

Readers Theatre: "Fur and Feathers"

To Read Aloud in Class or to Perform

*Based on a Story Retold by Elaine L. Lindy
Adapted as a Play Script by P.J. Rittiger*

► **Note:** If you read aloud this play script in class, skip the stage directions. The stage directions are the words shown inside the brackets and in italics: *[Like this.]*

Characters in Order of Appearance:

MAMA OSTRICH
OSTRICH CHICKS (1 & 2) - *no speaking lines*
MAMA LION
JUNGLE ANIMALS
MONGOOSE
MAMA ANTELOPE
ANTELOPE BABIES (1 & 2) - *no speaking lines*
MAMA ZEBRA
ZEBRA BABY - *no speaking lines*

ACT 1

[Scene: *an African jungle. On one side of the stage, if you have one, is the den of MAMA LION. On the other side is the home of MAMA OSTRICH.]*

[MAMA OSTRICH enters carrying a basket filled with fruit. She hums to herself.]

MAMA OSTRICH:

Children! Children, come and see what delicious food I have for you!

(looks around stage, then faces audience)

Have you seen my babies?

(waits while audience shouts, "No.")

Well they must be nearby.

(jumps up, surprised)

Oh, NO! I see LION TRACKS! Maybe a LION has come and taken them. I will follow the tracks to see where they lead.

(walks over to the Mama Lion's den with her face close to the stage)

[MAMA LION and two OSTRICH CHICKS crawl out of MAMA LION'S den. The OSTRICH CHICKS sit on the floor in front of the den.]

MAMA LION:

Do you want something, Mama Ostrich?

MAMA OSTRICH:

What are you doing with my chicks? Return them to me at once!

MAMA LION:

(adjusts glasses and looks at the two OSTRICH CHICKS)

What do you mean? These are MY cubs. That is very plain to see.

MAMA OSTRICH:

It is NOT at ALL plain to see! Those are chicks! Ostrich chicks! And I am an OSTRICH and ... and ... you're a LION!

[OSTRICH CHICKS cover their faces.]

MAMA LION:

IS that SO? Then you won't have any trouble finding another animal that agrees with you! I dare you! Find any animal at all that will look me in the eye and tell me that these are not my cubs. Do THAT first. THEN, I will give them back to you!

[MAMA LION stands, stretches, and roars. She crawls back into the den. OSTRICH CHICKS look at MAMA OSTRICH, but follow MAMA LION.]

MAMA OSTRICH:

(stamps her feet)

Well, I have never heard of such a silly thing!

(places hands on hips, strides to center stage and looks out to audience)

What is wrong with that lion? Do they look like CUBS to YOU?

(waits for audience to shout, "No!")

This is terrible. I must find a way to get my babies back!

(sits down and puts her face into her hands)

[MONGOOSE, JUNGLE ANIMALS, MAMA ZEBRA, ZEBRA BABIES, MAMA ANTELOPE and ANTELOPE BABIES enter and form a half-circle around MAMA OSTRICH. They creep and look around the stage as if they want to be sure that MAMA LION is gone.]

MAMA OSTRICH:

(sniffing and crying)

What will I do? What will I do?

MONGOOSE:

(sits next to MAMA OSTRICH)

What is the problem, Mama Ostrich?

MAMA OSTRICH:

Mama Lion took my chicks! She says they are her cubs and she will not give them back unless some animal in the jungle tells her they are not her cubs and I don't know what to do and...

MONGOOSE:

Whoa, Mama Ostrich! Slow down. Let me get this straight.

Are we talking about the Mama Lion that lives over there?

(points to MAMA LION's den)

The BIG Mama Lion?

[MAMA OSTRICH nods.]

MONGOOSE;

She took your chicks and says they are her own cubs?

[MAMA OSTRICH nods.]

MONGOOSE:

And she says that she will give them back to you only if you can find ONE animal in this jungle that will agree with you and say the chicks are yours?

[MAMA Ostrich nods.]

