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ABSTRACT

Intended to provide a natural and positive way to introduce young children to the stories told by different ethnic groups, this paper suggests a series of language activities that adapt folktales from around the world for classroom use to enable young children to read the stories for themselves. The paper notes that these activities are particularly appropriate for children of minority groups whose feelings of self-worth can be increased as they find themselves reflected in the stories they and their classmates are reading and enjoying. These stories can also become the backbone of an emergent literacy program or can be used to enhance the curriculum in early grades. In the first section, a story from Kenya ("The Magic Stone") has been rewritten in predictable language and procedures are given to make this into a big book to be used for shared book experiences. The next section describes a collection of small group activities, using a variety of folktales from different ethnic groups (including "The Fisherman and his Wife" from Germany, and "The Magic Orange Tree" from Haiti). The final section suggests additional ideas appropriate for the theme on wishes, based on folktales that include "The Story of the Stone Lion" from Tibet. Four figures are included. An appendix contains "The Magic Stone" story. A reference section contains 26 academic references, a list of 12 folkstories about wishes, and a list of 17 predictable folkstories and modern tales. (SR)

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Folktales from Around the World and Shared Book Experiences:  
Multicultural Education for Young Children

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## Abstract

Intriguing, imaginative, charming folktales have been created by different groups of people throughout the world. Over the ages these stories have provided enormous listening enjoyment for young children. These stories can also become the backbone of an emergent literacy program or can be used to enhance the curriculum in the early grades. This manuscript provides ways for adapting these for classroom use to enable young children to read the stories for themselves. As well it suggests a series of literature response activities for early childhood teachers to implement. These strategies and activities provide a natural and positive way to introduce young children to the stories told by different ethnic groups. For children of minority groups, in particular, their feelings of self worth can be increased as they find themselves reflected in the stories they, and the rest of their classmates, are reading and enjoying.

To Wish Upon a Star, a Stone, or a . . .  
Folktales from Around the World and Shared Book Experiences:  
Multicultural Education for Young Children

The populations of the United States and Canada are composed of diverse groups of people, each with its own distinctive traditions and cultural identities. For decades the common notion in both countries was that the different groups of children, regardless of their racial, religious or ethnic backgrounds, should be assimilated into the dominant Anglo-Saxon, Protestant culture; and the bulk of the historical perspectives, literary selections and other learning materials were created by and reflected the dominant cultural group (Rasinski & Padak, 1990; Sleeter & Grant, 1994).

During the 1970s multiethnic education became a popular concept. Its objectives, as articulated by Banks (1981), were clear--teachers could help children: 1) in clarifying and accepting their own cultural identities, 2) in acquiring an appreciation for other ethnic cultures and in recognizing these as equally valid, and 3) in developing abilities to make reflective decisions on social issues and in identifying appropriate personal actions to resolve these problems. Commercial readers began to include stories that portrayed visible minorities and dealt with different ethnic groups (Reimer, 1992). Materials were developed to address the needs of "disadvantaged" students; these students, it was reasoned, would receive an affirmation of their worth if they could identify with characters in the stories they were reading. However, many teachers came to regard multicultural education as appropriate only for minorities--for children of color or for children whose mother tongue was other than English (Gay, 1988; Neito, 1992). Although governments and schoolboards might adopt multicultural policies, practices in classrooms were often not effected (Friesen, 1993).

The faces of North America, however, continued to change. By 1990, the population of the United States was more than 12% African American, 9% Hispanic; almost 3% Asian, and .8% Native American (Sleeter & Grant, 1994). The Canadian scene showed similar changes, especially in large urban areas. In 1991, recent immigrants made up 38% of the population of Toronto; and 30% in Vancouver (cited in Lyons & Farrell, 1994). The largest school board in Montreal has forecast that within a few years more than half of its children would have a mother tongue other than French or English (Henchey & Burgess, 1987). Educators in the U. S. have predicted that the percentage of children of color will increase from 25% in 1980 to 42% by 2000 (Ramirez & Ramirez, 1994). Whereas most immigrants had previously originated from European countries, they are now coming primarily from other areas of the world: Asia, South and Central America, the Caribbean, and Africa. The population of North America is rapidly becoming even more diverse, ethnically and racially (Grant & Sleeter, 1993; Henchey & Burgess, 1987).

