

A Reader's Theater Script for
CLEVER JACK TAKES THE CAKE
(For grades 2-4)

Reader's Theater adaptation by Judy Freeman (www.JudyReadsBooks.com) of *Clever Jack Takes the Cake*, written and illustrated by Candace Fleming, published by Schwartz & Wade, 2010.

ROLES: Narrators 1-5, Jack, Mother, Troll, Gypsy Woman, Bear, Guard, Princess, Sound Effects Chorus

NOTE: When you photocopy this script, be sure to number the pages and run it single-sided. Double-sided scripts are confusing for children to follow. If you are acting the story out with a larger class, have two or more sets of narrators.

NARRATOR 1: One summer morning long ago, a poor boy named Jack found an invitation slipped beneath his cottage door. It read . . .

NARRATORS 1-5: His Majesty the King cordially invites all the children of the realm to the Princess's Tenth Birthday Party tomorrow afternoon in the castle courtyard.

JACK: A party! For the princess.

MOTHER: What a shame you can't go.

JACK: Why not?

MOTHER: Because we've nothing fine enough to give her and no money to buy a gift.

NARRATOR 2: Jack had to admit his mother was right. His pockets were empty except for the matchsticks he always carried.

NARRATOR 3: As for their few belongings—a spinning wheel, a threadbare quilt, a pitted ax—what princess wanted those?

JACK: (*thinking*) Then I will make her something! I will make her a cake.

MOTHER: From what? From the dust in the cupboard? From the dirt on the floor?

JACK: I have a better idea.

NARRATOR 4: That same morning, he traded his ax for two bags of sugar and his quilt for a sack of flour.

NARRATOR 5: He gave the hen an extra handful of the seed in exchange for two fresh eggs, and he kissed the cow on the nose for a pail of her sweetest milk.

NARRATOR 1: He gathered walnuts. He dipped candles.

NARRATOR 2: And in the strawberry patch, he searched . . . and searched . . . and searched until he found the reddest, juiciest, and most succulent strawberry in the land.

JACK: DELICIOUS!

NARRATOR 3: Said Jack as he plucked it from its stem.

NARRATOR 4: Then he set to work, churning, chopping, blending, baking.

BAKERS' CHORUS: Churn, churn, churn. Chop, chop, chop. Blend, blend, blend. Bake, bake, bake.

NARRATOR 5: That same night, Jack stood back to admire his creation—two layers of golden-sweet cake covered in buttery frosting and ringed with ten tiny candles.

NARRATOR 1: Across the cake's top, walnuts spelled out "Happy Birthday, Princess." And in the very center—in the place of honor—sat the succulent strawberry.

MOTHER: What a fine, fine gift.

NARRATOR 2: Jack grinned.

NARRATOR 3: Early the next morning, with combed hair and clean shirt, Jack set off for the castle, holding the cake proudly before him.

NARRATOR 4: Before long, he came to a bloom-speckled meadow.

JACK: Perhaps I should pick a bouquet for the princess.

NARRATOR 5: Just then, four-and-twenty blackbirds rose into the air. Like a sudden summer storm cloud, they swirled around the cake, pecking, nipping, flapping, picking.

BIRD CHORUS: (*cackling*) Aw-caw-caw-caw-caw!

JACK: (*hollering*) GET BACK. I'm taking this cake to the princess.

NARRATOR 1: And as quickly as they had come, they were gone, taking with them the walnuts that spelled "Happy Birthday, Princess."

JACK: (*looking at his cake*) At least I still have two layers of cake, ten candles, and the succulent strawberry.

NARRATOR 2: Holding the cake proudly before him, Jack continued on to the castle. Before long he came to a bridge.

TROLL: **TOLL!**

NARRATOR 3: Out stepped a wild-haired troll.

TROLL: No one crosses my bridge without paying.

JACK: But I haven't any money.

TROLL: (*licking his lips*) But you do have a cake.

JACK: I'm taking this to the princess.

TROLL: (*growling*) And just how will you get it there. You and your cake are on this side of the river. The princess is on that side, and my bridge is the only way across.

NARRATOR 4: Jack considered the problem.

JACK: I will make you a deal. If you let me cross, I will give you half this cake.

TROLL: (*grunting*) Agreed.

NARRATOR 5: So Jack slid out one layer and, as the troll slobbered and gobbled, crossed the bridge.

NARRATOR 1: On the other side, he looked down at his gift.

JACK: At least I still have a layer of cake, ten candles, and the succulent strawberry.

NARRATOR 2: Holding the cake proudly before him, Jack continued on to the castle.

NARRATOR 3: Before long he came to the forest. No birds chirped here. No squirrels chattered.

NARRATOR 4: As if under a spell, the entire wood lay silent, sleeping. Only the wind seemed to whisper . . .

WIND CHORUS: (*whispering*) Beware! Beware!

NARRATOR 5: Pulling the cake closer, Jack pressed on. The road grew narrower. The trees grew thicker. The light grew dimmer.

NARRATOR 1: Soon it was so dark that Jack couldn't see the cake in front of his face.

WIND CHORUS: (*whispering*) Turn back! Turn back!

JACK: **I CAN'T!** I'm taking this cake to the princess.

