

# Strega Nona

by Tomie de Paola

## Classroom Favorites



Teacher's Guide by Jennifer Lee Richards

A Perma-Bound Production

### Synopsis

*Strega Nona* is a tale about a kind country witch and her magic pot that can make endless servings of pasta. Her hired hand, Big Anthony, is told not to touch the pasta pot, but his temptation gets the best of him.

When Strega Nona has to visit a friend, Big Anthony sees his chance to show the townspeople how the magic pot works. Unfortunately Big Anthony does not know how to make the pot stop swirling out pasta and the town almost becomes a large order of spaghetti.

Luckily, Strega Nona returns just in time to break the spell and save the village. Big Anthony learns a lesson that is hard to swallow, literally!

### Biographical Sketch

Tomie de Paola was born September 15, 1934 in Meriden, Connecticut. He received his B.A. from Pratt University in 1956 and his Masters of Fine Arts from California College of Arts and Crafts in 1969. He received a doctoral equivalency from Lone Mountain College in 1970. De Paola now lives in Wilmot Flat, New Hampshire.

Tomie de Paola is both an author and an illustrator of children's books. He also conceived, designed and directed the puppet ballet, "A Rainbow Christmas," at Botolph in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

He feels "his mother reading aloud to him and the radio show, 'Let's Pretend,'" caused him to know in first grade that when he grew up he was going to make books with pictures. De Paola made his first book as a child for a present for his sister's birthday.

### Critic's Corner

De Paola feels "he needs to actually get involved personally with his characters, whether they be human or animal, and find some personal characteristics either of himself, or of friends in them, or they are not 'real.'" He feels "making the characters 'real' is of prime importance to him - that fantasy be 'real,' from the child-in-all-of-us point of view."

### Objectives

1. To discuss magic
2. To understand responsibility
3. To analyze "temptation"

### Comprehension/Discussion Questions

1. After reading the first page aloud have the students brainstorm what the magic touch could be.
2. Have students name the four food groups and find out which one pasta falls under.
3. Discuss why the townspeople spoke about Strega Nona in whispers.
4. Notice what pages the peacock and rabbit are on. Ask your students if they think Strega Nona owns them. Do they think they are magical? If so, have them list the magical things these animals can do.
5. Have students discuss what the sign Strega Nona hung in the townsquare said. Have them create the sign using art supplies.
6. Discuss Big Anthony. What is so "big" about him? What did de Paola mean by, "who didn't pay attention"? Make a story about how Big Anthony got his name.
7. Ask the students if they know what "grazia," (thank you) or "si," (yes) mean. Learn more Italian. Have an Italian speaking person visit the class.
8. Ask the students if they find it strange that Strega Nona has a goat inside her house. Have they got any "different" pets that they allow inside their homes?
9. Discuss why the students think "Pasta Pot" has capital letters.
10. Examine the illustrations. Do the students notice their cartoon-like manner? Study the pages on which de Paola has divided the page into four sections. (Such as when Strega Nona is blowing three kisses to her pasta pot.)
11. Discuss the italicized words, "My chance has come." Have students read these words aloud as they think Big Anthony was thinking them.
12. Discuss the term, "the punishment must fit the crime" and how it is used in the story. Have students share experiences of when they had to be punished. Do they feel their punishment fit their crime?
13. Note the italicized word, "I," when Strega Nona speaks about wanting to sleep in her little bed that night. Have students say that line as they believe Strega Nona would have.

