

# Stone Soup



One cold, dark night three soldiers were trudging home after a long battle. They were tired and hungry and longed for some warm food in their bellies and a safe place to sleep for the night.





“Let’s try over there!” the first soldier exclaimed, pointing towards a small village in the distance. “I am sure the people will be kind enough to help us.” The other soldiers agreed that it was an excellent plan so they headed off in the direction of the village with hope in their hearts.



However the villagers had watched the soldiers approaching and, anticipating what they wanted, quickly hid all their food, for they did not wish to share their provisions with strangers.





When the soldiers arrived in the village they knocked at the first door and smiled eagerly at the old man who answered. The second soldier spoke:

“Excuse me Sir, are you able to spare us some morsels to eat? We are weak with hunger after our battle.”

“I wish I could help,” the old man replied, “but I have nothing to offer. I am just a poor old man and my cupboards are bare.” The soldiers thanked him for his time and continued on their way.



At the next house the third soldier asked if they might rest on a blanket in the kitchen for the night to shelter from the cold.

“I wish I could help,” came the reply from the farmer’s daughter who peered out into the night at them “but we have no room in our kitchen and cannot spare even a single blanket.”

The soldiers smiled weakly back at her and tramped on.

“We’ll have more luck at the next house,” soldier one reassured his comrades.



Unfortunately the response was the same at each and every house they tried. Everybody seemed unable to offer them a scrap of food or a place to rest. The three men slumped together on a bench beside the village green.





“We have no other option than to make ourselves some delicious stone soup!” soldier two yelled loudly. “If only we had a cooking pot filled with water and a fire on which to cook.” The curious villagers twitched at their curtains, intrigued by the sound of this unusual meal. Almost at once an old lady hobbled out of the nearest house with a cooking pot splashing with fresh water and a box of matches to light a fire. “Here use these,” she called “I would love to see you make stone soup.”





“Ah excellent!” soldier three replied “You are very kind and stone soup really is most exquisite.” He rummaged in his pocket and pulled out two large, smooth pebbles, plopped them into the pot and lit the fire. By the time the water was bubbling gently a small crowd of villagers had gathered around chattering excitedly about the magic of making a meal from stones.



Soldier two dipped his finger into the pot and tested the soup while the villagers held their breath in anticipation. “Mmmm very tasty!” he concluded. “If only we had some seasoning.” The villagers gasped in amazement and the farmer’s daughter rushed to his side.

“I will fetch some!” she announced, and within a few minutes she was back with a small jar of salt and some fresh peppercorns. The soldier added a generous pinch of each and tested the soup again.

“Much better!” he declared. “But if we only had a carrot or two, this soup would be divine.”





“I think I could spare a couple of carrots,” a young man piped up and he dashed off towards his house. Soldier three decided to try the soup too. “I do think an onion and some cabbage would also enhance the flavour,” he mused and at once the grocer spoke out: “Now I am thinking of it I might just have some of those in my vegetable garden. I’ll go and grab them.”



Soldier one smiled a tiny wry smile and spoke one last time: “I am certain that a ham hank and some barley would transform this stone soup into a meal fit for royalty!” The greedy butcher, who was practically salivating over the pot by this time, jumped to attention.

“There may be just one ham left in my store. I will go and see, and while I am there I am sure I will be able to find some barley too.” He scurried off to fetch the goods.





When all the villagers returned with the ingredients the soldiers added them one by one to the pot and soon the most delicious smell enveloped the crowd of people.

“I do believe the stone soup is ready!” soldier two announced grandly. “Now who wishes to try some?” The villagers rushed forward and the soldiers dished out portions to everybody, including themselves. Within seconds they were all slurping their soup noisily and the villagers were congratulating the soldiers on being so clever as to make such a scrumptious soup using stones. The soldiers thanked them for their kind words and stood up to leave.



“No you must stay here the night so we can repay you for the lovely stone soup,” the baker called out. “I have just the right room for three wise, kind soldiers.”

Later that night the three soldiers were tucked up cosily in the baker’s comfortable bed while the baker and his wife slept on the floor downstairs.

“Stone soup really is the best kind of meal,” soldier three yawned. His friends nodded in agreement and soon all three were fast asleep and snoring loudly.