MONGOOSE:

Well, good luck to you and your chicks, Mama Ostrich. I guess your babies better learn how to roar!

[JUNGLE ANIMALS laugh with MONGOOSE. MAMA ANTELOPE, ANTELOPE BABIES, MAMA ZEBRA and ZEBRA BABIES do not laugh.]

MAMA OSTRICH:

WAIT A MINUTE! WAIT JUST A MINUTE!

(points to MONGOOSE)

You are supposed to be one of the smartest and bravest animals in the jungle! And what about the rest of you?

(points to all of the other JUNGLE ANIMALS)

What if these were your babies? Wouldn't you try to think of a way to get them back? You HAVE to help me! WON'T ANY OF YOU TELL MAMA LION THAT MY CHICKS DO NOT BELONG TO HER?

[JUNGLE ANIMALS shake their heads. They look to the ground.]

MONGOOSE:

(slowly rubs chin)

Mama Ostrich is right, everyone. Mama Lion is one scary beast. Still, maybe there is a way to outsmart her!

[JUNGLE ANIMALS and MAMA OSTRICH whisper with excitement.]

MAMA OSTRICH:

Tell me, Mongoose. I'll do anything to get my babies back!

MONGOOSE:

You know the anthill outside of the clearing?

MAMA OSTRICH:

The one that is almost as big than I am? Of course I know it!

MONGOOSE:

Go dig a big hole with two exits—one that goes under the anthill and one that comes out the other end behind it! Then, go tell Mama Lion that you have to see her later tonight at the anthill. Go on! Hurry!

[MAMA OSTRICH grabs her basket and hurries off the stage. MONGOOSE gathers all of the JUNGLE ANIMALS together in a football style huddle to whisper his plan.]

ACT 2

[A giant anthill is shown with a fabric curtain for a closure. MAMA OSTRICH runs to it and pushes "dirt" away with her hands. She runs around to the exit of the anthills and clears "dirt" with her hands. Then MAMA OSTRICH paces back and forth in front of the anthill. Every now and then, she looks to where she expects MONGOOSE to come. MONGOOSE enters, followed by JUNGLE ANIMALS including ZEBRA and the ANTELOPE families.]

MONGOOSE:

Did you do it? Did you dig the holes?

MAMA OSTRICH:

Yes, yes, I did it all. I dug a hole at the front and another at the back of the anthill. What if she doesn't come?

MONGOOSE:

She'll come! She'll come!

MAMA OSTRICH:

What if she doesn't bring the chicks with her?

MONGOOSE:

(nervously looks around MAMA OSTRICH)

She'll bring them! She'll bring them!

MAMA OSTRICH:

WHAT IF I AM TOO SCARED TO SPEAK?

MONGOOSE:

YOU HAVE NO CHOICE!

(gently holds MAMA OSTRICH by the shoulders, then looks to one side)

Quiet! HERE SHE COMES! OK, everyone sit down and act natural!

[Audience hears a mighty roar from off-stage. MAMA LION very slowly enters, with her glasses perched on her nose, looking proud.]

MAMA LION:

CHILDREN!

[OSTRICH CHICKS enter, holding hands. When MAMA OSTRICH sees them, she reaches for them, but MONGOOSE makes her sit back down. JUNGLE ANIMALS make hissing, booing noises, but MAMA LION does not seem to hear them. MAMA LION makes the OSTRICH CHICKS sit down.]

MAMA LION:

So, Mama Ostrich, I see you have all your brave friends here. I am sure that they have been arguing about who will be first to tell me that these babies are NOT my LION CUBS!

(laughs)

And I see my old friend Mongoose, who is always so helpful.

MAMA OSTRICH:

Yes, all of the jungle animals are here, Mama Lion. And, now...

MAMA LION:

(cuts off MAMA OSTRICH in mid-sentence)

Now, which one of you will look me in the eye and tell me these are not my cubs? Is it YOU?

(roars to MAMA ANTELOPE, who shrinks back in fear)

Or YOU?

