



The King's Choice

Readers Theater Play Script and Performance Notes

***AUTHORS:** Elaine Lindy & Spencer Loucks, **COUNTRY:** Sweden, **GENRE:** Fairytales*



CHARACTERS

NARRATOR

KING

QUEEN

COUNCILOR ANTON

COUNCILOR ERIK

COUNCILOR LARS

COUNCILOR OSCAR

COUNCILOR SIMON

COUNCILOR VIKTOR

If there are performance notes, they can be found on the pages following the script

Scene 1 – Castle Hall

[**Stage set:** The stage is divided into three sections. On a far end is the castle hall with two thrones. In the middle is a forest (**See Performance Notes** for ideas on making trees). On the other end of the stage is a lake. (**See Performance Notes** for ideas on how to show water during Scene 3).]

[KING sits on his throne holding INFANT (a doll). KING wears a royal robe. QUEEN stands by his side as they both play with INFANT.]

NARRATOR:

Hello, everyone. This play is “A King’s Choice,” a fairy tale from Sweden. (*gestures to King*) There’s our King. (*to audience*) The story is brought to you by *Stories to Grow by*.

[NARRATOR steps forward.]

NARRATOR:

Long ago in Sweden, there once lived a King. The King loved his wife and their child very much.

[KING shakes shiny rattle in INFANT’S face.]

KING:

Can you say, “Da-da?”

NARRATOR:

The King was going on a long trip, so he needed someone to watch over his kingdom, Queen, and their child. The King had six councilors, which are advisers.

[Enter the six councilors – COUNCILOR ANTON, COUNCILOR ERIK, COUNCILOR LARS, COUNCILOR OSCAR, COUNCILOR SIMON, and COUNCILOR VIKTOR.]

NARRATOR:

And here they are. The King was not sure which of these councilors to put in charge while he was away. They can’t hear me, but they can see me. Here’s the truth of the matter. The first one, Councilor Anton, was too bossy.

[NARRATOR gestures to COUNCILOR ANTON to step forward. COUNCILOR ANTON steps forward.]

COUNCILOR ANTON:

There are two ways to do things: My way, and the wrong way!

[COUNCILOR ANTON steps back into line.]

NARRATOR:

The second councilor, Councilor Erik, was too young.

[NARRATOR gestures to COUNCILOR ERIK to step forward. He does.]

COUNCILOR ERIK:

(excitedly) I just lost my last baby tooth!

[COUNCILOR ERIK steps back in line.]

NARRATOR:

The third councilor, Councilor Lars, was gluttonous. He cared only for food.

[NARRATOR gestures to COUNCILOR LARS to step forward. He is chewing. He holds a Swedish meatballs up in the air and then devours it.]

COUNCILOR LARS:

(to audience) So I like Swedish meatballs. Anyone have a problem with that?

[COUNCILOR LARS falls back into line.]

NARRATOR:

The fourth councilor, Councilor Oscar, cared only for money.

[NARRATOR gestures to COUNCILOR OSCAR to step forward. He does, holding a large golden shield.]

COUNCILOR OSCAR:

You see this shield? It's 14 carat gold – the most expensive shield in the village!

[COUNCILOR OSCAR falls back in line.]

NARRATOR:

The fifth councilor, Simon, was obsessed with his hair.

[NARRATOR gestures to COUNCILOR SIMON to step forward. He does, holding a mirror and a comb.]

COUNCILOR SIMON:

(tosses hair) If you toss a bit of egg and lavender and work it into your locks *(runs hand through hair)* it makes a FANTASTIC shine!

[COUNCILOR SIMON falls back into line.]

NARRATOR:

The sixth councilor, Councilor Viktor, was, just, well, boring.

[NARRATOR gestures COUNCILOR VIKTOR steps forward and stands there for a moment. He releases a long yawn.]

NARRATOR:

Wait a minute. Did he do anything?

[COUNCILOR VIKTOR then falls back in line. All of the Councilors exit.]

