

## STONE SOUP

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Three Monks traveled along a mountain road. They talked about cat whiskers, the color of the sun, and whatever else came to mind. “What makes one happy?” asked the youngest monk.

The old and the wisest monk said, “Let’s find out.”

The monks found themselves gazing down at the rooftops of a village below. The monks knew the village had been through many hard times and villagers had even become suspicious of their neighbors. The villagers worked hard, but only for themselves. They had little to do with one another. When the monks came down, the villagers disappeared into their houses and no one came to the gate to greet them. Even the windows were closed tight. The monks knocked on the doors but there was no answer. “These people do not know happiness,” they all agreed. “But today we will show them how to make stone soup.”

They gathered twigs and made a fire. They placed a small tin pot on top and filled it with water. A brave little girl who had been watching came to them. “What are you doing?” she asked.

“We are making stone soup and we need three round, smooth stones,” said a monk. The little girl helped the monks find three perfectly round stones.

“These stones will make excellent soup,” said the oldest monk. “But this very small pot won’t make much.”

The little girl ran home to get her mother’s big pot. “The three strangers are making soup from stones,” she said.

The monks poked the coals. As smoke drifted up, the neighbors peered out from their windows. They found the monks, the fire, and the large pot in the middle of the village very curious, indeed! One by one, the villagers came out to see just what this stone soup was. “Of course, old-style stone soup should be well seasoned with salt and pepper,” said the young monk. “But we have none.”

“I have some salt and pepper!” said a villager and disappeared and came back with spices.

The old monk took a taste. “The last time we had soup stones of this size and color, carrots made the broth very sweet.”

“Carrots?” said a woman from the back. “I may have a few carrots!” And she returned with as many carrots as she could carry and dropped them into the pot.

“Do you think it would be better with onions?” asked the other monk.

“Oh, yes, maybe an onion would taste good,” said a farmer. He left and returned in a moment with five big onions. He dropped them into the bubbling soup.

Something magical began to happen among the villagers. As each person opened his or her heart to give, the next person gave even more. The monks simply stirred and the pot bubbled.

At last, the soup was ready. The villagers gathered together. Everyone sat down to eat. They had not been together for a feast like this for as long as anyone could remember. After the banquet, they told stories, sang songs, and celebrated long into the night. Then they unlocked their doors and took the monks into their homes and gave them very comfortable places to sleep. In the gentle spring morning that came the next day, everyone gathered together to say farewell. “Thank you for having us as your guests,” said the monks. “You have been most generous.”

“Thank you,” said the villagers. “With the gifts you have given, we will always have plenty. You have shown us that sharing makes us all richer.”

“And to think,” said the monks, “to be happy is as simple as making stone soup.”



– Jon J. Muth, Scholastic Press