(roars to MAMA ZEBRA, who shrinks back in fear)

Or YOU?

(roars to MAMA ZEBRA, who shrinks back in fear)

MAMA LION:

WHO shall it be?

MAMA OSTRICH:

Well, maybe we should start with Mama Antelope. What do you say, Mama Antelope? Are these babies *chicks* or are they *lion cubs*?

[MAMA LION walks to MAMA ANTELOPE and stares at her.]

MAMA ANTELOPE:

(looking nervously at the OSTRICH CHICKS and MAMA OSTRICH)

Well, they are babies. There is no question about that. But I say they are . . . CUBS!

[MAMA ANTELOPE grabs the two ANTELOPE BABIES and gallops offstage.]

MAMA LION:

AH-HA! You see, even Mama Antelope says they are my CUBS!

(walks to center stage, looks out at audience)

What do you think?

(waits for audience to respond)

Aw, what do YOU know!

(walks back to MAMA OSTRICH)

MAMA OSTRICH:

WAIT! Wait! I WILL FIND SOMEONE TO ADMIT THAT THESE BABIES ARE MINE! MAMA ZEBRA!

(grabs MAMA ZEBRA'S hands and pulls her out in front)

Tell Mama Lion that these babies are OSTRICH CHICKS!

[JUNGLE ANIMALS whisper nervously to each other. MAMA LION walks over to MAMA ZEBRA and stares at her.]

MAMA ZEBRA:

Well, they are little like baby ostriches and they are cute like baby ostriches, but I say they are . . . CUBS!

(grabs her baby by the hand and gallops offstage)

[JUNGLE ANIMALS whisper to each other nervously.]

MAMA LION:

Mama Ostrich, you are losing your battle! When will you admit that these babies are mine? THEY ARE CUBS!

MAMA OSTRICH:

WAIT! WAIT! We will ask MONGOOSE, who is one of the smartest and bravest animals in the forest! Mongoose, are these babies LION CUBS or are they OSTRICH CHICKS?

MONGOOSE:

(walks around MAMA LION and the TWO OSTRICH CHICKS, then turns to face the other animals)

Have you ever seen a mama with fur with babies that have feathers? Think of what you are saying! Mama Lion has FUR. The CHICKS have FEATHERS! THEY BELONG TO THE OSTRICH!

[MAMA OSTRICH jumps up and down with excitement. MAMA LION roars in anger. MONGOOSE quickly runs to the anthill, crawls through the opening at the bottom and out the other side, and runs off-stage. MAMA LION shoves her head and shoulders through the opening of the anthill, letting go of the OSTRICH CHICKS, who run to MAMA OSTRICH. MAMA OSTRICH hugs her two OSTRICH CHICKS.]

MAMA LION:

(roaring)

I'll get you for this Mongoose! You little pest! I'll wait here until the end of time for you to come out of this anthill!

[MAMA LION pulls her head out of the ant hill, takes off her glasses and wipes them on her fur. After putting her glasses back on, MAMA LION stares at the ostriches.]

THOSE are the UGLIEST lion cubs I have EVER seen!

MAMA OSTRICH:

(pulls two OSTRICH CHICKS behind her back)

They are NOT lion cubs. They are OSTRICH CHICKS! MY ostrich chicks!

MAMA LION:

Scrawny little yappers! Who would want them? Yuck! All the feathers in the jungle put together can't compare with THIS lovely mane!

(glares at JUNGLE ANIMALS)

Wouldn't you AGREE?

[JUNGLE ANIMALS ad-lib fearful responses such as "Oh yes, madam"; "Finest coat of fur we ever saw"; "Where do you get your conditioner?"; "None like it in the jungle, I've always said," and so on.]

[MAMA LION stalks off-stage.]

[The OSTRICH CHICKS come out from behind MAMA OSTRICH's back. She gives them a big hug. JUNGLE ANIMALS, OSTRICH CHICKS and MAMA OSTRICH cheer loudly and hug each other. 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.]

The End