NARRATOR:

Despite their various issues, the King liked all of his councilors. But he wasn't sure who would make the best ruler in his absence, and could safeguard his wife and child.

[KING hands baby to QUEEN, and they exit.]

Scene 2 – Forest

[**Stage Set:** In the middle of the stage there are trees and bushes (**See Performance Notes** for ideas on how to make these.)]

NARRATOR:

So the King decided to go for a royal horse-back ride to think things over.

[KING gets on a play horse and pretends to gallop for a bit (**See Performance Notes** for how to make your own play horse).]

NARRATOR:

But as the King rode, it began to get foggy and was hard to see. In the fog, the King ran into an overhanging branch and fell off his horse (**See Performance Notes** for how to make this happen).

[KING falls down off his horse. (*Be careful!*)]

KING:

Ah, what a day! First I can't figure out who to choose to watch over my kingdom and my family. And now this!?!?

[FAIRY enters. KING does not notice her.]

FAIRY:

He, he, he!

KING:

(*frightened and confused, stands up*) What is that?!?! Who's there?!?!

[KING notices FAIRY. She holds a magic wand.]

FAIRY:

Hello, your Majesty.

KING:

You just appeared out of nowhere... And you look like a fairy!

FAIRY:

There's a reason for that. I AM a fairy!

KING:

I must say I didn't think fairies existed.

FAIRY:

(holds both arms out with palms up) What do you think now?

KING:

I'm becoming a believer. To what do I owe the pleasure?

FAIRY:

(bows lightly) I am here to serve you, Your Majesty. I believe I can to help make your difficult choice.

KING:

You know the choice that's on my mind?

FAIRY:

That's what we fairies DO.

[FAIRY steps in front of KING, so that KING is hidden when he removes his outer kingly robe. FAIRY dramatically waves her wand. When FAIRY steps aside, KING is looking downward at his new woodcutters outfit.]

[Stagehand brings on an axe and hands it to KING. Stagehands takes KING'S robe and sword offstage.]

[At the same time, other stagehands bring onstage a woodcutter's cottage, and place it behind KING and FAIRY. (See **Performance Notes** for particulars on the woodcutter's cottage.)]

KING:

What is the meaning of this? Where are my royal robes? And how is replacing my sword with an axe going to help me?!?! Are you some kind of trickster Fairy?!?! Where's my royal horse?

FAIRY:

Patience, Your Majesty. The answer to your problem is at hand. By and by, your counselors will come to you needing something. As a woodcutter, you will be in a position to help them. When they ask how they can thank you, invite the noblemen to dinner at your humble woodcutter's cottage in three days hence.

NARRATOR:

That makes no sense. What do you mean, "my woodcutter's cottage"?

[FAIRY points with wand to KING'S axe.]

KING:

Okay, I get it. I'm a woodcutter.

[FAIRY points with wand to woodcutter's cottage.]

KING:

And that's my cottage?

FAIRY:

Cute, right?

KING:

But I've never even SEEN that cottage!

FAIRY:

It's comfy, and it's yours. Now remember. You're going to help the councilors. When they ask how to thank you, you'll invite them to dinner at your cottage. In three days. Got it?

KING:

(to audience) I might as well go with. What's there to lose? *(to Fairy)* I'm in.

[FAIRY exits.]

[Actors offstage make noises of a windstorm approaching. The sound of the six COUNCILORS' voices are also heard from offstage.]

Scene 3 – Lake

[**Stage Set:** This is the third section of the stage, where a lake is shown. (**See Performance Notes** for ideas on how to simulate water during this scene.)]

[Enter COUNCILORS, all on a boat. (**See Performance Notes** for how to make the boat). They are rocking back and forth and losing control of the boat.]

COUNCILOR ERIK:

This wind is knocking me over!

COUNCILOR SIMON:

Can't say I mind the wind entirely. (*tosses his head back*) Gives me that hard-to-come-by wind-swept look.

COUNCILOR ANTON:

Oliver, there are no maidens for miles around.

