Stone Soup


**Stone Soup** is an old folk story in which hungry strangers convince the people of a town to each share a small amount of their food in order to make a meal that everyone enjoys. In varying traditions, the stone has been replaced with other common inedible objects, and therefore the fable is also known as axe soup, button soup, nail soup, and wood soup.

**Story**

Some travelers come to a village, carrying nothing more than an empty cooking pot. Upon their arrival, the villagers are unwilling to share any of their food stores with the hungry travelers. Then the travelers go to a stream and fill the pot with water, drop a large stone in it, and place it over a fire. One of the villagers becomes curious and asks what they are doing. The travelers answer that they are making “stone soup”, which tastes wonderful, although it still needs a little bit of garnish to improve the flavor, which they are missing. The villager does not mind parting with a few carrots to help them out, so that gets added to the soup. Another villager walks by, inquiring about the pot, and the travelers again mention their stone soup which has not reached its full potential yet. The villager hands them a little bit of seasoning to help them out. More and more villagers walk by, each adding another ingredient. Finally, the stone (being inedible) is removed from the pot, and a delicious and nourishing pot of soup is enjoyed by all. Although the travelers have thus tricked the villagers into sharing their food with them, they have successfully transformed it into a tasty and nutritious meal which they share with the donors.

**Variations**

- The Eastern European variation of the story (which is similar to the Northern European rendition) is called “axe soup”, with an axe as the catalyst.
- In the French and Hungarian versions of the tale, the travelers are soldiers returning home. In the French version, three soldiers are returning home from the [Napoleonic Wars]. In the Hungarian version, a single starving soldier encounters several hardships on his journey back to his homeland. In Russian tradition, a soldier prepares “axe kasha” ([Каша из топора](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Axe_kasha)).
- [Johann Peter Hebel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_Peter_Hebel) wrote a German version, "Der schlaue Pilgrim" ("The Cunning Pilgrim", 1811), in which a wily pilgrim, allegedly on his way to Jerusalem, tricks a hostess step-by-step into adding rich soup ingredients to his pebble stones, finally leaving the stones uneaten.
- In Northern European and Scandinavian countries, the story is most commonly known as "nail soup", and the main character is typically a tramp looking for food and lodgings, who convinces an old woman that he will make a tasty nail soup for the both of them if she would just add a few ingredients for the garnish.
- In the Portuguese tradition, the traveler is a monk, and the story takes place around Almeirim, Portugal. Nowadays [*sopa de pedra*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stone_soup) is considered a regional dish of Almeirim.

**Cultural and historical references**

In the Aarne-Thompson-Uther folktales classification system this tale and set of variants is type 1548.

**Art, entertainment, and media**

"Stone soup"-like collaborations
There are many examples of projects referencing the "Stone Soup" story's theme of making something significant by accumulating lots of small contributions. Examples include:

- **Dungeon Crawl Stone Soup** a computer game which expanded on an abandoned project using contributions from many different coders;
- **Stone Soup**, a children's literary magazine published by the California-based Children's Art Foundation since 1973;
- **Stone Soupercomputer**, a computer composed of many small units; and
- **Stone Soup Theater**, which presents one-act plays.\(^5\)

**Adaptations**

**Film**

The film *Fandango* (1985) contains a wedding sequence towards the end which builds on the Stone Soup theme. The protagonists need to hold a wedding ceremony, but they lack any funds to do so. Therefore, they set up a folding card table by the main street of a sleepy Texas town, dust it off, and invite passersby to come to the wedding. As they concoct stories of delinquent caterers and crashed champagne trucks, the friendly townspeople contribute their time and resources, the result being a magical wedding ceremony.

**Literature**

William Butler Yeats' play, *The Pot of Broth* (1904), tells a version of the story in which a clever Irish tramp uses his wits to swindle a shrewish medieval housewife out of her dinner.\(^6\)

The story is the basis of Marcia Brown's 1947 children's book, *Stone Soup* (1947),\(^7\) which features soldiers tricking miserly villages into cooking them a feast. The book was a Caldecott Honor book in 1948\(^8\) and was read aloud by the Captain (played by Bob Keeshan) on an early episode of *Captain Kangaroo* in the 1950s, as well as at least once in the 1960s or early 1970s.\(^9\)\(^10\)

"Stone Soup" (1968),\(^11\) written by Ann McGovern and illustrated by Nola Langner, tells the story of a little old lady and a hungry young man at the door asking for food, and he tricks her into making stone soup.

