



Cactus Soup

by Eric A. Kimmel

illustrated by Phil Huling

Summary

“Stone Soup” or “Nail Soup” is a popular folktale told and retold in many cultures around the world. This version, depicting soldiers riding into a town during the Mexican Revolution, is a rich retelling of the familiar story. As soldiers ride into the town of San Miguel, the townspeople, fearing the soldier’s arrival, hide all of their food. How surprised and lucky they are when they learn that the soldiers can make soup from a kettle of water and a cactus thorn!

Ideas for Classroom Use

Discussion Questions

Encourage the children to find examples from the story to document their answers.

- > *Why are the people of San Miguel so fearful of soldiers coming into their town?*
- > *What words would you use to describe the mayor? the captain?*
- > *Did the people of San Miguel really learn how to make cactus soup? What are some lessons they did learn?*

Read a version of Stone Soup. Discuss ways Cactus Soup and Stone Soup are different and the same.

- > *What ingredients were used to make the soup?*
- > *Where was each story set?*

Responding to the Text

Writing

There are numerous ways for your children to respond in writing to the story of Cactus Soup by Eric Kimmel. You might encourage them to choose from one of the following suggestions:

A letter to a friend:

Imagine that one of the townspeople is sending a letter to a friend about the soldiers’ visit to the town. What would he/she say in the letter? How would the person describe the soldiers? the soup? the fiesta?

The next community gathering

Describe how the community of San Miguel might treat the next visitors who come into town. Would they volunteer to make cactus soup for the next visitors? Or, describe how the people have changed due to the soldiers’ visit. How have their actions changed? How do they celebrate together now?



Cactus Soup

by Eric A. Kimmel

illustrated by Phil Huling

Cooking/Tasting

Cooking with cactus

Thanks to Gloria Montalvo and Sylvia Koite, librarian friends of Eric's from the San Benito School District, for these additional pointers and ideas for cooking with cactus:

Fried Cactus:

Cactus can be purchased already diced in jars or cans in the canned vegetable section of your grocery store. Drain the water completely from the cactus. If it's fresh, you need to boil the cactus first and then let it drain. Be very careful of the spines or thorns! Heat some cooking oil in a saucepan and add the cactus. Cook over medium heat and add spices to taste: salt, pepper, chili powder, etc. Add tomato if you like.

Cactus Scramble:

Scramble an egg into the cactus mixture

With chicken, beef or pork:

Dice chicken, ground or cubed meat. Brown them and then add to the cactus and spices mixture.

Cactus Soup

There are many versions of Cactus Soup (Sopa de nopales) available on various cooking websites. The easiest one is located at the following site:
www.elook.org/recipes/latin/32597.html

Science

Researching cactus

Are cacti native to your area? Find out what species are native to your state or area of the country. In addition to encyclopedias and researching on the internet, some books to assist you are *The Desert Alphabet Book*, by Jerry Pallotta and *Cactus Hotel*, by Brenda Z. Guiberson.

Bring cacti into the classroom for observation

Almost all florist have cacti available for purchase. Bring several kinds into the classroom for children to observe their slow growth. Monitor the amount of water given, measure growth in height, etc. Do some of the cacti bloom? Do they all have thorns? What purpose do the thorns have? Do you think they would taste good? These and other simple ideas for exploring cacti can be found in the many children's books about simple science experiments.