COUNCILOR SIMON:

(*arm around Councilor Matts*) One never knows, my friend. One never knows.

COUNCILOR LARS:

Oh, no! I dropped my meatballs! Everyone, freeze! (*bends over*)

COUNCILOR ANTON:

Lars, you're not seriously going to pick those meatballs up off the floor of the boat? And with all this rocking?

COUNCILOR LARS:

They're perfectly good! (*holds up clenched hand to audience*) A little squashed, maybe. But edible. (*eats it*)

COUNCILOR ANTON:

Focus, Lars. You'll tip us over!

COUNCILOR WILLIAM:

Oops, too late!

[All the COUNCILORS scream as the boat tips widely to one side, then to the other.]

COUNCILOR ANTON:

We're doomed!

COUNCILOR ERIK:

I'm too young to die!

NARRATOR:

Luckily, the King, who had been a champion boatman in his youth, heard the councilors' shouts of terror.

[KING holds up one hand to shield his eyes as if he is looking out across the water. He sees the boat.]

[KING pretends to jump into the sea and pantomimes swimming to reach the boat. He pantomimes jumping into boat.]

KING:

What are you all doing, standing there? Everyone needs to row. Quick, hand me some oars!

COUNCILOR LARS:

Gladly – My dinner awaits!

COUNCILOR ANTON:

He means you too, Lars!

KING:

He's right. We all need to row. Everyone, let's go!

[LARS seems to roll his eyes but stays with the others. KING and COUNCILORS pantomime rowing the boat to shore. Most vigorous are KING and COUNCILORS ANTON and ERIK. Less vigorous are COUNCILORS OSCAR, LARS, SIMON, and VIKTOR.]

COUNCILOR OLIVER:

Land ahoy! We're saved!

[COUNCILORS and KING pantomime getting off the boat. They can set the boat down near the cottage.]

COUNCILOR ANTON:

(addressing the King, who is dressed as a woodsman) Thank you SO much! You saved our lives!!!

COUNCILOR ERIK:

How can we ever repay you?!?!?

COUNCILOR LARS:

Banquet?

COUNCILOR OSCAR:

New garments?

COUNCILOR SIMON:

Gold? Whatever it is, just name it!

COUNCILOR VIKTOR:

Uh, let's not get carried away...

KING:

(to audience) Well now, isn't this sounding like what the fairy predicted. *(to Councilors)* I would be honored if you noblemen would come to my humble cottage for dinner. In three days time, I mean. That is, three days from now.

[COUNCILORS nod in agreement.]

COUNCILOR ANTON:

Is that all? Of course we'll come to your cottage for dinner. It's the least we could do!

[COUNCILORS shake KING's hand and exit, one by one.]

[KING exits.]

[Offstage, KING changes back into his royal robe and replaces the axe with his sword.]

Scene 4 – Castle Hall

[Stage set: same as in Scene 2.]

[KING enters and sits on his throne.]

KING:

It's good to be back. Though I must say I'm no closer to making a choice than I was before.

[FAIRY enters.]

KING:

Well! I'm glad to see you.

FAIRY:

Your Majesty.

KING:

You said all this woodsmen nonsense would help.

FAIRY:

Your Highness, listen. Invite your councilors to a royal banquet in three days where you'll make an announcement. Let them know they'll find out which councilor you have chosen to rule while you're away.

KING:

But they can't come! They already committed themselves to dinner at the woodcutter's cottage.

FAIRY:

(knowingly) Hmm... yes. They have, haven't they?

KING:

But...!

[FAIRY exits.]

KING:

(to audience) Oh, I get it!

[QUEEN enters, holding INFANT.]

QUEEN:

My husband, have you decided which one of the six councilors?

KING:

Not yet, my love. But soon. I don't want to make a mistake with the lives of my family and kingdom at stake.

[COUNCILORS enter.]

