Assistant	
21	Moth		47	Wardrobe Assistant	
22	Moth		48	Wardrobe Assistant	
23	Moth		49	Wardrobe Assistant	
24	Moth		50	Wardrobe Assistant	
25	Moth		51	Wardrobe Assistant	
26	Moth				

We prepared a clipboard with a page of numbered lines that matched the numbers we used on our character parts list but with **NO CHARACTER NAMES** filled in. The names of the kids we cast as those characters during auditions went in the column across from corresponding number. We didn't put the character names in until after the audition process, because we knew the kids would likely see the clipboard as auditions went on and we didn't want them getting side-tracked with who got what part. This is similar to the one we used during casting, referring to the previous list with the character names on it if we needed to in order to verify final casting with each other before announcing parts to the actors.

Audition Casting List					
Character #	(Can write in character after auditions)	Actor's Name	Character #	(Can write in character after auditions)	Actor's Name
1			27		
2			28		
3			29		
4			30		
5			31		
6			32		
7			33		
8			34		
9			35		
10			36		
11			37		
12			38		
13			39		
14			40		
15			41		
16			42		
17			43		
18			44		
19			45		
20			46		
21			47		
22			48		
23			49		
24			50		
25			51		
26					

Because we had over seventy kids express an interest in auditioning, and wanted everyone to have a chance to participate, we also had a clipboard with pages for Citizens of Washingland (your extras if you have a group larger than you have character parts and costumes for) that looked something like this:

W			
1		13	
2		14	
3		15	
4		16	
5		17	
6		18	
7		19	
8		20	
9		21	
10		22	
11		23	
12		24	

This group was cast from the kids not “tapped” as a particular character in all of the steps below. An older student who volunteered to be an assistant director filled their names in on this list as the audition process was going on (at the point during the auditions indicated below) while the other students were being considered and cast for larger parts. The citizens were a small but fun part of the shows. They participated in the dress rehearsal and performances, being scattered throughout the audience, singing the finale song, and waving small “Washingland” flags (they had decorated these in an afternoon session with some creative mom volunteers) each time the word, “Washingland” was sung (which was a lot!).

At the Auditions

For all of our Plays in Days kid musicals, we used basically the same quick process that not only makes auditions go quickly, it teaches main chorus numbers to the entire cast at once. This way, your auditions are also your first rehearsal!

Stitches, Sewphia, and I practiced how we would line up and organize those auditing. We used small post-its and moved them around as if they were the actors, writing the character names on the post-its as we “cast” them. Doing this hands-on practice, “acting out our parts” as directors at an audition and having the visual really helped us when it came time to actually hold the auditions. The first impression we gave our actors was that we were confident and knew exactly what the plan was, and this carried through to the rehearsals and performances as well. Stitches, Sewphia, the Assistant Director, and I were ready to go and all on the same page – pretty important when you show up to 60 + hopeful kids, excited to show you their stuff and you’ve got to cast them all in a very short period of time!

The following four diagrams represent what it looked like during the four phases of auditions:

1. Group Intro - All those auditioning sitting in a group. Introductions. Teach song portions.
2. Giant U - Kids form a U with 3 sides. Kids will stand along these walls in lines facing in, organized by shortest (top end, Side 1) to tallest (top end, Side 3).
3. Casting Starts - What the square will look like after casting begins. Diagram shows the first six characters' placements after casting.
4. Casting Done - What the square will look like after all casting is done.

See diagrams below.

Sign in/
Rehearsal
Materials
Table

Assistant
Director/
Volunteers

“Group Intro”

Director, Sewphia, Stitches

Group of those auditioning

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X x XX X x x XX X xxx X xx
x X X xxx X X X xxx
  X X X xx X xxx XX x
xxx X xx XxX xxx X xx X
  XX X  XX xx X X Xxx
  X X X XX x X X x xX
    
