

## WEBSITE RESOURCE W3.4

### The button story

*I want to acknowledge many people who have told this story before. I heard it from my husband who heard it on an inservice session for the National Oracy Project in 1988. I've also read a version of it in Harold Rosen's booklet *Troublesome Boy*; in his version it's about Plotnek the tailor. As I've told it (many times), the story has developed ideas of its own . . .*

In a land far away there lived a young ruler. He was handsome, wealthy, wise and generous – and known for his sartorial elegance. The time came for him to host the meeting of all the surrounding countries and he wanted to make a good impression. As he inspected his palace, he caught sight of a very bedraggled creature scuttling out of sight through a dark doorway. When in consternation he asked who it was he was told, 'It's your tailor, your highness.'

He couldn't believe that such a tatty individual could supply him with his fine and stylish clothes – and he didn't want anything to spoil the picture of smart perfection in his palace. 'Send him to me,' he commanded.

The tailor arrived, very frightened at being summoned, but the young ruler said to him, 'You have made me such beautiful clothes I can't have you wandering about looking such a fright. Here, take this and make yourself some clothes that will befit the tailor of such a man as I am.' And he gave him a purse full of money. (I said he was generous, didn't I?)

The tailor couldn't believe his luck. He went to the warehouse and gazed at all the shelves of bolts of cloth. He took a long time, feeling their weight and quality and taking them to the window to see them in the light of day but finally settled on a cloth that was of all colours – and no colour in particular. It was perfection! He took the fabric to his workshop, laid it down on his workbench, took out his big tailor's scissors and cut out the pattern.

The next day he walked through the palace with great pride in his new garment – a long full skirted coat or even gown – and everyone he met said, 'Oooh, love your coat. You look great!'

The meeting of all the surrounding countries went off without a hitch and nothing spoiled the image of the ruler and his fashionable style. The tailor loved his new coat and he wore it and he wore it, but as time passed, he found that his beautiful new coat was getting worn. All down the front where he stuck his pins as he fitted people with their clothes there were snags and holes; the ends of the sleeves and the hem were getting ragged.

What should he do?

Sadly, he went to his workshop, took off the coat, laid it on his workbench, took up his big tailor's scissors and said, 'Coat, oh, coat, you have served me well . . . but I'll not throw you away, I'll make something of you yet!'

And what do you think he made? (At this point you hope that the audience will come up with something feasible, like a waistcoat . . . or even a tie. The larger the replacement the better because it means the story has more repetitions.)

Yes, he made a jacket! He cut off the fraying hem at the bottom and turned it up, found some contrasting fabric and made new cuffs and re-lined the front where he'd stuck the pins.

It was perfection!

The next day he walked through the palace with great pride in his new jacket and everyone he met said, (audience joins in) 'Oooh, love your jacket. You look great!'

The tailor got a lot of new business because of his fabulous workmanship and was very busy. He loved his new jacket and he wore it and he wore it (audience joins in), but as time passed, he found that his beautiful new jacket was getting worn. The new cuffs were again very frayed and he had the same problem even where he'd relined the jacket – all down the front were the same old snags and holes.

What should he do?

Sadly, he went to his workshop, took off the jacket, laid it on his workbench, took up his big tailor's scissors and said (audience joins in), 'Jacket, oh, jacket, you have served me well . . . but I'll not throw you away, I'll make something of you yet!'

And what do you think he made?

Yes, he made a waistcoat! (you can jump to something smaller if you need to speed up the story . . .). He cut the sleeves out of the jacket, found some wonderful red satin and made a very stylish back to the waistcoat.

It was perfection!

The next day he walked through the palace with great pride in his new waistcoat and everyone he met said, (audience again) 'Oooh, love your waistcoat. You look great!'

He was extraordinarily busy making his new spring collection for the fashionistas of the region so that time passed quickly but he loved his new waistcoat and he wore it and he wore it (audience) but one day the tailor found that his beautiful waistcoat was getting very worn. I'm afraid he'd practically ruined the front with myriads of pins, and through bending over with his back to the workshop windows the sun had faded the lovely red silk.

What should he do?

Sadly, he went to his workshop, took off the waistcoat, laid it on his workbench, took up his big tailor's scissors and said (audience again), 'Waistcoat, oh, waistcoat, you have served me well . . . but I'll not throw you away, I'll make something of you yet!'

And what do you think he made?

Yes, he made a tie! He cut across the weft of the fabric and pieced together a tie lined with parts of the red silk he'd managed to salvage.

It was perfection!

The next day he walked through the palace with great pride in his new tie and everyone he met said, (audience again) 'Oooh, love your tie. You look great!'

The tailor loved his new tie and he wore and he wore it (audience) but time passed and as the year turned into autumn, one day he caught sight of himself in a mirror. He was horrified. His beautiful new tie was like a piece of string and I'm afraid there was quite a bit of dinner spilt down it.

What should he do?

Sadly, he went to his workshop, took off the tie, laid it on his workbench, took up his big tailor's scissors and said (audience again), 'Tie, oh, tie, you have served me well . . . but I'll not throw you away, I'll make something of you yet!'

And what do you think he made?

He made a button! He took the fabric from the widest part of the tie, laundered it carefully, selected a plain old large button and carefully covered it with the fabric. Then he put it at the neck of his plain old coat.

It was perfection!

The next day he walked through the palace with great pride in his new button and everyone he met said, (audience again) 'Oooh, love your button. You look great!'

The tailor was very proud of his new button on the plain old coat and he wore it and he wore it (audience)but time passed and as winter began to turn to spring again he noticed that the fabric was coming off his beautiful button where he'd done his coat up and undone it many times.

What should he do?

Sadly, he went to his workshop, took off his coat with the lovely button, laid it on his workbench, took up his big tailor's scissors and said (audience again), 'Button, oh, button, you have served me well . . . but I'll not throw you away, I'll make something of you yet!'

And what do you think he made? (At this point the audience may look baffled about what on earth you can make from the frayed fabric covering a button . . . but . . .)

. . . he made a story!

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