KING:

My Councilors! As you know, I will be leaving soon on a trip. One of you will rule in my absence, not to mention ensure the safety of the Queen and our child. I will host a great feast. At the feast I will announce which one of you is my choice.

[COUNCILORS all cheer.]

KING:

Three days from now!

[COUNCILORS go silent.]

KING:

Is something wrong? Are you not excited to dine with your King?

COUNCILOR ANTON:

Of course we are, my liege. We just... *(turns to other Councilors)*

[COUNCILORS huddle. The next few lines are spoken quickly.]

COUNCILOR ANTON:

What do we do?

COUNCILOR LARS:

I don't know – what do you think we should do?

COUNCILOR ERIK:

It's the very same day as the woodcutter's invitation!

COUNCILOR SIMON:

We have to serve our King!

COUNCILOR LARS:

But that woodcutter saved our lives.

COUNCILOR ANTON:

Our lives won't be worth much if we don't show up to the King's feast. *(to the King)* Of course, we will all be there!

KING:

Excellent!

[All COUNCILORS cheer, except COUNCILOR ERIK.]

KING:

You may all be excused.

[COUNCILORS exit.]

KING:

What a bunch!

Scene 5 – Castle Hall

[**Stage Set:** The same castle hall as in Scene 1.]

[NARRATOR enters.]

NARRATOR:

Three days have passed. The time for the feast has arrived.

[COUNCILOR ANTON enters and approaches KING.]

COUNCILOR ANTON:

(*bows*) Your Majesty.

KING:

Councilor Anton.

[COUNCILOR LARS enters, approaches KING and bows.]

COUNCILOR LARS:

Your Majesty.

KING:

Councilor Lars.

[COUNCILOR OSCAR enters, approaches KING and bows.]

COUNCILOR OSCAR:

Your Majesty.

KING:

Councilor Oscar.

[COUNCILOR SIMON enters, approaches KING and bows.]

COUNCILOR SIMON:

Your Majesty.

KING:

Councilor Simon.

[COUNCILOR VIKTOR enters, approaches KING and bows.]

COUNCILOR VIKTOR:

Your Majesty.

KING:

Councilor Viktor.

[KING waits for a few moments.]

COUNCILOR OSCAR:

(to Councilor Lars) I wonder when the King will announce his decision?

COUNCILOR Lars:

Who cares?!?! Free FOOD! Pickled herring, Swedish nuts, cinnamon buns—and, of course, meatballs! Come to Papa!

[COUNCILOR LARS starts to gorge himself. The other COUNCILORS join him.]

NARRATOR:

And so 20, maybe 30 minutes passed.

[Voice of COUNCILOR ERIK, panting, is heard offstage. COUNCILOR ERIK enters, flustered. His hair and clothes are disheveled. COUNCILOR ERIK approaches KING and bows deeply.]

COUNCILOR ERIK:

Your Majesty.

KING:

You're late! Where have you been?!?! Your King invites you to a feast and you show up not only late but... *(gestures)* DISHEVELED. Dare you show me such disrespect?

[COUNCILOR ERIK bows again.]

COUNCILOR ERIK:

I'm terribly sorry, my King. You see, three days ago a woodcutter saved our lives. I promised I would dine with him at his cottage this evening.

KING:

(thundering) I, your King, invited you to dine!!

COUNCILOR ERIK:

(trembling) Yes, of course, my Lord. *(with an aside to audience)* I fear this will not go well for me. *(to the King)* But, you see, I promised the woodcutter BEFORE you asked us to come to

your feast. Although, when I went there tonight – most odd – the woodcutter’s cottage was gone. It had vanished!

KING:

You expect me to believe the reason you are late is because you agreed to attend dinner at the home of some common woodcutter, but his cottage disappeared in thin air? And for this you risked angering your King?

COUNCILOR ERIK:

(hangs head) What could I do, my liege? I had accepted and could not go back on my promise.

[KING belts out a large laugh.]

KING:

Then you must be willing to accept the consequences.

COUNCILOR ERIK:

I am, Your Majesty.