Canadian children's author Aubrey Davis adapted the story to a Jewish context in his book *Bone Button Borscht* (1996). According to Davis, he wrote the story when he was unable to find a story that he liked for a Hanukkah reading.\(^12\) Barbara Budd's narration of *Bone Button Borscht* traditionally airs across Canada on CBC Radio One's *As It Happens*, on the first day of Hanukkah.

Jon J. Muth's children's book based on the story, also called *Stone Soup* (2003),\(^13\) is set in China, as is Ying Chang's *The Real Story of Stone Soup* (2007).\(^14\)

**Music**

Shel Silverstein's song, "The Wonderful Soup Stone", tells a version of this story Bobby Bare included the song on his album *Lullabys, Legends and Lies* (1973),\(^15\) and Dr. Hook & The Medicine Show included the song on their album *Belly Up!* (1973).

**Sound recordings**

Danny Kaye tells the story "Nail Broth" on the 1960 phonograph record *Danny Kaye tells 6 stories from faraway places*.\(^16\)\(^17\)

**Television**

Jim Henson's *The Storyteller* series contains one tale called "A Story Short", in which the Storyteller himself (played by John Hurt) is the main character. In the beginning, he arrives at a castle where a man is thrown out for begging for food. He proceeds to trick the King's cook into making stone soup. After the people are happily fed, the cook realizes what has happened and pleads with the King to let him boil the Storyteller in oil, but the King instead offers a way out — to tell him a story every day for a year instead.

**Lucky Iron Fish**

A contemporary twist on "nail soup" helps relieve real-world iron deficiency anemia in Cambodia. The lucky iron fish is a cast iron bar in the shape of the "Try Kantrop" fish that many villagers consider lucky. When immersed into a simmering pot of soup, enough of the iron dissolves into the liquid to add the critical amounts of a trace nutrient needed to prevent certain types of anemia.\(^18\)

**Military tactics**
US Army General George S. Patton, Jr. referred to the "rock soup method" of acquiring resources for attacks in the face of official disapproval by his superiors for offensive operations. In the military context, he sent units forward, ostensibly on reconnaissance missions, to later reinforce them when resistance was met, and these missions eventually turned small scale probes into all out attacks; he notably did this during the Battle of Sicily, in the advance on Palermo, and again in the campaign in northwest Europe, notably near Metz when his 3rd US Army was officially halted during Operation Market Garden.

Places
The big pool at Karl Johan street in Oslo, funded by the steel company Christiania Spigerverk ("Christiania Nail Factory"), is nicknamed Spikersuppa ("Nail Soup") as a humorous reference to the story.

References

Sources

External links
Wikisource has original text related to this article: The Nail Broth.
Wikimedia Commons has media related to Sopa da Pedra.
- "Recipe of stone soup from Almeirim's most famous restaurant" gastronomias.com. (in Portuguese)
Stone Soup is a European folk story in which hungry strangers convince the people of a town to each share a small amount of their food in order to make a meal that everyone enjoys, and exists as a moral regarding the value of sharing. In varying traditions, the stone has been replaced with other common inedible objects, and therefore the fable is also known as axe soup, button soup, nail soup, and wood soup. Reddit gives you the best of the internet in one place. Get a constantly updating feed of breaking news, fun stories, pics, memes, and videos just for you. Passionate about something niche? Reddit has thousands of vibrant communities with people that share your interests. Alternatively, find out what’s trending across all of Reddit on r/popular. Reddit is also anonymous so you can be yourself, with your Reddit profile and persona disconnected from your real-world identity. Do you want to become a published Stone Soup author, artist, blogger, or book reviewer? Submit your work to get started! Submit Now. Visit our Submissions FAQ. Sign up for our free, weekly Newsletter. Get exclusive Stone Soup content delivered to your inbox every Saturday. Leave this field empty if you're human: Footer.

There is a famous story called Stone Soup about using a stone to make soup. Oh, that's this story! A pot is a big round thing that you cook food in. You can cook sauces, stews and soups in pots. A saucepan is a special kind of pot. An ingredient is a piece of food that you use to cook something else. OK, so listen and enjoy! Stone Soup. Once, a man was travelling across the country. He was very poor. You may also wish to visit the official homepage of Dungeon Crawl Stone Soup, or go directly to the download of the most recent version. This wiki contains massive spoilers. If you do not wish to have your game experience spoiled, stop reading now!