As a result, multicultural education is evolving to acknowledge the more recent immigrants, as well as giving attention to matters of gender, age, social class, sexual preference, and human rights. No longer is it regarded merely as a gesture to minority children living in the inner city; multi-cultural education is about all people, and is for all people. Nieto (1992) reasons, "It can even be convincingly argued that students from the dominant culture need multicultural education more than others, for they are often the most miseducated about diversity in our society; . . . (these children come) to feel that their way of living, of doing things, of believing, and of acting are simply the only possibilities" (p. 213). Garcia (1982) states simply, "All students irrespective of ethnic, cultural, religious, or socio-economic background should be prepared to live in a pluralistic

society" (p. 17).

Children's literature often provides the basis for a multicultural curriculum, and with good reason. Stories that mirror the lifestyles, attributes, and values of the children in the class will enhance their self-esteem, and when links are established between their home life and school, children experience greater academic success (Ramirez & Ramirez, 1994). Literature presents all students with new ideas and new worlds from which they can explore and understand their own cultural values and beliefs (Harris, 1991; Norton, 1990; Rasinski & Padak, 1990). In many areas of our society, prejudicial attitudes are still strong and are easily acquired especially by young children (Pang, 1991; Ramsey, 1987). Through a variety of educational activities, teachers can help these children feel less threatened by diversity and change. Bishop (1987) and Yokota (1993) claim that literature helps children realize and appreciate the unique attributes of different cultural groups; and, equally important, recognize the similarity of emotions, needs and desires of people throughout the world.

Between 2,500 and 3,500 children's books are published annually in the U. S.; however, the number of books with any kind of multicultural content is very small. In recent years, less than 2% of these books have been about African Americans; and even fewer about Asian Americans, Hispanics, or Native Americans (Bishop, 1991). Most of these stories have been written for children at the later childhood or young adult levels. As well, most of the activities suggested in articles and books about multicultural education are designed for children in the higher grades. Yet young children also benefit from having multicultural materials incorporated into their curriculum. Children are at their most impressionable when they are in the early grades. As they are beginning to acquire their confidence and abilities as readers, they should be able to identify with characters in the stories.

They need to counter their fears of the unknown, and rumors they may have heard, with some satisfying, albeit vicarious, experiences with children from other ethnic groups.

Folktales have an enormous appeal for young children, and may be found within the cultural heritage of virtually every ethnic group. Collections of folktales are readily available from any library. While some of these stories have been rewritten in predictable formats that are more appropriate for younger children (a selected list has been included in the references), many of the best remain hidden away in the seldom turned pages of old anthologies.

These folktales can provide an early childhood class with a wealth of listening enjoyment, but most use a story structure that is quite complex and the vocabulary is somewhat unfamiliar and often archaic.

The purpose of this manuscript is to suggest a series of language activities for young children adapting and using folktales from around the world. First, a story from Kenya has been rewritten in predictable language and procedures are given to make this into a big book to be used for shared book experiences. Then a collection of small group activities are described, using a variety of folktales from different ethnic groups. Finally, additional ideas are suggested to expand the literary experiences of emergent readers.

