

## **Stone Soup: the lesson.**

Students are placed into groups, and told to read the story, “Stone Soup,” and then discuss questions about it.

What the students are not told, is that within each group there are two very different versions of the story. In one, the traveler cons everyone into feeding him, and goes away vengefully triumphant. In the other, by dint of his wits and leadership he manages to feed the entire village, along with himself.

Will the students figure out that their stories are different? Some groups will, and some won't, and either way, they learn the lessons: talk, assert yourself, use evidence, and most important—the lesson of the story “Stone Soup” itself—contribute.

The final experience of this lesson is nearly always the same. In a few groups, a simple minimum of interest in the task at hand can result in the most perfunctory answering of questions, jotting of answers, and moving on, without disagreement. In some groups, a dominant personality will bulldoze the other group members and his/her answers will be accepted even when other group members are puzzled by the results.

And finally, some groups figure out that there are two different stories. They do this because during the course of answering the questions, they actually do use the text for evidence, reading parts aloud to support their differing answers. Invariably, those groups raise their hands for the teacher and are ready to blurt out that their stories are different. The teacher has to be ready for this, and quell their vocalizations so as not to give away the conclusion.

The conclusion, naturally, is this: when discussing a piece of literature, when analyzing a text, the participants need to back up their conclusions by using the text itself—quoting it, paraphrasing it—and need to participate actively, asserting their perspectives so that others can see and use different views.

I first conceived of this lesson while I was teaching in Portugal. I've always liked the “Stone Soup” story itself, because of the idea of a person managing to get others to all contribute so that they all benefit, while the person's singular contribution is the idea. I told the story to one of my classes, and my Portuguese students responded that they had the same general story, but it was quite different. Theirs was a tale of their archetypal trickster character, and in their version, he simply cons everyone else out of their food and tricks them into feeding him, while they go hungry. It is not a story about community and contribution, but about cleverness and deceit. I loved that the two places could have the same tale, but with such a dramatically different moral.

And of course, every class discussion is, really, if all participate and contribute what they can, the making of stone soup.

## **“Stone Soup” Lesson Plan**

**Purpose:** To make visible the value of close-reading, use of textual evidence, and defending answers in discussions

Put students in **groups** (3-4 students/group). Spread out groups to minimize overhearing.

Have a **class set of stories** you collect back at the end (half with title on left; half with title in center).

**Each group needs to have at least one of each version.** (If they all have the same version, they won't have any differences to discover!)

### **Instructions to class:**

- I will pass out story.
- I will read the opening out loud.
- Then each student will silently read the rest of the story.
- When you finish, discuss the answers to the questions with your group.
- Have one member of group jot down brief notes, so you will remember your thinking when we come back together to discuss as a full class.
- FOCUS is on *discussing the answers*. Written answers are brief.
- As your group makes discoveries, keep within your group – don't yell out -- so all groups can discover answers on their own.

Pass out story (making sure each group has a mix of versions).

Read first four paragraphs aloud (through: “All I can tell you is that it's very good.”)

Circulate as the groups discuss the answers to the questions.

Rush to hush groups who discover they have different versions. Quietly congratulate them, ask them to keep silent about their discovery, and then ask them to see which answers are affected by having different versions (#1, 5, 8, etc.).

Students will need coaching on #12, developing a metaphor for the stone. (What role does the stone play in the story? What is something in life that plays that same role?)

**When the groups have finished, bring them together as a class.**

Ask them to look over all questions – are some harder than others? Why? Can discuss differences in types of questions and thinking they require.

**Start with #8 (“for the sake of time”)** and try to elicit some people saying the traveler gave a “spoonful” versus a bowl of soup. Have kids defend their answers with the text.

**Discover different stories!**

Other rich questions to discuss are: 9, 10 (can the same moral work for both versions?) and 12.

