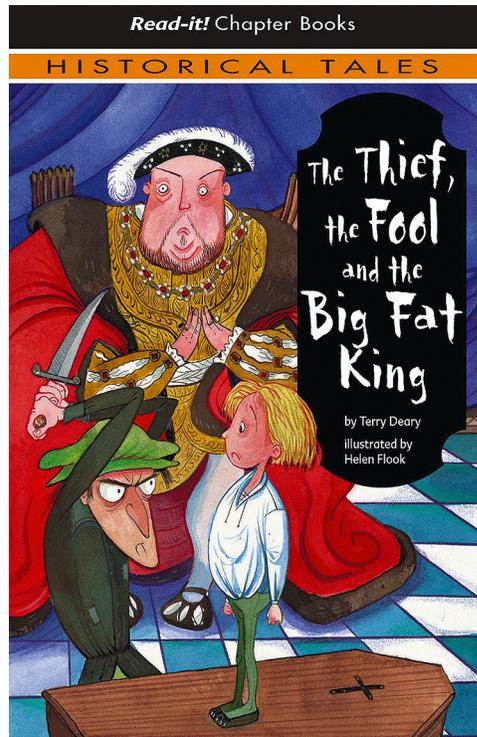




READER'S THEATER



The Thief, the Fool, and the Big Fat King by Terry Deary

Characters: **James**
 Father
 Will Somers
 King Henry
 Narrator

Genre: **Historical Fiction**

Ages: **7-10**

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In the reign of King Henry VIII, London is full of cheats and villains. When James and his parents catch the eye of the king's jester, they are summoned to the king's court as entertainment, where they find he wants to play games of his own...

Narrator: A man stepped out from the shadow of a doorway. He wore a yellow jacket and red pants. It was the man from the churchyard. He placed a hand on my father's shoulder, and Father drew his dagger as fast as a butterfly's wing.

Father: What do you want? Money? We haven't got any. Not a penny! Go rob someone else! Are you a fool?

Will Somers: Yes.

James: What?

Will Somers: Yes, I'm a fool.

James: You don't look like a fool.

Will Somers: No. I mean I am the fool at the court of King Henry VIII. I am Will Somers, the king's jester.

Father: Are you serious?

Will Somers: No, I'm fool-ish! I entertain the king with jests and songs and dancing and juggling.

Narrator: The man leapt into the air, spun around, landed on a pile of horse droppings, and slipped on his backside. James and his family laughed.

Will Somers: Your act in St. Paul's churchyard would be perfect for the king. He loves disgusting things like that. Will you come to Hampton Court Palace with me? I have a carriage in the tavern courtyard all ready.

Father: Will we be paid?

Will Somers: With a purse of gold if the king likes you.

Father: Our props will need to be replaced . . .

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Will Somers: Of course!

Father: Then show us to the carriage!

Narrator: Once they arrived at the palace, they were led into a massive room to perform for the king. King Henry was as fat as a hog. His red face had six chins, greedy little eyes, and gold chains around his neck. His sly-eyed queen, Anne Boleyn, watched us with a sneer. Henry's pasty-faced daughter, Mary, trembled and prayed.

Father: Your majesties, my lords, ladies and gentlemen . . .

Narrator: It seemed to James that his father would never get on with the act! But at last, the knife swept down.

James gasped and staggered. He wailed and fell down into the coffin. His hands shook so much that he fumbled with his props and barely finished in time for his mother to throw the coffin lid open.

King Henry: Haha! Amazing! (claps and laughs)

Narrator: When the crowd saw that Henry had enjoyed the show, they joined in with polite clapping. Anne Boleyn still sneered.

Will Somers: Let's go down to the kitchen and get something to eat. Do you play cards?

Narrator: A heavy purse of gold coins jangled on Father's broad belt, the payment for the night's show.

Father: A little . . .

Narrator: James wanted to brag that his father could make a fortune cheating at cards in the tavern, but his mother stepped heavily on his foot.

James: Father can make a fortune . . . ouch, my foot! My toes are crushed like a swatted fly!

Will Somers: The king enjoys a game of mumchance. Do you play?

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Father: (Pretending to be confused) Er . . . we all name a card. Then we turn the cards over one at a time. The first one to see their own card wins, is that right?

King Henry: That's right.

Narrator: Everyone turned to see the king limp into the kitchen. His fat legs were covered in bandages.

James: (Whispering under his breath) Look at the sores on his legs. Why won't they heal? That blood seeping through is disgusting. It smells worse than mutton pies!

Narrator: Everyone bowed, and the king sat heavily down at the kitchen table and gave a huge belch.

Will Somers: Let me get you some wine, King.

King Henry: Sit down, you peasants. Give me a chance to win back some of that gold you earned tonight.

Narrator: Father sat down happily. He always won. Always. But by the time the clock chimed midnight, Father had lost every last gold piece . . .

What happened to change Father's luck? Will James and his family survive their adventure in King Henry VIII's palace? To find out, read *The Thief, the Fool, and the Big Fat King*, a Read-It! Historical Tale from Picture Window Books.