## Student Involvement Activities

1. Read the book aloud to or with your students.
2. Read other books written and/or illustrated by Tomie de Paola.
3. Read other books about magic or foods.
4. Research Calabria. (It is the "toe" section of the "boot" country, Italy.)
5. Research magic and magic tricks.
6. Research pasta, the different types, how it is made, where it was started. (Rumor has it spaghetti is originally Chinese.)
7. Make pasta from scratch or cook some from the store. Eat!
8. Research priests, sisters (nuns), and convents.
9. Research rabbits and peacocks.
10. Research Italian architecture. Notice the arches and tiled roofs de Paola has drawn.
11. Find out what time period this story took place in by using the clothes of the townspeople as a guide. (It looks like the Renaissance period which was from the 14th century to the 17th century.)
12. Have students make costumes of this time period. Possibly act out the story or have a Renaissance fair.
13. Have students ask at home if their parents or relatives have any "home remedies." Share these back at school. (Ex: Drinking a glass of water upside down between your legs to get rid of the hiccups.)
14. Have students make up their own curing remedies or lists of ingredients for potions.
15. Research medicines.
16. Make a list of what Strega Nona grows in her garden.
17. Research herbs and spices and what effects they have on illnesses. Taste various spices and herbs. Try to grow some if possible.
18. Research pigeons. Read about pigeons in Venice, Italy.
19. Use the dictionary to look up the definition of the word "temptation." Ask students if they have ever been tempted. Share stories. Were they punished for their behavior?
20. Have students share what their chores are at home. Do they receive an allowance? Do they feel Big Anthony was paid fairly for his labor?
21. Make up a tune to sing to the pasta pot chants Strega Nona sings. Use some instruments to help.
22. Have students make up their own chants. Possibly to make the potion or remedy they made up work.
23. Notice the simplicity of Strega Nona's house. Have students discuss how their homes are different from Strega Nona's.
24. Ask the students where they think Big Anthony got water in the townsquare. (There is a fountain shown on one of the pages.) Research fountains and wells.
25. Use the dictionary to look up the definition of the word, "confess." Have the students ever had to confess something? Are any of the students Catholic and attend confessional? Have them share what the experience is like with their classmates.
26. Notice the page on which Big Anthony has a "balloon" above his head in which a picture of the pasta pot is drawn. Ask the students what they think that means.
27. Bring in many cartoon sections from the newspaper and some comic books. Have students compare the various types and then create their own comic, cartoon, or a cartooned story. They could make a cartooned version of a classic such as *Cinderella* or one of their favorite book.
28. Brainstorm what Strega Nona did at Amelia's house.
29. Make a list of compliments the townspeople could have given Big Anthony after he had fed them. Act out this part of the story.
30. Make a list of items that could be used for a quick barricade to block the overflowing pasta.
31. Research about America's criminal system. Discuss jail, fines, and the laws that govern our country. Do the students feel criminals' punishments fit their crimes? How would they have criminals punished?
32. Have students see how many cooked strands of spaghetti they can wind around a spoon or fork.
33. Have a pasta eating contest.
34. Have students estimate how many bites Big Anthony had to take to eat up all the pasta in the town.
35. Have students tell their favorite pasta dish. Vote on a class favorite. Graph results of the poll. Eat the winning pasta if possible.
36. Paint pasta noodles to make designs, necklaces or bracelets. (Rigatoni noodles work well.)
37. Bring in a box of spaghetti or noodles and have students estimate the amount of strands or noodles there are inside. Count them up and give the winner a prize such as a spaghetti serving measurement utensil or a wooden spoon.
38. Estimate how many cups of pasta a certain amount of noodles or sticks of spaghetti will make when cooked. Cook and find out.
39. Make clay pots.
40. Sing the song "On Top of Spaghetti."

## Bibliography

ed. Commire, Anne. *Something about the Author: Facts and Pictures About Authors and Illustrators of Books for Young People*, Vol 11, 1977

## Vocabulary Test

Draw a "spaghetti strand" from each of the words in the pasta pot on the left to their correct definition on the right. Use the book *Strega Nona* or a dictionary to help you.



- portion of food
- a word used to express unhappiness
- to go after and bring something back
- small building for storage
- something nice that was said to someone
- large serving plate
- to stop
- to tell the truth
- to eat the evening meal
- barrier to stop something

## Comprehension Test

Circle the letter that best answers each question.

1. Strega Nona's pasta pot is made of
  - a. iron.
  - b. tin.
  - c. clay.
2. Big Anthony had to feed and milk the
  - a. chickens.
  - b. goat.
  - c. cow.
3. "Strega Nona" means
  - a. Grandma Witch
  - b. Mother Earth
  - c. Grandma Nature.
4. Strega Nona could cure
  - a. colds.
  - b. headaches.
  - c. fevers.
5. Strega Nona left a lunch for Big Anthony of
  - a. soup.
  - b. pasta.
  - c. bread and cheese.

## ANSWER KEY

### Vocabulary Test

confess: to tell the truth

platter: large serving plate

barricade: barrier to stop something

fetch: to go after and bring something back

alas: a word used to express unhappiness

shed: small building for storage

helping: portion of food

compliment: something nice that was said to someone

sup: to eat the evening meal

halt: to stop

### Comprehension Test

1. c      2. b      3. a      4. b      5. c



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