```

"Giant U"

Actors line up shortest to tallest heights

Shortest

Tallest

Side 1

Side 3



Medium Height

Side 2

Sample Only
Not Complete

“Casting Starts”
Actors have started being cast and moved to positions

Side 4

Tempa Missy Doubleknit Doubleknit Emperor Honest Child XXXXX Other “Tapped” Actors XXXXX
Cheer Buttons Twin Twin

Side 1

x
x
x
x
x
x
x
x
x
x
x
x
x
x
x
x

Side 3

X
X
X
X
X
X
X
X
X
X
X
X
X
X
X
X

X X X X X X X X X

Side 2

Sample Only
Not Complete

“Casting Done”

Actors have all been cast and moved to these positions

Side 4

Tempa Missy Doubleknit Doubleknit Emperor Honest Workers To-the-9s Chief Secretary Spot &
 Cheer Buttons Twin Twin Child 1 thru 6 Advisor Princess

C
i
t
i
z
e
n
s

M
O
T
H
S
1 thru 9

Side 1

of

W
a
s
h
i
n
g
l
a
n
d

L S
A E
U R
N V
D A
R N
Y T
S

Side 3

WARDROBE ASSISTANTS 1 thru 10

JOKERS 1 thru 6

1 thru 8

Side 2

Using these diagrams as a basis, the following are the basic audition preparation and execution steps we followed for *The Emperor’s New Clothes*:

Who’s Leading “D” = director “A” = Assistant “St” = Stitches “Se” - Sewphia	What to do	Lines or song phrase	Where actors go when cast
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set up table for collecting Permission Slips and handing out rehearsal schedules and materials near door. 	⊙	⊙
D, A, St, Se	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gather and settle kids seated on floor in large group. Collect any permission 	⊙	⊙

	slips that didn't get collected at door.		
D, St, Se, A (Take turns with points)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome. Introduce selves and role. Explain that kids who are cast as The Workers will be staying for their first rehearsal after auditions. Other cast members will need to stay to upload files, get CDs, or be put on the list for hard copies of recordings or to have the files sent by email. Tell about schedules and other files they will need--Songs, scripts, audio performance recordings. Tell them, "Don't leave until you have your schedules and rehearsal materials." Explain everyone who cooperates will have a part. Teach "Pin Drop" or quieting down cue. Demonstrate. Kids do it. 	⊗	⊗
D & A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask for parent volunteers. Get them to sign up and note their talents/contact info on the clipboards at the table. Ask for any older students who <i>only</i> want to assistant direct. If there are more kids auditioning than we have character parts, give these assistants clipboards with paper that says "W" on top. They will be writing down citizens of Washingland (a chorus of extras) 	⊗	⊗
Se & St	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain we're looking for: Big voices, big movements, following instructions, manners. Demonstrate how to, how not to. 	⊗	⊗
Se & St	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teach last two lines of Emperor of Washingland Song. Teach end of W.A. Boogie, have sides of the group split for echo. Teach Friend song. 	Song – "Emperor of Washingland" - "He is, he is the Emperor of Wash....Our man!" Song – "W.A. Boogie" – "We dress the king. (echo) Uh-huh-huh, oh yeah!" Song – "A Friend Like Me" Vs 1	⊗
D, A, Se, St	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help kids line up in a squared off "U" shortest to tallest. Three sides, one side 	⊗	⊗

- Thank everyone.
- Explain again that Workers will be staying for rehearsal.
- Guide an orderly move in a line to the “Schedules, Scripts, Sounds” tables.
- The Workers will receive their items first. Once The Workers have their items, Stitches and Sewphia take The Workers to the rehearsal room and go over the basic story of the play and how The Workers fit in.
- The rest of the cast will now get their items to take home, get on the email list, or load devices.
VOLUNTEER HELPERS NEEDED!

You might be thinking, What if it doesn't go perfectly as planned? What if I miss a step? What if the kids ignore Pin Drop? What if they hate me and cry if they don't like their parts? Or lead a rebellion? What if there *is* a casting stampede???

PLAYS in
DAYS



Take a deep breath. Chances are, the auditions, the rehearsals and the plays won't all go perfect because people and kids are imperfect—including directors. Our auditions went differently every time at every school or community theater where we brought our travelling theater experience. One time, we entered a campus and could hear a loud roar coming from the auditorium where auditions were to be held. We were only expecting the sixty who had indicated an interest ahead of time. I thought, “Well, it won't be a problem getting *them* to use “Big Voices!” But, no. It was the noise of One Hundred Seventy-Five excited elementary school kids, all anxious to be in our play. YIKES!!! Sixty would have been huge. This was ridiculous! But how do you turn down a bunch of excited kids... With all of their parents lined up along the walls watching your every move....

It was a bit more like working crowd control at a sporting event, but we determined to follow through as best we could with our plan. We kicked up our energy level several notches, *acted* as confident as possible (we are theater geeks, after all), and shot up the most fervent five-second prayers we could. We jumped aboard that crazy train and experienced what turned out to be a very rewarding journey for us and for the kids. And so many parent volunteers! With 100+ kids who had to be cast as citizens, it was the fullest Kingdom of Washingland ever! I can only say that we got through the “surprise” because we were confident in our knowledge of the play and its characters—AND because we had a good plan ready, clipboard lists and charts in hand!

Your experiences will be different than ours, of course. You might see things in our plan you can improve upon. Go for it! Make it work conveniently and well for you. The main point is:

If you are as prepared as you can be by getting to know your play and its characters like the back of your hand and have a good plan ready, you can totally do this thing!

Sample Only
Not Complete