

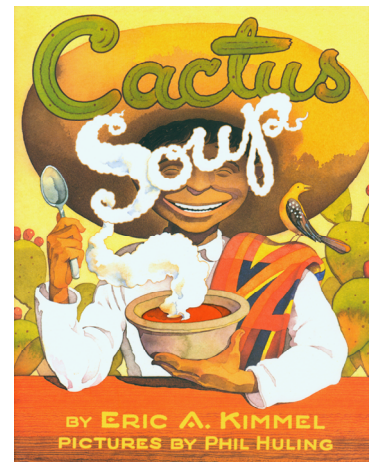
Ideas and Activities to Use with *Cactus Soup*

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Ideas and Activities

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with thanks to Marlene Iversen for art ideas



Themes: cooperation, persuasion, procedural writing, folk tales

Before Reading:

1. Ask students to look at the cover and tell where they think the story is set or takes place. What clues helped them decide? Look at a map showing the United States and Mexico. Read the dedication. It might be the Southwest. Then read the author's note in the back.
2. Notice the glossary. It lists some Spanish words with their definitions. See if the students know any of them. If you have Spanish speakers, let them pronounce the words correctly and explain the meanings—along with personal information and experiences, if they want.
3. Talk about the title. How do they think cactus soup would be made? What might the ingredients be? Make a list.
4. Look at the illustrations on the title page. Ask students if they think you would just stick a piece of cactus in a bowl. Do they think cactus is good to eat? Have students vote with thumbs up or down. Have they ever heard of cactus candy? Is it real?

During Reading:

5. After reading the second page, ask students if they think this plan will work. Do they think the soldiers will believe the townspeople? Why or why not? Notice the mayor. Does he look like he has no food? Compare him with the soldiers on the previous page.
6. When you get to the third time the captain says, “Why ask for what you don’t have,” get the students to join in. Cue them to join in every time this phrase is repeated.
7. At the end of the story, pause and let the students say, “Cactus Soup.”

After Reading Discussion Questions:

8. What things did the townspeople do to prepare for the arrival of the soldiers? Make a list.
9. What patterns did you notice in the story? What events or dialogue happened several times? (a) add ingredients, stir, taste, comment that it would be better with . . . (b) “Why ask for what you don’t have?” Point out that the first pattern happens three times. Writers often use three characters, events, or phrases in a series. Occasionally authors stretch it to four as was done with the expression above (b). Folk tales are known for having three main characters. With older students share the handout called **Three, Three, Three**.

10. Look at the page of **Writing Techniques**. Talk about what they are and give examples. Then look at the page of **Writing Techniques Used in Cactus Soup** to see how Eric Kimmel used some of these techniques.
11. Ask students why the townspeople said the hens were old, the beans were rotten, and the carrots were moldy. Point out that this is another example of a series of 3's.
12. Discuss persuasion. How did the soldiers persuade the townspeople to give them food for the soup? How would the story have changed if the soldiers had acted mean and demanded food? What if the soldiers had called the townspeople liars when they started bringing out some vegetables or when they brought food for the fiesta?
13. How did the captain persuade the townspeople to contribute? (He asked for something small first and something that wasn't food.)
14. Do you think the townspeople ever realized what happened? Why or why not?

After Reading Activities:

15. The townspeople's attitudes and behavior changed during the story. Use the **Character Change: the Townspeople** sheet for independent work, group work, or discussion.
16. Read *Stone Soup* by Marcia Brown. Compare it with *Cactus Soup* using the **Comparison of Two Stories** page for those stories.
17. Ask students to make up a similar story using a different small item such as a button, a pine needle, or a pencil stub. What ingredients would they add? Who would the characters be? With younger students this might work better as a class story.
18. Most retells of this folk tale are similar, but two listed here are quite different. In *The Real Story of Stone Soup* by Ying Chang Compestine, a fisherman tells the story not realizing that his three hired hands are outwitting him when they make stone soup. In the version by Tony Ross, a wolf wants to eat Mother Hen but she outwits him by offering him a bowl of soup and sending him all over for the ingredients. Use the **Comparison of Two Stories** page for those stories.
19. Talk about persuasion, what it is and how it is different from begging. If someone does a good job of persuading, the other person feels good about doing what is asked—like the townspeople did. Ask the students to imagine they have a task they don't like, such as cleaning up a junky yard. How could they convince others to not only help, but to enjoy helping?
 - Variation 1: Choose a different task.
 - Variation 2: For older students, first read the **excerpt from *Tom Sawyer*** by Mark Twain that is included in this packet. This may give them some more ideas.