A Guide for Using

Strega Nona

in the Classroom

Based on the tale retold and illustrated by Tomie dePaola

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Getting to Know the Book and Author

About the Book

(Strega Nona is published in the U.S. by Simon & Schuster Inc. It is also available in Canada from Simon & Schuster, in the United Kingdom from International Book Dist., and in Australia from Prentice Hall.)

Big Anthony answers Strega Nona’s ad and is hired to weed the garden, feed the goats, and fetch the water. Strega Nona asks Big Anthony not to touch her valuable pasta pot, but Big Anthony doesn’t listen.

Big Anthony sees the pot bubbling over with pasta after Strega Nona recites a magic chant. He brags to the townspeople that he, too, can magically produce enough pasta to feed them all. However, Big Anthony missed an important detail while eavesdropping on Strega Nona, and he can’t get the pot to stop cooking pasta!

The pasta threatens to overrun the town and nothing seems to be able to save the town from disaster. Fortunately, Strega Nona returns just in time to recite the chant and blow the three kisses that will make the pot stop. Big Anthony learns his lesson the hard way when he has to eat the pasta all by himself.

About the Author

Tomie dePaola was born in Meriden, Connecticut, in 1934, and graduated from the Pratt Institute in 1956. He has earned advanced degrees since that time. Besides illustrating and writing children’s books, he is an artist and has been a costume and set designer. He also taught art and theater in various New England colleges. In 1976, Strega Nona was named a Caldecott Honor Book. He currently lives in Wilmot Flat, New Hampshire.

Tomie dePaola’s family and heritage influenced him in such a way that he developed an interest in old stories or folktales about Italy.

Stories and recollections from friends and family are the basis of many of Tomie dePaola’s books. He uses humor to develop his characters and plots, and beautifully illustrates his own books.
Suggestions for Using the Unit Activities

Use some or all of the following suggestions to introduce students to *Strega Nona* and to extend their appreciation of the book through activities that cross the curriculum.

1. Use *Strega Nona* along with other old stories to comprise a unit on folktales. With *Strega Nona*, the following themes can be explored:
   - assuming responsibility for one’s actions
   - the effects of eavesdropping, bragging, and teasing
   - the importance of completing chores

2. Before you begin the unit, prepare the vocabulary cards, story question hats, and sentence strips for the pocket chart activities. (See samples, patterns, and directions on pages 11-16.)

3. Engage prior knowledge and oral language skills by asking the children to identify or recall any Italian foods they have recently eaten. Show pictures of pizza, spaghetti, and a variety of Italian foods from magazines or a nutrition unit.

4. Ask if anyone knows where Italy is located on a map. On which continent is Italy located? Help students find Italy on a map and a globe. Locate Calabria in the southern part of Italy. Compare the size of Italy to the state in which the students live.

   If the class has studied about Columbus, ask if anyone remembers an explorer who was born in Italy. Locate Genoa on a map.

5. Discuss the meaning of the following words in context before reading the story. Make several copies of the pot pattern on page 13. Write the words below on the pots. Display the pasta pots on a pocket chart. (See page 11 for directions on making a pocket chart.)

   - pasta
   - fetch
   - confess
   - halt
   - sup
   - sputter
   - helping
   - fountain
   - *grazia*
   - shed
   - priest
   - platter
   - supper
   - simmer
   - convent
   - *valuable*
   - *applause*
   - compliments
   - townspeople
   - punishment
   - overflow
   - barricade
   - *sisters of the convent*
Suggestions for Using the Unit Activities (cont.)

6. Provide exposure to the following “Big Ideas:”

Discuss the concept of responsibility:
- Is it a good idea to eavesdrop on other people’s conversations?
- Should we use other people’s belongings without their permission?

Talk about the changes in food after cooking:
- How does pasta change after being placed in boiling water?
- What changes have you seen in popcorn, ice cream, butter, gelatin, and meat as they are prepared for eating?

Remind children of the basic food groups. In which group does pasta belong? (Bread, Cereal, Rice, and Pasta Group)

7. Display the cover of Strega Nona. Have the children look for any clues that might convey the story setting.

8. Ask the students to make a prediction about what Strega Nona will do with the cooking pot. Ask: Does the story take place now or long ago? Read the story aloud to discover what happens in the little town of Calabria.

9. Develop critical thinking skills with the story questions on page 14. The questions are based on Bloom’s Taxonomy and are provided in each of Bloom’s Level’s of Learning. Make hats using these story questions. Refer to page 12 for information on how to make the story question hats and suggestions on how to use the story questions.

10. Refer to the sentences on pages 15-16 to prepare Story Summary Sentence Strips. Cut out the sentence strips. Laminate a set of sentences for use with a pocket chart. Work with students on some or all of the following activities.
- On the pocket chart, sequence the sentences in the order in which the events happened in the story.
- Use the sentences to retell the story.
- Divide the class into small groups and distribute a few sentence strips to each group. Ask the groups to act out the part of the story represented by the sentence.

In addition to these activities, you may wish to reproduce the pages and have students read the sentences aloud to a partner or take them home to read to a parent, sibling, etc.

11. Reproduce “Strega Nona’s Magic Pot” (page 17). Divide the class into four groups and assign each group a verse of the poem. Have the groups choral read and act out their verses. As an extension, have children recite Shel Silverstein’s “Spaghetti” from Where the Sidewalk Ends (HarperCollins Child Books, 1974).
Suggestions for Using the Unit Activities (cont.)

12. Prepare Stick Puppet Theaters following the suggestions and directions on page 18. Allow the students to construct puppets by coloring, cutting, and gluing puppets on tongue depressors. Use the suggestions for stick puppets found on page 19.

13. Have students construct a scene from *Strega Nona* and write about some of the events in the story. Directions, patterns, and sentence blocks are provided on pages 23-24.

14. Sharpen students’ map skills by having them use the map of Italy on page 37 and answer the questions on page 38.

15. Provide practice in sorting, counting, graphing, and making comparisons by making pasta graphs. Give each child a copy of the graph on page 35 and a resealable plastic bag containing four different kinds of pasta: shells, elbow macaroni, spirals, and rigatoni. Each bag should contain no more than 8 pieces of each kind of pasta; provide an assorted number of each pasta. Instruct students to sort and graph the pieces of pasta in their bags. You might want students to glue the pasta to the paper graph or you can have them color the graph and save the pasta to use again. Distribute copies of page 36. Have students complete the graphs, record the information, and share their results.

16. Help students learn to sequence important story events with the activity on pages 25-27. This can be done as a whole-class activity or students can work in cooperative pairs or groups.

17. Use “Character Clouds” on page 28 to help students choose important facts, details, or traits about some of the characters in *Strega Nona*. This activity may be presented as a whole-class or cooperative group activity.


19. Help students learn and write Strega Nona’s magic chants and illustrate them with a black pot, real pasta, and three kisses! On the chalkboard or a large chart, write Strega Nona’s songs (chants) to start and stop the magic pot. In the appropriate boxes on page 31, have children copy Strega Nona’s chants to make pasta in the magic pot. For younger children, you may wish to fill in the chants on page 31 before copying the page. Reproduce the pot on page 13 on black construction paper. (Enlarge the pattern if desired.) Follow the directions on page 31 for assembling the chants and the magic pot.