

## Resource 12

### *King Matt the First* *Janusz Korczak*

The story of King Matt was first published in Poland in 1923. It became very popular, and is as well known in some parts of Europe as stories like *Peter Pan* are in Australia. In the story Matt is only ten years old when his father dies, leaving him all alone to rule as King. Matt has many adventures as he struggles to become a good ruler: sneaking away to War, travelling to the land of the cannibals and hosting a magnificent party for a group of foreign kings.

Matt decides to make some big changes. He decides to introduce democracy into his country, and establishes parliaments for children as well as adults. He tries to find ways to share power among all the citizens of his country, including the children, but things don't always go smoothly...

*Matt has just returned to the capital after spending the summer in the countryside. Matt is reluctant to return to the pressures of life as King, as his time in the country had been spent playing, resting and recovering from the visit of the foreign kings.*

*Matt had earlier appointed his playmate Felek Prime Minister of the children's government. Felek encourages Matt to attend the first session of the Children's Parliament (Proparl) to give an inaugural address.*

"Tomorrow will be the first session of the Proparl after vacation," said Felek. "No doubt, Your Royal Highness will wish to make a little speech to parliament."

"And say what?"

"Kings usually say they are happy that the people are making their voices heard, and they wish them success."

"All right, I'll go," agreed Matt.

But he didn't want to go, because it would be noisy with so many children there, and they'd all be staring at him.

But when Matt saw that children had come to parliament from all over his land to discuss how to govern the country, when he saw how happy they were, and when he spotted his village playmates from that summer in the crowd, he came to life and made a very fine speech.

"You are the delegates," he said. "Until now, I was all alone. I wanted to make life good for everyone. But it's very hard for one person to know what everybody needs. It'll be easier for you. Some of you know what cities need, and some of you know what the countryside needs. The little children know what little children need, and the big children know what big children need. I hope that someday children from all over the world will meet together, the way the kings did recently, and all the children will present their own special needs. For instance, African children don't need skates, because they don't have skating rinks. The workers have their own special flag. A red one. The children should have a flag of their own too. Maybe they'll choose green, because children love the forest, and the forest is green..."

Matt spoke for a very long time, but the delegates paid close attention, and that made Matt happy.

Then the journalist stood up and said that the newspaper for children was coming out every day, so they could read the latest news, and they could write articles for it themselves if they wanted. Then he asked if they'd had a good time at camp.

The children responded with a terrific uproar. Felek called in the police and things quieted down.

Felek said that anyone who shouted would be thrown out the door and that they should take turns talking.

The first to speak was a barefoot boy wearing a tattered jacket.

"I'm a delegate and I want to say that we didn't have a good time at all. There were no games to play, the food was bad, and when it rained, water dripped on your head because there were holes in the roof."

"And they didn't change the sheets," someone shouted.

"And they gave us slop for lunch."

"Like we were pigs."

"Things were a mess."

"And they beat us."

"And locked us in our cabins for any little thing."

Again, such an uproar arose that a ten-minute recess was needed.

The four delegates who were making the most noise were thrown out. Then the journalist made a brief speech saying that nothing was perfect in the beginning and that next year would be better. He called on the delegates to state their requests.

There was another uproar.

"I want to keep pigeons," one shouted.

"I want a dog."

"Every child should have a watch."

"Children should be allowed to use the telephone."

"We don't want people kissing us."... ..

"We want to go to bed late."

"Every child should have a bicycle."

"And his own bookcase."

"And more pockets. My father has thirteen pockets and I only have two. I can't fit everything in them, and I get yelled at if I lose my handkerchief."

"Every child should have a trumpet."

"And a revolver."

"And drive a car to school."

"Abolish girls and little children."

"I want to be a magician."

"Every child should have his own boat."

"And go to the circus every day."... ..

"Every child should have his own room."... ..

"Every child should be allowed to break a window at least once a month."

"And smoke cigarettes."

"And there shouldn't be any blank maps with countries to fill in."

"Or spelling tests."

"We want a special day when the grownups have to stay home and the children can go wherever they want."

"All kings should be children."

"Grownups should go to school."

"We want boots."... ..

"Every child should have his own car."

"And his own ship."

"And a house."