



## **Fur & Feathers**

### **Readers Theater Play Script and Performance Notes**

*AUTHORS: Elaine Lindy & P.J. Rittiger, COUNTRY: Kenya, GENRE: Animal Tales*



#### **CHARACTERS**

**NARRATOR**  
**MAMA OSTRICH**  
**MAMA LION**  
**OSTRICH CHICK #1**  
**OSTRICH CHICK #2**  
**MONGOOSE**  
**GIRAFFE**  
**GORILLA #1**  
**GORILLA #2**  
**MAMA ZEBRA**  
**MAMA ANTELOPE**

*\*Performance notes can be found on the pages following the script*

## Scene 1 – Home of Mama Ostrich and the den of Mama Lion

[Stage set: An African jungle. On one side of the stage is the home of MAMA OSTRICH. On the other side of the stage is the den of MAMA LION.]

[NARRATOR enters.]

**NARRATOR:**

Hello, everyone. This play is “Fur & Feathers,” a folktale from Kenya - that's a country in Africa. The story is brought to you by *Stories to Grow by*.

[Sound of MAMA OSTRICH humming from offstage.]

[NARRATOR steps forward.]

**NARRATOR:**

Ah, that’s Mama Ostrich. This is where the story starts.

[NARRATOR steps back, and exits. MAMA OSTRICH enters, carrying a basket filled with mangoes. She continues to hum to herself.]

**MAMA OSTRICH:**

Children! Children, come and see the delicious mangoes I gathered for you!

[MAMA OSTRICH looks around stage, then faces audience.]

**MAMA OSTRICH:**

*(sets down basket)* Have you seen my babies? My two ostrich chicks. *(waits for audience response)* No, really. Have you seen them? *(waits until members of the audience shout, “No!”)* Well, they must be nearby. *(looks down at the stage then jumps up, surprised)* Oh, no! What is THAT? *(to audience)* LION TRACKS! Could it be? *(paces)* Oh dear, oh dear! Has a Lion has come and taken my poor baby chicks? I know – I will follow the tracks. Surely they will lead me to the lion’s den. *(looks uncertain for a moment)* Is this really a good idea? *(then with certainty)* No, it's not a good idea. But I'll do it, anyway!

[MAMA OSTRICH walks over to the MAMA LION’s den while looking down at the stage, as if following the lion tracks.]

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

**OSTRICH CHICK #1 and OSTRICH CHICK #2, together:**

*(in a high, squeaky voice)* Mama! Mama!

**MAMA OSTRICH:**

**My babies!**

**MAMA LION:**

*(steps in front of ostrich chicks, blocking their view)* What can I do for you, Mama Ostrich?

**MAMA OSTRICH:**

**Return my chicks! Move away, I tell you. At once!**

**MAMA LION:**

*(adjusts glasses and turns to look at the two Ostrich Chicks)* What do you mean? These are lion cubs. MY cubs. That is plain to see.

[OSTRICH CHICKS are frightened and cover their faces.]

**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 look hopeful.]

**MAMA LION:**

**IS that SO? Well then you shouldn'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. If you can do that, I will give them back to you!**

[MAMA LION stretches and roars.]

**MAMA LION:**

*(to audience, swiping hands up and down)* And THAT takes care of THAT.

[MAMA LION crawls back into the den.]

[OSTRICH CHICKS look longingly at MAMA OSTRICH, but follow MAMA LION into the den.]

**MAMA OSTRICH:**

*(stamps her feet)* Well, I never heard of such a thing! *(places hands on hips, strides to center stage and turns to audience)* What is wrong with that lion? Do they look like CUBS to YOU? *(waits for audience to shout, "No!")* I must find a way to get my babies back! My BABIES! *(sits down and puts her face into her hands)*

[MONGOOSE, GIRAFFE, GORILLA #1, GORILLA #2, MAMA ZEBRA, and MAMA ANTELOPE 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:**

*(sniffs and cries)* What will I do? What will I do?

**GIRAFFE:**

*(sits next to Mama Ostrich)* What is the problem, Mama Ostrich?

**MAMA OSTRICH:**

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

**GORILLA #1:**

Slow down, Mama Ostrich! Let me get this straight. Are we talking about the Mama Lion who lives over there? *(points to Mama Lion's den)* The Mama Lion with the big, loud roar?

[MAMA OSTRICH nods.]

**GORILLA #2:**

You're saying she took your chicks and now she says they are her very own cubs?

[MAMA OSTRICH nods.]

**GORILLA #2:**

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

[MAMA Ostrich nods.]