**Ask class: What is the moral of MY story? Why did I give out two versions?**

**Did anyone discover this? How? What can we learn from this?**

- To make you realize the importance of **citing SPECIFIC evidence from the text** (not “some” soup – big difference between a spoonful and a bowlful of soup for lunch!!)
- Be willing to speak up and respectfully disagree
- Defend your answer with textual evidence. **Speak up! Use the text!**

**Make students take OATH they will not tell other classes (and deprive them of this learning opportunity!!)**

FYI: greedy = Portuguese version (title in center) share = American version (title on left)

## STONE SOUP

A poor traveler came into a small town. Very hungry, he arrived at the door of a farmer. He knocked at the door, and a man answered. The traveler asked the man to give him some food. The man replied, "I'm sorry, but we have only a little meat, and my family has to eat."

The traveler went to another house, where he again asked for food. The man who had answered the door said, "We don't have enough food: only a bit of cabbage. We cannot give you anything."

At the next house, after he asked, a woman answered that she had only a few carrots, and that she needed them.

Again, at the next house, a large farmhouse, the people would give him nothing, although they did not seem too poor. The traveler went from house to house in the village, but no one would give him anything. Finally, at one large house, after the people told him to leave, he said to them, "I'm going to see if I can make some stone soup." He went out to the road and started searching for an appropriate stone. He examined several stones carefully, to see if they were good for making soup. At last, he found one that he liked. He wiped the dust off the stone, and looked at the stone closely. The people of the house just laughed. "So," he said, "it seems that you've never eaten stone soup. All I can tell you is that it's very good."

They answered him, "We'd like to see that."

That was all the traveler needed to hear. He said, "Oh, yes, it's quite good. In fact, go around the village and invite your neighbors and tell them that I will make stone soup for everyone. Just one thing: could I borrow a pot from you?"

The people gave him a pot, and he went to the well at the center of the village to fill the pot with water. He washed the stone, then put it into the pot. He built a small fire in the town center, near the well. Soon, the people of the town were all gathered around him to watch his project.

After the water began to simmer, the traveler took a spoon out of his bag, and tasted the soup. He said to himself, out loud, "I used to put some salt into this, didn't I? Well, we don't have any salt now, so we'll eat it as it is." When one woman heard this, she went to her house and got a lump of salt, which she gave to him. He put it into the pot, after thanking her for her generosity.

He stirred the pot, then tasted the soup. "Mmmmm," he said, "Delicious! Just a bit of cabbage and it would be just perfect."

The man who had told him that he had cabbage ran to his house and got it. The townspeople were very curious to see the traveler making stone soup, and wondered if it could really be done. The traveler thanked the man profusely, and then tore the cabbage apart with his hands and threw it into the pot.

He tasted the soup, and said to them, "I remember, once, that I ate at the table of the King of Mongolia, and he put carrots into his soup. Oh!" he said, "It was a flavor for royalty, only."

The other woman went and got her carrots, and gave them to the traveler. He put them into the pot, then said, "This doesn't need anything else. It is stone soup extraordinaire!" He watched the soup cook for a while and sat back. Then he looked into the sky and mused, almost to himself, "Hmm, I just now remembered the time I was in Egypt, and they made stone soup for the gods. They put in just a bit of meat. But that was only for the gods."

He closed his eyes as though to take a short nap. The man who had some meat crept to his house and cut up the meat. He tip-toed back into the town center and dropped the meat into the pot, gesturing for the other townspeople to be quiet. Finally, the traveler returned to the pot, and decided that the stone soup was done. He took the pot from the fire, to cool. The people of the town were still watching him, to see if he had really made soup from a stone. After the soup cooled, the traveler took out his spoon, and tasted the soup. "Oh!" he declared, "It is heavenly! Let's eat!"

The people came forward, and the traveler served them each a bowl of soup, then ate from the pot, himself. Eventually, he emptied the pot, leaving the stone at the bottom. The people of the village, amazed, said, "But what about the stone?"

The traveler replied, "The stone? Well, this is a very good stone for stone soup. I'm going to keep it, in case I need to make stone soup, again, soon." The traveler stood, and went out of the town.

