



WILD  
SWAN  
THEATER

Study Guide  
for

*Strega Nona and the Magic  
Pasta Pot*

Script by Jeff Duncan based on the folk tales of Strega Nona



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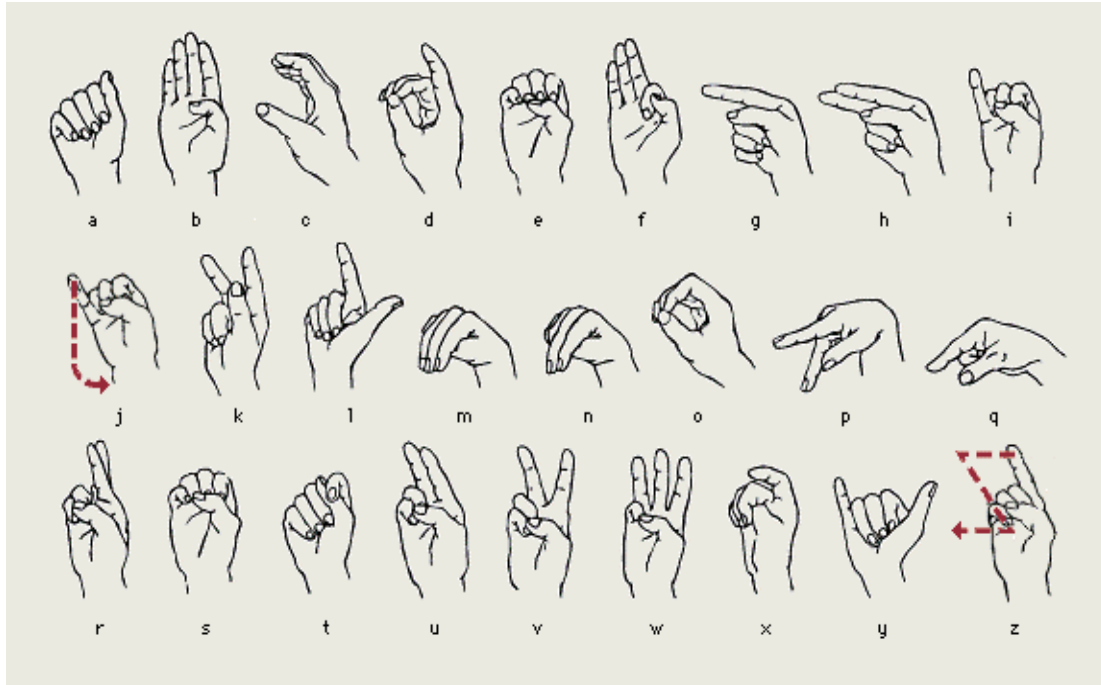
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The information for this *Strega Nona* study guide was written or compiled by Ramona Brand, Education Director - Wild Swan Theater - November 2003.

## **American Sign Language Alphabet**

When you come to see *Strega Nona* you will notice that American Sign Language Interpreters are part of the play. They are signing the dialogue of the show for audience members who may have difficulty hearing. American Sign Language is a language used by the deaf and hearing impaired community. Using sign language in Wild Swan Theater shows enables more people to enjoy a theatrical production.

Below is the basic sign language alphabet. Can you make the letters of the alphabet using the chart below?



### **Classroom Activities:**

- 1 Try spelling your name using sign language or try spelling words and phrases.
- 1 Use the ASL alphabet to spell character names and words that are used in the play such as *Strega Nona*, Big Anthony, Paula, pasta, magic spell.
- 1 Can you make up a magic spell of your own? Use American Sign Language to express your spell.

## Story Synopsis

In a town in Calabria, Italy, a long time ago, there lived an old lady everyone called Strega Nona, which meant “Grandma Witch.” She had the magic touch and everyone in the village went to see her for a cure if they had troubles. But Strega Nona was getting old and she needed someone to help her keep her little house and garden so she put up a sign in the town square. Big Anthony, who didn’t pay attention, came to work for her. Strega Nona gives him the list of chores he must do, and what he will be given in exchange for his work. Strega Nona also tells him what he must **not** do. He must never touch her magic pasta pot.

One day Big Anthony overhears Strega Nona singing her magic spell and to his astonishment the pot is full of steaming pasta. He then hears the spell to end the cooking, but, alas, for Big Anthony he does not see Strega Nona blow three kisses to the pot.

Big Anthony tells the townspeople of the magic pasta pot that cooks by itself. They laugh at him and tell him he has told a big lie, which makes Big Anthony very angry. “I’ll show them!” he says to himself!

When Strega Nona leaves to visit her niece, Big Anthony sees his chance. He invites the entire town to a feast. He says the magic spell and the pasta pot begins to cook. When everyone is full, he says the magic spell to stop the pot, except he doesn’t know to blow three kisses. The magic pasta pots cooks and cooks and cooks. Soon it is bubbling over and heading toward town. Big Anthony is in big trouble. Will Strega Nona save the day? You will find out when you come see the play.

### Activities for your classroom:



Language Arts: Author study. Learn about Tomie de Paola through his books. Many of his stories are autobiographical. Have your students create a pictorial timeline of events in Tomie de Paola’s life based on his stories.



Science: Create attribute charts with pasta. Collect many kinds of pasta and have your students sort and categorize them.



Creative Writing: Learn as many different pasta names as possible and use them to write a poem.