**GORILLA #2 :**

Well good luck with that, Mama Ostrich.

**GORILLA #1:**

I guess your babies had better learn how to roar!

[GIRAFFE, GORILLA #1, and GORILLA #2 laugh. MAMA ANTELOPE, ANTELOPE BABIES, MAMA ZEBRA, ZEBRA BABY and MONGOOSE do not laugh. MAMA ANTELOPE puts her arms around ANTELOPE BABIES. MAMA ZEBRA puts her arm around ZEBRA BABY.]

**MAMA OSTRICH:**

Wait a minute. WAIT JUST A MINUTE! What if these were YOUR babies? What would you do? All of you are bigger animals than I am. Won't ANY of you help me?

**GORILLA #1:**

Oh, I WOULD, really...

**GORILLA #2:**

Except for the Mama Lion part. That's the only thing. The only little thing.

**GIRAFFE:**

No doubt, you understand the problem.

**MAMA OSTRICH:**

*(in a huff)* I understand all too well! *(points to Mongoose)* You are supposed to be one of the smartest and bravest animals in the jungle.

**MONGOOSE:**

"One of"? I AM the smartest and bravest!

**MAMA OSTRICH:**

*(hands on hips)* Then prove it!

**MONGOOSE:**

Harumph. There may be another way of looking at this situation. *(boths hands forward, palms up)* Give me a moment to ponder, all right? The creative process, you know. *(paces for a few moments while rubbing chin)* *(to audience)* I'm thinking. Pondering. Hmm – hmm – hmm. *(stops suddenly)* Aha! I've got it!

[JUNGLE ANIMALS are excited.]

**MAMA OSTRICH:**

Tell me! What?

**MONGOOSE:**

Simple, really. You know the anthill outside the clearing?

**MAMA OSTRICH:**

Of course. That anthill is almost as big as I am.

**MONGOOSE:**

That's the one. Here's what you must do. Dig a tunnel! Go dig two holes. The first one in front of the anthill. Connect it to a second hole that goes out the back of the anthill.

**MAMA OSTRICH:**

And... what is the point of that?

**GIRAFFE:**

Mongoose, you do realize the idea is to get Mama Ostrich's babies back, right? What's all this talk about holes?

**MONGOOSE:**

Trust me, okay? *(to Mama Ostrich)* When you're done, go tell Mama Lion you have to see her later tonight at the anthill for a special meeting.

**MAMA OSTRICH:**

What special meeting?

**MONGOOSE:**

Just do it! Dig the holes and tunnel. Then tell Mama Lion about the meeting. All of you others must be there too. At sunset. Now go, everyone!

[MAMA OSTRICH shrugs, but exits hurriedly. Rest of animals exit.]

## Scene 2 – Anthill

[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 anthill 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.]

**MONGOOSE:**

Did you finish the two holes and the connecting tunnel?

**MAMA OSTRICH:**

Yes. There’s an entrance at the front of the anthill and an exit out the back. Just as you said. And I told Mama Lion about the meeting at sunset tonight, which will be soon. Though the whole thing doesn’t really make sense to me...

**MONGOOSE:**

Never mind about that. Listen, when Mama Lion gets here she’s going to ask for any animal to look her in the eye and tell her the chicks are not her cubs.

**MAMA OSTRICH:**

That’s the sad truth. I hope you know what you are doing. (*pauses*) But what if Mama Lion doesn’t even come tonight?

**MONGOOSE:**

She’ll come.

**MAMA OSTRICH:**

What if she doesn’t bring my chicks?

**MONGOOSE:**

She’ll bring them.

**MAMA OSTRICH:**

And what if no one else comes?

**MONGOOSE:**

Stop worrying!

**GIRAFFE (*from offstage*):**

I don’t even know why we’re doing this.

**GORILLA #1 (*from offstage*):**

Tell me about it.

**MONGOOSE:**

Ah, here they come.

[GIRAFFE, GORILLA #1, GORILLA #2, ZEBRA and ANTELOPE enter.]

**GIRAFFE:**

Here we are, everyone. This better be good.

**GORILLA #1:**

I left a field of bamboo shoots for this.

**GORILLA #2:**

This is my naptime.

**MAMA ZEBRA:**

I wouldn't miss this for anything. But I left my baby safe at home.

**MAMA ANTELOPE:**

Me, too. We're talking Mama Lion, after all.

**MONGOOSE:**

*(looks offstage)* Quiet! Here she comes! Okay everyone, sit down and act natural!

[Audience hears a mighty roar from offstage. MAMA LION very slowly enters, with her glasses perched on her nose, looking proud. She turns suddenly and looks behind her.]

