

Stone Soup

The version of this old story that I want to offer is from Africa. I think its moral is, "It's amazing what you can do when people contribute their gifts and their talents together."



There was a traveler who had been traveling all day for several days and he came upon a lively market. He was very hungry and he walked up to one of the villagers and he said, "Sir, I'm so hungry I don't know what to do. Could you feed me tonight?" And the villager said to him, "I'm sorry, sir, but I hardly have enough to feed my own family. I can't help you." And he approached another villager and he got basically the same answer, "I'm sorry, sir, I can't help you. I hardly have enough to feed my family."

He was wondering what to do when he saw a rock shaped like a mango that gave him an idea, so he reached over and picked up the rock, and he climbed up on a crate, and he spoke to the people in the market. "Ladies and Gentlemen, with this stone I'm going to make some magic soup." And everybody started walking around him to see what he was going to do. And he said, "Now, I need a pot with some water." And so one lady said, "Well, my house is just across the road. We can walk over there and you can use mine." The group followed him across the road, they got the water boiling, and he ceremoniously placed the mango shaped stone into the pot of boiling water.

Then he said, "Now, stone soup is good all by itself, but if you really want to make it right, you need to add some carrots." And one lady said, "Well, I have some carrots." So they chopped up the carrots and put the carrots in. And then he said, "Now, stone soup with carrots is outstanding, but if you really want to make it better, you add some onions." And another guy walked forward and said, "I've got some onions and let's put them in." And so, one by one, the villagers began to add different ingredients to this soup. Pretty soon, everybody marveled at how a stranger had walked into the village and made enough soup so that everybody in the village had plenty to eat that evening.

When I think about that stone, it shows a way to use imagination to give people the chance to contribute what they have in a way that nourishes and strengthens everyone. When I think of this story, I think of how we in the ABCD world call gifts to the center of a community's awareness and efforts, and how doing this can bring people from isolation and scarcity to connection and sharing.

—Henry Moore