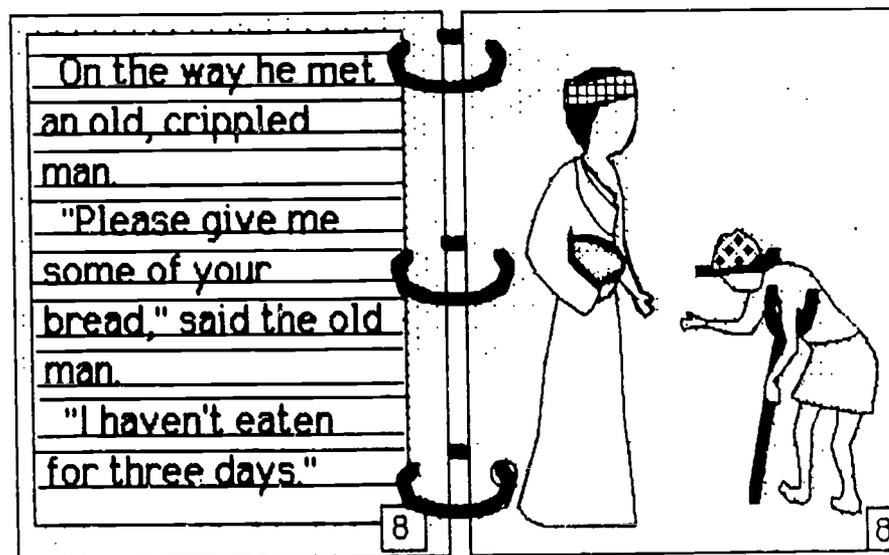
Anthologies, old and new, have provided the folktales for these activities. Resources like the ones used are readily available in school and public libraries. The theme of wishes, a recurrent theme, has been selected as a common thread for all of these folktales and activities. This theme is also a popular one with children. Is there a child alive who has not fantasized about what he or she might become or has not wished for some special gift or power?

#### Creating a Predictable Big Book from a Folktale

The Magic Stone (Childcraft, Children Everywhere, 1970) is a

charming folktale from Kenya. In the original story, a rich brother has made his money in the "salt market," a notion that would not have much meaning for children in this day of electricity and refrigeration. It has been rewritten in predictable language (see Appendix) to use as the primary focus for a number of different language activities. As in the example, predictable stories use simple language structures and familiar vocabulary, have episodes and words that are repeated, and are within the life experiences of the children. When these stories are enlarged into big books, they are ideal for shared book experiences.

The teacher first divides the story into segments so that one sentence or idea can be put onto each page. This version of the folktale could easily be divided into twenty or more different pages. The text should be printed using manuscript that is easily visible from a distance of 15 feet. Many teachers use sheets of lined chart paper for this purpose. If the paper for the lettering is cut smaller than the paper to be used for the big book, it can be pasted on the backs of the children's drawings, creating a border effect, as in the illustration below.



The teacher could select a dark brown construction paper for the pages

of this big book, and the children could use colored chalk to make their illustrations. The effects of pastel chalks on the dark background are quite dramatic ! Pastel fixative or hair spray will keep the chalk from smearing and the pages of the book could also be laminated to improve durability.

To get started, the teacher first reads the story as a whole, then rereads a page at a time as each child selects a part of the story to illustrate. It would be helpful to number each page of text and to put that number on the piece of construction paper that is given to the child. (If there are more children than pages to illustrate, they can help to decorate the front and back covers, the title page and other additional pages.)

When the children are finished, the teacher calls them together and they assemble the book, reading the text for each illustration. The text is pasted on to the back of the previous illustration, the pages are fastened between covers, and The Magic Stone is ready for shared book experiences.

At the start of each lesson, the teacher places the big book on an easel or chair so that all the children are able to see the text clearly. The teacher reads the story over, encouraging the children to chime in during the reading. This repeated reading will enable many of the children to become so familiar with the text that they may ask to read the story unassisted. The follow-up activities listed below are designed to focus on various aspects of the story and to teach specific language skills. Because the children's natural language patterns have been used to retell this story, the text becomes a more useful tool in helping them to master the print and become active and eager readers (Slaughter, 1993).