KING:

Then know this! *(gestures around)* Listen up, everyone. Councilor Erik, you may be young, but you are the one who held true to your word. YOU are the man to rule in my absence.

[All COUNCILORS gasp.]

[KING hands his sword to COUNCILOR ERIK.]

KING:

(leans toward Councilor Erik) I don’t suppose you would have guessed I who was really the woodcutter, and a Fairy had enchanted me?

COUNCILOR HUGO:

Right around now, I would believe just about anything.

[KING shakes hands with COUNCILOR ERIK.]

[QUEEN enters, holding infant.]

QUEEN:

So are we decided, my husband?

KING:

(places hand on shoulder of Councilor Erik) Oh, yes. We’re good.

COUNCILOR LARS:

(shrugs) Ah well, so it goes. Um, where's dessert?

[If you have a curtain, close it now. If you do not, fade the lights. If you have no stage lights, all actors come on stage and bow to the audience.]



Performance Notes for The King's Choice

THREE WAYS THAT STUDENTS AND TEACHERS CAN UTILIZE THIS PLAY

1. Students can read the play aloud while sitting in the classroom. Ask the readers to skip all bracketed stage directions. You may prefer to rotate your actors to give all students a chance to read the speaking parts.
2. Students can perform the play in the classroom. Clear an area that can be used as the stage. Have the audience sit on the floor in front of the stage. Students in the play can make simple costumes and/or sets as described below. When the scene change, the characters "on stage" simply walk to the back of the room where they wait until their next appearance "on stage."
3. Students can perform the play on stage. Refer to the production notes that follow. Ask the actors to enter from the back of the room and move through the audience as they approach the stage.



COSTUMES

- NARRATOR – Plain, simple clothing.
- KING – A red robe that is easy to remove, and a crown. Under the robe, he should wear a simple shirt and pants that are a bit tattered. This will be his woodcutter's costume. During Scene 2, the KING will remove his robe to become a woodcutter.
- QUEEN – Nice dress or robe, and a crown.
- COUNCILORS – Can all wear khaki shirts and pants. You can also have them each wear something different to help the audience separate them, such as different colored belts or sashes.
- FAIRY – Sparkly or sequined dress or outfit. Wings, if possible.



PROPS

Scene 1

- A sword for KING to have at his side. This can be a plastic sword or a sword cut out of cardboard. It can be held at his side with a belt, which goes over his robe and is easy to remove.
- A doll wrapped in a blanket to represent the INFANT.
- Small rattle for KING to shake.
- Something small and white to represent COUNCILOR ERIK'S tooth. Or he can just pretend to hold up a tooth.
- A fork and small meatball for COUNCILOR LARS. The meatball can be real- he can carry it in a cup and then actually eat it, or you can make a fake meatball from cardboard or crumpled up paper, and attach it to a fork. In this case, he can just pretend to take a bite and chew.
- A golden shield for COUNCILOR OSCAR. You can make this out of cardboard and make a cardboard handle on the back.
- A mirror and comb for COUNCILOR SIMON.

Scene 2

- A toy horse for KING to ride. Or you can make a fake horse using a broom handle and cardboard. Remove the handle from the broom. Draw a horse head, about a foot long, onto cardboard, using a black sharpie, so the details will stand out. Cut it out and attach it to one end of a broom handle.
- A branch made from cardboard for KING to "run into". A stagehand can hold the branch out, and the KING gallops into it.
- A magic wand for FAIRY. You can make this out of paper or cardboard, or you can use a stick for the base and decorate it with yarn, ribbon, and paper.
- Woodcutter's Cottage. This can be simple- cut from cardboard and painted to resemble a wood cottage. Stagehands bring it on during KING'S change and hold it until the end of Scene 3, and then take it off.
- An axe for KING, when he becomes a woodcutter. This can be plastic or cut from cardboard.