**MAMA LION:**

CHILDREN!

**OSTRICH CHICK #1:**

*(in a sad voice)* Coming.

**OSTRICH CHICK #2:**

*(also in a sad voice)* We're right here.

[OSTRICH CHICKS enter, holding hands. When MAMA OSTRICH sees them, she reaches for them. But MONGOOSE makes her sit back down.]

[GIRAFFE, GORILLA #1 and GORILLA #2 make quiet hissing, booing noises toward MAMA LION. MAMA LION quickly turns around, notices them and glares. They are silenced.]

[MAMA LION turns her attention back to OSTRICH CHICKS and makes them sit down.]



**MAMA LION:**

So, Mama Ostrich. I see you have gathered all your friends for this so-called meeting. We can use this opportunity to prove once and for all that these are my cubs.

**MAMA OSTRICH:**

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

**MAMA LION:**

Now! (*walks threatening in front of all the Jungle Animals*) Which one of you will look me in the eye and tell me these are not my cubs? (*loudly to Giraffe*) Is it YOU?

**GIRAFFE:**

(*shrinking back in fear*) Um... I need to go home?

[GIRAFFE steps back slowly, then suddenly runs offstage.]

**MAMA LION:**

(*to Gorilla #1*) You! Maybe YOU'RE the one to tell me these are not my cubs.

**GORILLA #1:**

Certainly not. No way, Jose. (*runs offstage*)

**MAMA LION:**

(*roars to Gorilla #2*) Or maybe YOU?

**GORILLA #2:**

(*shrinking back in fear*) Not likely. Not today, anyway. Or tomorrow. (*holds out a bamboo shoot*) How about some yummy bamboo?

**MAMA LION:**

(*roars, turning to Mama Antelope*) I prefer the taste of ANTELOPE steaks! (*Mama Antelope shrinks back in fear*) So are these my cubs, or not? Cubs or chicks. CHOOSE!

**GORILLA #2:**

Definitely CUBS, Sire. Ma'am. Your Majesty. Your Highness. (*bows and runs offstage*)

**MAMA LION:**

(*to Mama Ostrich*) You see? Just as I thought.

**MAMA OSTRICH:**

Well, we haven't heard from everyone.

**MAMA LION:**

(*to Mama Zebra*) You're next, Mama Zebra.

**MAMA ZEBRA:**

They are small and cute like baby ostriches (*examines more closely the Ostrich Chicks*) They have long necks like baby ostriches and two legs like baby ostriches...

**MAMA LION:**

(*growling*) Exactly what are you saying, Mama Zebra?

**MAMA ZEBRA:**

I am saying they may look like chicks (*Mama Lion glares at Mama Zebra*), but they are without a doubt... CUBS!

[MAMA ZEBRA gallops offstage. MAMA LION walks menacingly over to MAMA ANTELOPE.]

**MAMA LION:**

You're left, Gorilla. For your own sake, I hope you agree with me.

**GORILLA #2:**

I agree whenever possible. It's good to agree, right? Well, these two are, no doubt about it, your own sweet and adorable CUBS!

[GORILLA #2 also backs up a few steps, then runs offstage.]

**MAMA LION:**

(*to audience, sarcastically*) How nice when everyone sees things my way. (*threateningly, to Mama Ostrich*) So stay away from my cubs from now on!

**MAMA OSTRICH:**

Wait! WAIT! We have not asked MONGOOSE.

**MAMA LION:**

That little thing? What do we care what she thinks? (*note- if actor playing Mongoose is a boy, to say "he"*)

**MAMA OSTRICH:**

Dear Mongoose, are these lion cubs, or are they ostrich chicks?

**MAMA LION:**

Spare us, why don't you? We already know the answer.

[MONGOOSE walks around MAMA LION and the TWO OSTRICH CHICKS, then turns to face the other animals. MONGOOSE is located directly in front of the entrance to the hole.]

**MONGOOSE:**

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, gives the audience a quick victory sign, and runs offstage. (See Performance Notes for more description of the anthill and its “tunnel.”) ]

[MAMA LION shoves her head and shoulders through the opening of the anthill. OSTRICH CHICKS see the chance, and run to their mother’s open wings/arms.]

**OSTRICH CHICK #1 and OSTRICH CHICK #2, together:**  
(*to Mama Ostrich*) Mama! Mama!

[MAMA OSTRICH hushes the two OSTRICH CHICKS. They hug.]