- Key words can be selected from the story and printed onto flash cards. During the rereadings of the story, these cards can be distributed among the children who hold up their card each time their key word is read aloud. This will help the children focus on specific words within the text.

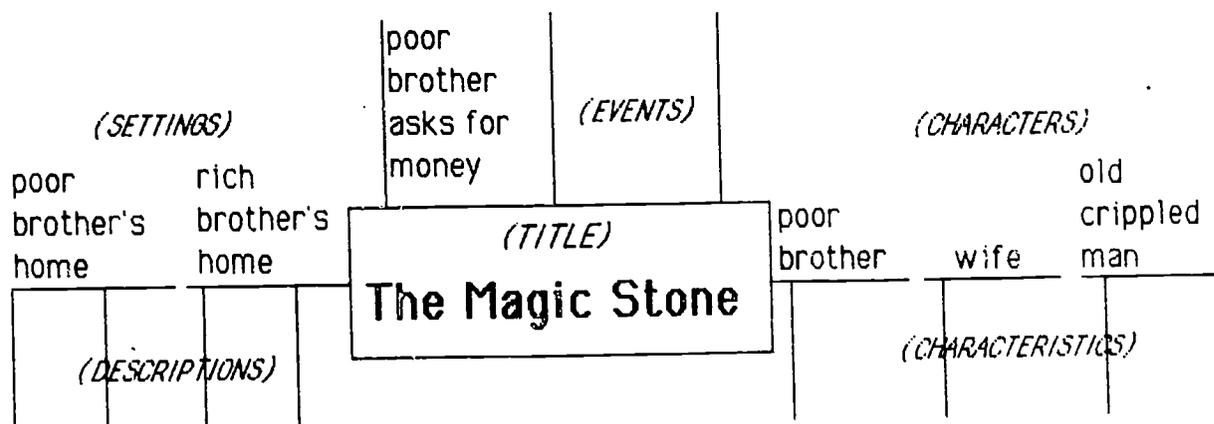
Key words like these are appropriate for The Magic Stone: brother, rich, poor, wife, house, gold pieces, bread, stone, magic, children, wish, and food.

- Different aspects of the story can be discussed, such as the differences between the wishes of the rich brother and the wishes of the poor brother and whether each one had used the wishes wisely.

- Two initial consonant sounds can be compared. To do this the teacher can print magic and stone, for instance, on the chalkboard and ask children to think of other words that begin with the same sounds. These suggestions are printed underneath each of the key words. On another day, two lists of rhyming words could be created for man and wish.

- The teacher can read The Magic Mill (Sutherland, 1976), a Latvian folktale. This story has many similarities to The Magic Stone and the children can note likenesses and differences.

- A simple story map could be created; the diagram below shows how one for this story might get underway.



- The story can be dramatized, with the children volunteering to play the various roles. As the story is reread, the teacher can hesitate at the dialogue parts, to enable the "actors" to *ad lib* their lines.

#### Small Group Activities Using a Variety of Folk Tales

There are many reasons why a teacher might want to divide the class into smaller groups for language activities. When there are fewer children,

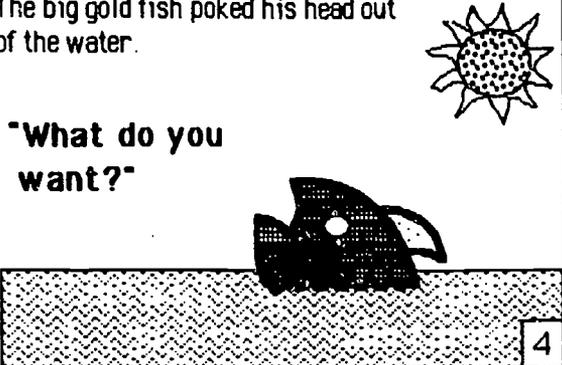
each one is able to participate more frequently; and their attention is more easily sustained. A camaraderie is fostered when collaborative activities are included. Each group can be involved with its own folktale or with a different response activity, and can demonstrate its creation to the rest of the class--a ready made and appreciative audience. During language experience activities, the teacher can use a personal computer to jot down the stories of children. If there are only eight or so children in a group, they can all see the screen as their words are being recorded. Below are some activities that are appropriate to use with smaller groups of children.