Scene 3

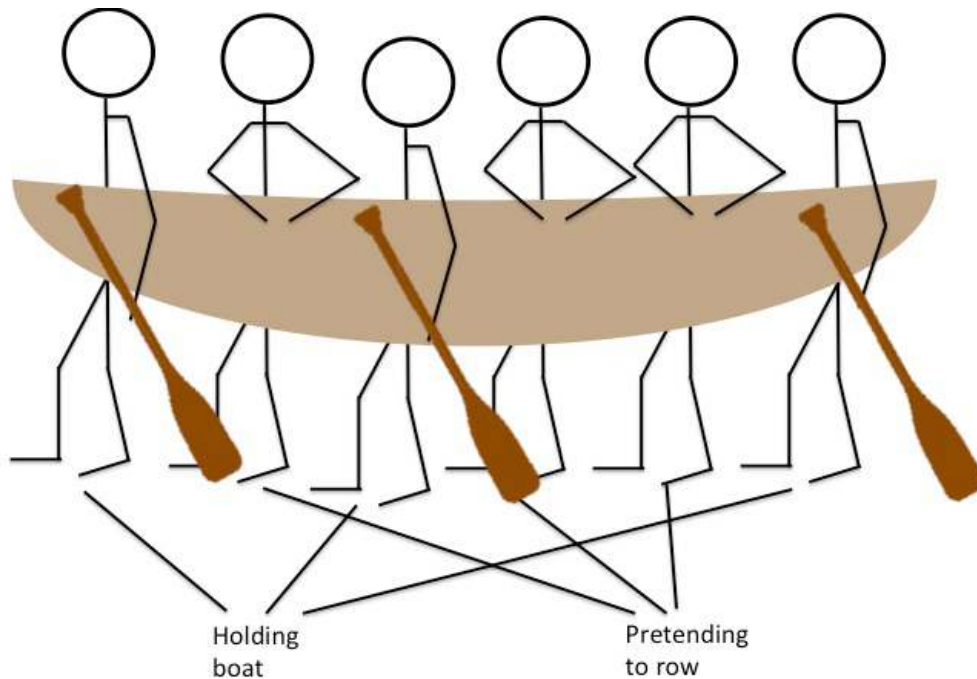
- A boat for the COUNCILORS to use. This can be made from a big piece of cardboard. Cut out the shape of a canoe-style boat. It should be long enough length-wise that all six COUNCILORS can stand behind it in a row. If you can't



make it that long, make it at least long enough for 3 of the COUNCILORS to stand behind it, and the other 3 can stand next to them (creating two rows).

The boat should be short enough height-wise that the COUNCILORS can hold the boat up with their arms. Most of their legs and their feet can show at the bottom.

They can walk the boat on, with a few of them carrying it and a few of them pretending to row. You can even make oars out of cardboard for those who are rowing. When the storm comes, those who are carrying it can move the boat back and forth, as the actors move their bodies, to give the appearance of rough waters.



Scene 4

- N/A

Scene 5

- Bowls and plates of food. The bowls and plates can be filled with fake food items, either plastic, or made from paper.



SETS

To make scene transitions earlier, the stage can be split into three sections. You can make a backdrop that shows the three locations, or just rely on set pieces. The three



locations are:

- 1) Castle Hall, on one side of the stage.
- 2) The forest, in the middle of the stage.
- 3) The Lake, on the other side of the stage.

- **Scene 1** – Castle Hall consists of two thrones. Use high-backed chairs and cover them in red fabric.
- **Scene 2** – Forest consists of trees and bushes, which can be made out of cardboard boxes. You can paint small boxes to resemble bushes, and paint larger boxes to resemble clusters of trees. Another option would be to cut flat trees out of cardboard and use excess cardboard to create a brace to help them stand up.
- **Scene 3** – Lake is show more with action than set. As the COUNCILORS bring on the boat, you can have stage hands bring on a long piece of blue flowy fabric and wave it back and forth in front of the boat.
- **Scene 4** – Castle hall- Same as Scene 1.
- **Scene 5** – Castle hall- Same as Scene 1 & 4.