

# Stone Soup

## Program Notes

Stone Soup, the popular folktale about motivation, teamwork, and collaboration, has been told for many years in all parts of the world. Folktales are traditional tales of imaginary events, and the plots often revolve around trickery. *Gingerbread Man*, *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*, and *Jack and the Beanstalk* are examples of folktales with themes of trickery that teach a lesson.

As is the case for many folktales, the story of Stone Soup has been preserved through generations because of an oral tradition of storytelling. Before there were written storybooks, people would keep stories in their memories, and pass stories on to others through speaking. Because of this oral tradition, there are many different versions of Stone Soup from many different countries. *The Clever Pilgrim* from Switzerland, *The Old Woman and the Tramp* from Sweden, *Limestone Broth* from Ireland, and *Nail Soup* from the Czech Republic are all variations of the same story. Besides stones, other objects such as nails, buttons, wood, and axes are found in the various tellings as the main soup ingredient.

In the most common version of Stone Soup, a great famine in Eastern Europe causes people to hoard their food. Travelers, searching to fill their empty stomachs, arrive in a new town. When the villagers shun them, the tricky travelers use a “magic stone” to make soup. Soon, the curious (and hungry) villagers donate ingredients that make a tasty meal for everyone. In the Portuguese tradition, the traveller is a monk and the story takes place around Almeirim, Portugal. Nowadays many restaurants in Almeirim actually serve stone soup, or *sopa de pedra*. In fact, Almeirim is considered the capital of stone soup!

One of the most well-known modern versions of the story is the Caldecott Honor Book *Stone Soup* by Marcia Brown, published in 1947. Brown was the winner of the 1962 Caldecott Medal for *Once a Mouse*, and the winner of the 1955 Caldecott Medal for *Cinderella*. Brown’s version of Stone Soup, on which this performance is loosely based, features three hungry soldiers returning home from the Napoleonic Wars, who engage in a battle of wits with the leery peasants of a poor village.

The moral of the story, no matter its country of origin or differences in characters or setting, is that sharing and cooperation can achieve great goals and working together has more magical powers than a soup stone! We hope you enjoy our performance of Stone Soup!