The Fisherman and his Wife (Martignoni, 1955), a German tale, is much too long to be used as reading material by young children. After the story has been read aloud, the teacher and children can work together to rewrite the story and create minibooks for everyone in the class. The teacher asks the children to recall what happened in the story and writes their comments directly into a word processing program, using a larger than standard font size for the print. If the teacher sits to one side of the screen, with the key board in front of her, the children can see their words as they are being recorded. Children will often begin recalling important details from the middle of the story, but the teacher can input their ideas as they express them, knowing that the words can be moved around, embellished and clarified as necessary to make a coherent story. The children experience the writing process first hand. The procedure may take more than one session before the children are satisfied with their retelling.

In asking the children to retell the story, the teacher is helping them to improve their comprehension, their understanding of the story structure, and their vocabularies (Morrow, 1985). As children recreate these stories their own particular view of the world is given voice (Mikkelsen, 1990). Their interpretation provides a text that is easier for them to read. It is an

excellent activity for emergent readers and should be repeated often.

### A Fish and a Wish

<p>Every day Mr. Fisher went fishing. One day he put his line in the water and caught a big gold fish.</p> <p><b>"No ! Don't eat me !"</b> said the fish.</p>	<p>Mr. Fisher went back to the water. <b>"Fish ! Yo, Fish !</b> I have just one wish", he called.</p>
<p>Mr. Fisher let the fish go and went home to tell his wife about the talking fish. "Oh", said Mrs. Fisher. "Maybe it's magic. Go ask the fish to give us a new house."</p>	<p>The big gold fish poked his head out of the water.</p> <p><b>"What do you want?"</b></p> 

This is the beginning of the story as retold by a first grade class. The sheet on the left is a facsimile of their first two pages. The one on the right shows how a child might add an illustration to one of the pages. The pages are cut along the dotted line, assembled, and fastened with staplers.

To turn this version into minibooks, the text is divided into segments, two segments of text for each computer sheet. Room is left on each page for illustrations, as in the diagram above, and the pages are numbered. After the sheets are printed and xeroxed (each child will need a copy), the sheets are cut in half, put in order and stapled. The children can then illustrate their pages and practice reading their story as they listen to a taped version. This group can then present other class members with minibooks and do a reader's theater performance of *The Fish and The Wish*.

The Haitian folkstory, *The Magic Orange Tree* (Moss & Stott, 1986) is short enough to use as it is presented in the anthology, *The Family of Stories*. The teacher and group of children could also condense the story

reserving as many of the catchy verses as possible. The teacher can then put the text onto acetate transparencies using permanent markers, leaving plenty of room for drawings. (These sheets should be numbered to avoid confusion later). The teacher reads over each transparency and a child selects a sheet to illustrate using washable markers. A taped recording enables the children to listen to the story repeatedly, an activity which facilitates their emergent reading (Holdaway, 1979). When they have finished their illustrations, they can project the story onto a screen using an overhead and share it with others in the class. The story could then be used as choral reading material with this group leading the rest of the children.

The Japanese folktale, *The Stone Cutter* (Bailey & Lewis, 1923), makes an ideal story for a lesson in sequencing. The man in the story was very dissatisfied with his lot and wished repeatedly to be something other than what he was. After the teacher reads the story to a group of children, each could select an episode to illustrate. The teacher works with each child to create a caption for their portion of the story. These illustrations and captions are put into the order in which they happened and are mounted on a large bulletin board. The teacher can begin narrating the story to the rest of the children in the class, and let each child in the group tell his or her part of the story using the illustration to assist in recalling details.