And so, the traveler ate in the town of the people who would give him nothing, and the people learned to make stone soup, together.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** When everyone in your group has finished reading the story, respond to the following questions. **Answer the questions by taking brief notes for the group (not individually) on separate paper.** Reread parts of the story as often as you'd like, and talk with each other to make sure you understand it. At the end, we will compare your understanding with that of the other groups.

Comprehension and discussion questions:  
*Jot notes on separate paper for the group.*

1) Do you think that the traveler was clever? Do you think he was kind? Why?

2) How long ago do you think this story took place? Why do you think so?

3) When the traveler stopped at the first few houses, what did he want? Was he successful?

4) How did the traveler get the people to pay attention to him, at first?

5) Where did the traveler start to make his soup? Using what?

6) Why did the people decide to give him some food, when they hadn't given him food before?

7) Why did the man have to sneak the meat into the soup, in secret?

8) After the traveler finished making the soup, what did he do?

9) Did the people get anything from the traveler?

10) What do you think is the "moral" of the story?

11) Did the traveler "contribute" anything to the soup? What?

12) The stone in this story is a metaphor. In your interpretation, what might it stand for?

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Again, at the next house, a large farmhouse, the people would give him nothing, although they did not seem too poor. The traveler went from house to house in the village, but no one would give him anything. Finally, at one large house, after the people told him to leave, he said to them, "I'm going to see if I can make some stone soup." He went out to the road and started searching for an appropriate stone. He examined several stones carefully, to see if they were good for making soup. At last, he found one that he liked. He wiped the dust off the stone, and looked at the stone closely. The people of the house just laughed. "So," he said, "it seems that you've never eaten stone soup. All I can tell you is that it's very good."

They answered him, "We'd like to see that."

That was all the traveler needed to hear. He said, "Could you just lend me a pot of water?" The woman brought him a pot of water. The traveler washed the stone with some of the water, and then put the stone in the pot. "Would you be so kind as to let me put the pot by the fire?" They let him do that.

After the water began to simmer, the traveler took a spoon out of his bag and tasted the soup. He said to himself, out loud, "I used to put some salt into this, didn't I? Well, I don't have any salt, now, so I'll eat it as it is." When the woman of the house heard this, she gave him a lump of salt, which he put into the pot after thanking her for her generosity.

He stirred the pot, then tasted the soup. "Mmmmm," he said, "Delicious! Just a bit of cabbage and it would be just perfect."

The man in the house heard this, and went out to get a head of cabbage. The people were very curious to see the traveler making stone soup, and wondered if it could really be done. The traveler thanked the man profusely, then tore the cabbage apart with his hands and threw it into the pot.

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The woman went to the garden and brought back two carrots, which he put into the pot. He said, "This doesn't need anything else. It is stone soup extraordinaire!" He watched the soup cook for a while and sat back. Then he looked into the sky and mused, almost to himself, "Hmm, I just now remembered the time I was in Egypt, and they made stone soup for the gods. They put in just a bit of meat. But that was only for the gods."

He closed his eyes as though to take a short nap. The man of the house crept into the kitchen and quietly cut up some meat. He tip-toed back into the room and dropped the meat into the pot. After some time, the traveler opened his eyes again, and returned to tending the soup. He tasted it and declared it finished. He took the pot away from the fire, to cool. The people of the house were still watching him, to see if he had really made soup from a stone. After the soup cooled, the traveler took out his spoon, and ate the soup slowly. "Oh!" he declared. "It is heavenly!"

The man and woman asked for a taste. The traveler said, "Well, all right, but just a spoonful. After all, the soup did come from MY stone." He gave them each a spoonful of the soup, and they immediately could taste its goodness, and wished that they had made it for their supper. Eventually, the traveler emptied the pot, leaving the stone at the bottom. The people of the house, amazed, said, "But what about the stone?"

The traveler replied, "The stone? Well, this is a very good stone for stone soup. I'm going to keep it, in case I need to make stone soup, again, soon." The traveler stood, and went out of the house.

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