NARRATOR 2: And he reached into his pocket for a matchstick, struck it on his shoe, and lit one of the ten candles.

NARRATOR 3: The tiny flame cast a magical circle of light. In its warm glow, Jack carefully made his way forward.

NARRATOR 4: But the little candle quickly burned down and—

CANDLE CHORUS: Pfft!

NARRATOR 5: It snuffed out. So Jack lit a second candle.

NARRATOR 1: But he had not gone much farther before—

CANDLE CHORUS: Pfft!

NARRATOR 2: It, too, snuffed out.

NARRATOR 3: So Jack lit a third. . . then a fourth. . . then a fifth. . . until the tenth and final candle flickered, fluttered, sputtered to its end.

NARRATOR 4: And as it did, the road widened, the trees thinned, and the bright sunlight shone once more.

JACK: *(looking down at his gift)* At least I still have a layer of cake and the succulent strawberry.

NARRATOR 5: Holding the cake proudly before him, Jack continued on to the castle.

NARRATOR 1: Before long he came to a clearing where an old gypsy woman stood with her dancing bear.

GYPSY WOMAN: Good morning young sir! Have you come to see Samson dance?

NARRATOR 2: At the sound of his name, the bear beside her rose up on his hind legs.

BEAR: Growwwl.

JACK: I don't have time. I'm taking this cake to the princess.

GYPSY WOMAN: Then we shall make it a quick jig.

NARRATOR 2: She snatched up her concertina and set the instrument to wheezing.

DANCE CHORUS: OOMPA-OOMPA! OOMPA-OOMPA!

NARRATOR 4: The bear began to dance.

BEAR: (*dances and kicks, side to side*)

DANCE CHORUS: Shuffle-shuffle-kick. Shuffle-shuffle-kick.

NARRATOR 5: TAP-TAP-TAP, went Jack's foot, as he set down the cake to dance with his new friends.

BEAR: **G-U-U-U-L-P!**

JACK: **HEY**, that bear ate the princess's cake!

BEAR: **PATOOIE!** (*spits out strawberry*)

GYPSY WOMAN: But not the strawberry. Samson hates fruit.

NARRATOR 1: Jack looked down at his gift, and for several seconds he was unable to speak. Finally, he said—

JACK: At least I still have this—the reddest, juiciest, most succulent strawberry in the land.

NARRATOR 2: And holding the strawberry proudly before him, Jack continued on to the castle.

NARRATOR 3: Across the drawbridge . . .

NARRATOR 4: Through the fortress walls . . .

NARRATOR 5: Straight into the courtyard.

NARRATOR 1: What a sight! There, smack in the center of all the festivities, sat the princess on her velvet throne, a long line of guests stretched before her.

NARRATOR 2: One by one, they presented her with their gifts, each more fabulous than the last.

NARRATOR 3: But even the most magnificent treasures did not seem to interest Her Highness.

PRINCESS: *(with a bored yawn)* More rubies? How tiresome. Another tiara? How dull.

NARRATOR 4: Joining the line, Jack glanced down at his humble gift. A guard noticed him.

GUARD: And just what have you brought the princess?

JACK: A strawberry. The reddest, juiciest, most succulent one in the land.

NARRATOR 5: He held it out for the guard to see.

GUARD: That is a fine piece of fruit, but I cannot allow you to give it to the princess.

JACK: Why not?

GUARD: Because she is allergic to strawberries. One taste and she swells up like a balloon.

JACK: *(gasps)* NO!

GUARD: Yes. I'm sorry, but you'll have to give it to me.

NARRATOR 1: Reluctantly, Jack handed over the strawberry.

GUARD: Mmmmm!

NARRATOR 2: Now Jack found himself at the front of the line.

PRINCESS: (*turning her gaze to Jack*) And what have you brought me?

NARRATOR 3: Jack gulped.

NARRATOR 4: He blushed.

NARRATOR 5: He shuffled his feet.

PRINCESS: Well?

NARRATOR 1: Jack took a deep breath and knelt down before her.

JACK: Your Highness, let me explain what happened.

NARRATOR 2: And he told the princess about trading for the ingredients to bake a golden-sweet cake just for her.

BAKERS' CHORUS: Churn, churn, churn. Chop, chop, chop. Blend, blend, blend. Bake, bake, bake.

NARRATOR 3: He told her about the swirling storm of blackbirds, the wild-haired troll, and the dark, dark wood.

BIRD CHORUS: (*cackling*) Aw-caw-caw-caw-caw!

NARRATOR 4: He told her about the old gypsy woman and her concertina, and the bear who loved to dance but hated fruit.

DANCE CHORUS: OOMPA-OOMPA! OOMPA-OOMPA! Shuffle-shuffle-kick. Shuffle-shuffle-kick.

JACK: And in the end, I still had the succulent strawberry, but . . . (*sighs*) you're allergic to strawberries.

NARRATOR 5: He waited for her to yawn.

JACK: So the guard ate it.

NARRATOR 1: The princess laughed and clapped her hands in delight.

PRINCESS: A STORY! And an adventure story at that! What a fine gift. (*rising from her throne*) Time for a birthday cake. And my new friend Jack shall have the honor of cutting it.

NARRATOR: And so he did, for his new friend, the princess.