*The Old Iron Pot* (Ireson, 1966) is a fascinating story, probably British in origin, about an iron pot with a mind of its own. The teacher reads the story initially to a small group of children and talks about turning the story into a puppet show. Children select the roles they wish to play. As many as nine speaking roles can be found in this story; as all but three are short, some children can assume two different roles if necessary. The children create their characters on stiff paper, cut them out, and fasten them onto sticks or rulers. As they prepare their puppets, they listen to a taped

version of the story. When they are ready to perform the play for the rest of the children, a large table can be turned on its side to hide the puppeteers.

The teacher narrates the story and lets the children *ad lib* their dialogue as they hold up their puppets and move them around.

#### Additional Activities Appropriate for the Theme on Wishes

Children can be asked to talk, to draw and to write about "wishes" that they would make. These drawings and captions can be shared with the rest of the children and mounted on the classroom walls.

Early childhood teachers would do well to capitalize on the popularity of the Arabian story, *Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp* (Arbuthnot, 1961). Because there are so many strange words used in this story, the class might like to create an Aladdin Dictionary. After reading the story, new words and phrases (for example: genie, magic lamp, magician, Sultan, and Grand-Vizier) can be listed on the board. Each word can be put on a page and a child selected to illustrate its meaning. Rereadings of the story and its various versions may suggest other terms to include in the dictionary.

Folkstories provide the basis for many interesting and serious discussions and are ideal for directed listening activities. Using the Tibetan tale, *The Story of the Stone Lion* (Manning-Sanders, 1965), the teacher can ask the children questions such as: Was the Lion fair? Was the older brother right in turning away his mother? What might the younger brother have done with his good fortune? Do all people behave in this way? Do you think the wife liked to be tricked? What is the real problem in the story? Who is your favorite character? Is there a character that you do not like? Can you think of a different ending for the story? Discussions like these can lead children to listen to other people's points of view and to develop a respect for diversity. Pang (1991) maintains that, "Multicultural education moves to empower even our youngest citizens to think about issues

in their world and to challenge those arenas of life that they find unjust" (p.197).

Unfortunately, many of the traditional folktales, regardless of origin, can easily be regarded as sexist. A male is usually the main character, the strong, intelligent, and active one; while the female looks on, questions and admires, and gets rescued. [One of the exceptions to this is the Chinese story Pies of the Princess (Power, 1934), in which a young woman did not follow the wishes of her father.] An interesting project would be to rewrite a folktale switching sex roles. The Mexican story, The Poor Woodcutter (Moss & Stott, 1986), could be changed to describe "Margareta" Ventura, an orphaned girl who goes to the forest to chop wood and ends up marrying the Queen's son.

After a number of stories have been read, the teacher with the help of the children can make a comparative chart like the one below. This sort of activity will help the children to recall specific details from the various stories they have heard and read.

Title	Origin	Magic Object	Wishes
The Magic Stone	Kenya	stone	food clothes gardens that grow gold coins
The Stone Cutter	Japan	...	

To provide the children with a richer context for these stories, the teachers should also make use of non-fiction literature and reference resources. Although it is inappropriate to swamp young children with too much information about cultures and countries (Kendall, 1983), these materials usually include photographs and illustrations of people from other cultures. When a story from a particular part of the world is being read, the

teacher can show the class interesting pictures of local people and places. This complement to story reading will enable children to make the connections between fantasy and reality, and should help to reduce stereotyping. (For example, young children should not be left with the idea that all Japanese people are stone cutters !) Appropriate sections in encyclopedias and other resources can be flagged with place markers that identify the names of the countries or ethnic groups. A world map can be used to show the countries or areas from which the stories have come; a piece of yarn can connect Kenya to a label printed with the name of the story, The Magic Stone. Many children develop lasting interests about such topics as they delve into these interesting resources.

