Gobble up a Good Story

Food and eating figure in a number of folk and fairy tales from a range of cultures and traditions. The role of food and/or eating can be metaphorical or more concrete, but often serves to make a profound change in someone's view of the world. Other times, a particular kind of food can be the trigger for a series of events, such as Jack trading for magic beans or Rapunzel's mother having a craving for rampion. Some of the basic tales appear in different forms around the world; some are easily updated and adapted or given an added twist. Hungry for a good story? Try one (or more!) of these!

Over the centuries there have been many retellings of Aesop's story about the industrious ant who works hard to save and store food for the winter while the grasshopper fiddles and frolics through the summer. While many versions end with the traditional moral extolling hard work and leaving grasshopper to fend for himself (*The Ant and the Grasshopper* retold and illustrated by Amy Lowry Poole), several recent versions, including *Ant and Grasshopper* by Luli Gray and *The Ant and the Grasshopper* by Rebecca and Ed Emberley, also celebrate the importance of music and joy in life, with ant welcoming grasshopper into his home for the winter.

There are many published versions of the story of the Little Red Hen whose three friends refuse to help her bake a loaf of bread, but are only too happy to help her eat it. This hardworking chicken has expanded her baking repertoire to pizza (<u>The Little Red Hen (Makes a Pizza</u>) retold by Philemon Sturges) and matzah (<u>The Little Red Hen and the Passover Matzah</u> by Leslie Kimmelman and Paul Meisel), but has no better luck getting her companions to help her. A Mexican take on the story appears in <u>Manana Iguana</u> by Ann Whitford Paul, with Iguana getting no help putting on a party.

What is traditionally considered a European tale, the story of making soup out of a stone (or a nail) has received many retellings, including Marcia Brown's 1947 classic version, *Stone Soup: An Old Tale.* Jon Muth (*Stone Soup*) has reset the tale in China with three Buddhist monks instead of three soldiers as the protagonists who show inhospitable villagers how to make a delicious soup with a stone. A somewhat different take on the story is Ying Chang Compestine's *The Real Story of Stone Soup*. Also set in China, this story involves three young fishermen who trick their boss with their version of soup made of stones.

Janet Stevens, the author of <u>Tops and Bottoms</u> cites African-American folklore as a source for this story about clever Hare who makes an agreement with his lazy neighbor, Bear. Hare will plant, tend and harvest their land and they will divide the harvest- one will keep what grows above the ground, the other what grows beneath. Hare chooses what crops to plant, after asking Bear if he will want "tops" or "bottoms". Bear comes to learn that all "tops" and "bottoms" are not alike.

Both *One Grain of Rice* by Demi and *The King's Chessboard* by David Birch tell the story of a greedy raja who wishes to keep all his country's rice for himself. When a clever girl heals

his prize elephant he promises her anything she would like. Her wish involves a grain of rice and a chessboard. In the end, the ruler learns two important lessons (one involves math!) and his subjects benefit from his newly found wisdom.

Many folktales from around the world involve animals in pursuit of food- occasionally in human form (Little Red Riding Hood), often as another, usually smaller, animal. In most cases, the hungry animal is outsmarted by the clever, smaller creature. In <u>Love and Roast Chicken: A Trickster Tale from the Andes Mountains</u> by Barbara Knutson, guinea pig fends off fox several times (meanwhile tricking the farmer who grows the sweet alfalfa that he likes to eat). Just when he seems to be ensnared by both, he tricks fox into trading places with him and escapes. A similar storyline appears in <u>Borreguita and the Coyote</u> by Verna Aardema, with a clever sheep offering coyote various alternatives to making a meal out of her.

Food can also be considered a precious commodity- worth more than diamonds or only fit for gods. In Eric Kimmel's *Onions and Garlic*, a merchant's two oldest sons successfully follow in their father's footsteps. His youngest son, Getzel, knowing he does not have the same business talents, takes only a ship full of onions to trade. He finds himself in a land whose people know nothing about onions, but immediately find them irresistible. In exchange for his onions, Getzel is given what this land has in abundance—diamonds! When his brothers hear of his success, they decide that if these people paid so generously for onions, how much more would they offer them for garlic? In the Mexican tale *Blue Frog: The Legend of Chocolate* by Dianne de Las Casas, Sun God is the only one who has access to the pods of the cacao tree. Wind God urges Sun God to share with the people of the earth, but Sun God refuses. Wind God transforms himself into a blue frog and sings of the cacao tree so that the people of earth can locate it and enjoy its bounty along with the gods.

And if you are in the mood to cook something that is related to a folk or fairy tale, you could check out *Fairy Tale Feasts: A Literary Cookbook for Young Readers And Eaters* by Jane Yolen with its twenty stories and related recipes, from Runaway Pancakes to Red Riding Hood's "Picnic Basket of Goodies". Happy reading and bon appétit!