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Cactus Soup

Sandra L. Tidwell

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Kimmel, Eric A.. *Cactus Soup*. Illustrated by Phil Huling. Marshall Cavendish, 2004. ISBN 0761451552. \$16.95. 32 pp.

Reviewer: Sandra L. Tidwell

Reading Level: Primary

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Folklore; Historical Fiction;

Subject: Folklore--France--Juvenile Fiction; Books--Reviews;

A troop of soldiers is descending on the little town of San Miguel, and the townspeople, to preserve their food supplies from the hungry men, hide all their food and dress themselves like poor beggars. Just as they suspected, the soldiers' first request was for food. After the mayor explains they are too poor to feed them, the captain of the soldiers announces, "It looks like we're going to have to make cactus soup." Although the soldiers protest, they soon begin the process by boiling a kettle of water in the middle of the town plaza, and begin by adding the first ingredient, a huge cactus thorn! Intrigued, the townspeople gather closer, and soon they offer additional ingredients so that the cactus soup will taste better. Soon salt, chiles, onions, garlic, a variety of vegetables, and fat stewing hens are simmering in the pot. It is the most delicious soup anyone has ever tasted, "and to think it was made from a cactus thorn!" After their feasting, everyone has a fiesta!

Although similar to *Stone Soup*, this story is uniquely set in the time of the Mexican Revolution. Children will enjoy the repetitive sentence, "Why ask for what you don't have?" Huling's detailed bright watercolor illustrations emphasize the expressive Mexican culture. As the townspeople and the soldiers rejoice, the readers also rejoice in the moral of the story - instead of being stingy and dishonest, it's best to share what you have with those who have less. The glossary at the end of the book is helpful, but it lacks a pronunciation guide.