### Conclusion

Folktales from around the world will help children realize that all people have stories to tell. "Rather than viewing experiences different from their own as 'wired' or 'ethnic,' young readers can learn to approach literature with the understanding that we are all ethnic and therefore influenced by our backgrounds and experiences" (Nieto, 1993, p.194). As well, when children experience a wide range of literature, they understand that people the world over are similar in so many relevant ways (Norton, 1990).

For the children of minority groups, this emphasis can enhance their feelings of self-worth and can positively influence their academic achievement. Bishop (1987) summarizes the importance of a multicultural approach, "Children who find their own experiences mirrored in books receive an affirmation of themselves and their cultures" (p. 61). While a multicultural modification of the entire curriculum should be a major goal at all educational levels (Banks, 1979), folktales are a way to initiate this process and are particularly appropriate for young children. These folktales

enable a class to develop its own collection of multicultural stories, to promote literacy through shared book experiences and to provide a common core of experiences from which teachers can draw examples for all areas of the curriculum.

## Appendix

### The Magic Stone

Long ago and far away lived two brothers. One brother was very, very rich. Every day he sat at a table in his big house and counted his gold pieces.

The other brother was very, very poor. Every day he scratched at the dry soil in his garden and tried to grow food for his family.

The wife of the poor brother cried, "I am so hungry. Go to your rich brother and ask him for some money."

"No", said the poor brother. "He won't give me any money."

The wife of the poor brother cried again, "Your children are so hungry. Go to your rich brother and ask him for some money."

The poor brother walked and walked to the house of the rich brother. He found his brother sitting at a table counting his gold pieces.

"Please give me some money," said the poor brother. "My children are so hungry. My wife and I are so hungry. Give me a few of your gold pieces."

"NO !" said the rich brother, "but, here, if you are so hungry, eat this." And he gave the poor brother a loaf of bread.

The poor brother was very sad. He started home with the loaf of bread.

On the way he met an old, crippled man. "Please give me some of your bread," said the old man. "I haven't eaten for three days."

The poor brother gave the old man half of the bread. The old, crippled man ate it quickly. Then he took a stone from his pocket and handed it to the poor brother. "This stone has magic powers", he said. "It will give you anything you wish for, but use it wisely."

The poor brother walked home and put the rest of the bread in the middle of the table. He told his wife and children what his brother said and how he met an old, crippled man. He forgot about the magic stone.

"I wish I had more food for you than just this little bit of bread," said

the poor brother. In the blink of an eye, their table was overflowing with good things to eat. The family sat down to enjoy the food and then the poor brother remembered about the stone in his pocket, the stone with the magic powers. He showed it to his wife.

"What else shall we wish for?" he asked.

His wife looked at the rags they were all wearing. "I wish our children had new clothes," said his wife. And, in the blink of an eye, all their rags turned into new clothes.

"What else shall we wish for?" asked the poor brother.

"I wish we could get more food from our little garden," said his wife. And, in the blink of an eye, food began to grow in the garden, and the hens began to lay eggs, and the cow began to give milk.

"What else shall we wish for?" asked the brother, no longer poor.

"I wish all our neighbors also had food," said his wife. And, in the blink of an eye, the rains came and food began to grow in all the gardens.

The rich brother heard about this good luck and went to his brother's house. He peeked through the window and saw his brother holding the stone and making another wish.

"Ah, ha !" said the rich brother. "He has a stone with magic powers. I want that stone !" He waited until night and he stole the stone.

He ran back to his own home and tried the magic stone for himself.

"What shall I wish for?" he asked. "I wish I had more money, lots and lots and lots of money !" Gold pieces began to pour down on top of him like rain and the rich brother was buried in a mountain of money.

The poor brother and his family had everything they needed. They were very happy. They had used the magic stone wisely.

(This story has been adapted from Children everywhere, The 1970 Childcraft Annual.

Chicago: Field Enterprises. The original version is by John M. Ibongia and M. Dobrin.)

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