**MAMA LION:**  
(*roars into anthole*) I’ll get you for this, Mongoose! You little pest!

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

**MAMA LION:**  
It's just as well, since 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! And they are beautiful.

**MAMA LION:**  
Scrawny little yappers! Who wants them?

[While MAMA LION is staring at the entrance hole, MONGOOSE appears briefly on stage and gives a quick wave to MAMA OSTRICH. MAMA OSTRICH and her two OSTRICH CHICKS give a quick wave back. MONGOOSE exits.]

[MAMA OSTRICH and her two OSTRICH CHICKS step backwards slowly offstage, while keeping their eyes fixed on MAMA LION. When close to offstage but still visible, the three of them silently jump up and down, and silently high-five each other. Then quickly exit.]

**MAMA LION:**  
(*shakes fist to opening of anthill*) I’ll get you, you little rodent!

[NARRATOR enters.]

**NARRATOR:**

Well, now. It appears the situation has worked out for the best. Mama Ostrich, present and accounted for?

**MAMA OSTRICH (*from offstage*):**

Here!

**NARRATOR:**

Ostrich chicks?

**OSTRICH CHICK #1 and OSTRICH CHICK #2, together:**

*(in a high, squeaky voice)* Here!

**NARRATOR:**

Everyone else?

**GIRAFFE, GORILLA #1, GORILLA #2, MAMA ANTELOPE and MAMA ZEBRA (*from offstage*):**

Out of here!

**NARRATOR:**

And what of Mama Lion? She was left waiting at the foot of the anthill for a very, very long time.

**MAMA LION:**

*(roars)* I'll wait here forever, if I have to!

**NARRATOR:**

That could be awhile. Which would work out just fine for the rest of them. And is as good a spot as any to say to you, "the end."

[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 Fur and Feathers

### 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

Ask the children to come up with ideas about how to make their own costumes. The characters should bear some small resemblance to the animals they portray, but they are more fanciful than realistic. An option is to have them make animal masks out of paper plates. Below are some more suggestions for getting started.

- MAMA LION – Yellow clothing, can be furry material, and a mane of fuzzy material. Over-sized, bright spectacles.
- MAMA OSTRICH – White or light yellow furry fabric, draped. Pink knee socks and a bright kerchief over her head.
- MAMA ANTELOPE – A pink marabou boa or red tennis shoes.
- MONGOOSE – Camouflage paints over his or her face with cloth ears pinned to his or her hair.



- **GORILLA** – Brown or black t-shirt and pants with a circle of brown or black furry fabric glued or sewed to the middle of the T-shirt.
- **GIRAFFE** – Yellow T-shirt with black spots. Pants to match, or brown pants. You can make giraffe horns out of paper or cardboard, and attach to a plastic headband.
- **OSTRICH CHICKS** – Similar to MAMA OSTRICH, with white or light yellow furry fabric, draped. You can add brown and black spots to their backs, to make them slightly different, since they are chicks. Pink knee socks.
- **MAMA ZEBRA** – Black and white stripes. Optional long tail made of black and white striped fabric or painted cardboard, pinned or otherwise attached to waist band of pants.



## PROPS

### Scene 1

- A simple basket containing mangoes, real or plastic, for MAMA OSTRICH to carry.



## SETS

“Fur & Feathers” takes place at dusk in the African jungle. The scenery for both scenes is similar. If you are able to paint a backdrop, it could show a setting sun, large purple and black mountains, silvery streams, trees, and animals. This backdrop does not change.

**Scene 1:** The homes of MAMA OSTRICH and MAMA LION. You can make the two homes out of large, refrigerator-sized boxes, painting them so they look made of jungle materials- browns and greens to represent wood, mud, and leaves. You can also make vines and leaves from paper and fabric, and drape them over the huts.

NOTE: After Scene 1, the homes of MAMA LION and MAMA OSTRICH can be taken offstage or moved out of the way, and replaced with an anthill. You can use stage hands to help with the transition or use the actors in costumes to move it, making it a “part” of the show.

Another option is to create two sets and have the actors move from one side of the stage to the other.

**Scene 2:** An anthill. The anthill can be built using boxes stacked atop each other and painted reddish brown. When MONGOOSE goes through the anthill, they can just crawl behind it, pretending as if they or going into it.

You might paint big black ants all over your anthill or glue plastic or construction paper bugs on it.

The “dirt” referred to in the beginning of the second scene can be made of brown fabric draped on the ground, or toilet paper rolls painted brown and placed around the anthill. Either way, it should be placed so that MAMA OSTRICH can easily push it away. Be sure it does not obstruct the pathways of your actors.