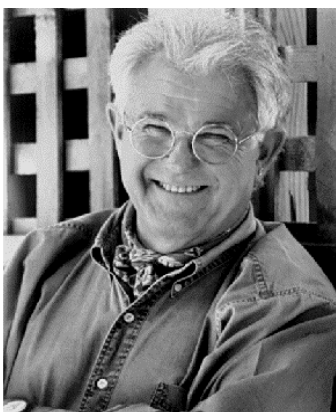


Drama: Act out different parts of the story. Have students take roles of characters in the book.



Social Studies: Feelings – Explore the feelings of different characters during different times in the book. Make a paper plate pie chart that matches the feelings of the characters with situations in the book.

## About Tomie de Paola



Tomie de Paola was born in Meriden, Connecticut, on September 15, 1934 to a family of Irish and Italian background. By the time he could hold a pencil, he knew what his life's work would be. His first book was a gift to his little sister for her birthday. It was called *Glimmera, The Story of a Mermaid*. He was ten years old.

Much of what we know about de Paola's early life comes from the author's own books. In fact, his series of beginning chapter books is based on his childhood. Known as 26 Fairmount Avenue books, they include *26 Fairmount Avenue*, which received a 2000 Newbery Honor Award, *Here We All Are*, and *On My Way*.

From these books and several of his picture books, we know that Tomie came from a loving family of Irish and Italian background. He had an older brother and two younger sisters. His grandmothers were an important part of his life. Tomie's parents supported his desire to be an artist and to perform on stage. When he expressed an interest in taking dance lessons, he was immediately enrolled, even though it was unusual for a young boy to take dance lessons at that time. The emphasis in Tomie's family was on enjoying home, school, family and friends, and embracing personal interests and talents.

His determination to create books for children led to a BFA from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York, and an MFA from the California College of Arts & Crafts in Oakland, California. Between college and graduate school he spent a brief time in a Benedictine monastery. de Paola taught art and/or theater design at the college level from 1962 through 1978 before devoting himself fulltime to children's literature.

de Paola's picture books cover a number of themes/topics. Some of these include: his own life, Christmas and other holidays (religious and secular), folktales, Bible stories, Mother Goose rhymes, and books about Strega Nona. His first Strega Nona book won the 1976 Caldecott Honor Book Award. He has also written a number of informational books like *Charlie Needs a Cloak*, which is the story of the creation of a wool cloak, from shearing a sheep to spinning the wool, weaving the cloth, and sewing the garment. His collections include Mother Goose stories, scary stories, seasonal stories, and nursery tales. His books are characterized by humor and light-hearted illustrations, many in a folkart style. de Paola creates his artwork in a combination of watercolor, tempera, and acrylic.

Today, Tomie de Paola lives in New Hampshire. de Paola is currently a college professor at New England College in Henniker, New Hampshire, where he still lives with four dogs. His studio is a renovated, 200-year old barn. He has published almost 200 books in fifteen different countries, and publishes around two to four new books ever year. de Paola also receives over 100,000 fan letters each year. All these accomplishments have made him one of the most popular children's authors of this half-century.

<http://childrensbooks.about.com/library/weekly/aa110500a.html>

## How Strega Nona began

Strega Nona, the magical, big-nosed Italian "Grandma Witch" who was to become de Paola's most popular creation, came to life in this carefree way. One day, he recalls, he was doodling during a faculty meeting at a school where he taught. One of his doodles was this little character, "and I knew her name was Strega Nona."

Like Strega Nona, many of de Paola's characters and stories have roots in his own childhood. Born in Connecticut to an Italian father and Irish mother, he grew up with an older brother and two younger sisters. As a four-year-old, he says, his "best friend" was his Irish great-grandmother, who became the central figure in the book "Nana Upstairs & Nana Downstairs."



(FROM 'STREGA NONA:  
HER STORY,' BY TOMIE  
DE PAOLA)

The character Strega Nona, with her big pasta pot, was partly inspired by de Paola's Italian grandmother. "Her house was really strange," he says. "Cooking was a really huge part of her life, and so she had a stove right by the table." Most of all, de Paola recalls the "endless" servings of spaghetti she would force him to eat.

### **Recalling when he was a kid**

He remembers the unpleasant shock of seeing her "turn up at the doorstep" to care for him and his siblings once when his mother was in the hospital with a new baby. (Today, though, de Paola loves to cook pasta and often bakes bread in his studio while he is working.)

Words and traditions from his family background also appear frequently in his books. ***Days of the Blackbird***, his latest book, takes place in a mountain village in northern Italy. The story is about a white dove who sings through the winter to keep up the spirits of an ailing duke. To stay warm on the coldest days, the bird takes refuge in a chimney. Its feathers turn black from the soot. From then on, the last three days of January are called the "days of the blackbird."

de Paola says his greatest hope is that his books will all send a message of joy. Taking a heart as his trademark, he says he wants to let his readers know that "life is worth living and is a wonderful thing to experience."

<http://search.csmonitor.com/durable/1997/08/26/home/home.1.html>

## **Making Web connections:**

### **Web sites for Strega Nona:**

<http://www.uiowa.edu/~humiowa/streganona5.html>

Story summary and lesson plan ideas

<http://faldo.atmos.uiuc.edu/CLA/LESSONS/106.html>

Language arts lesson plans

[http://www.eduplace.com/tview/pages/s/Strega\\_Nona\\_Tomie\\_dePaola.html](http://www.eduplace.com/tview/pages/s/Strega_Nona_Tomie_dePaola.html)

Enrichment activities for Strega Nona

### **Web sites about Tomie de Paola:**

<http://www.geocities.com/tomiedepaola/index.html>

<http://childrensbooks.about.com/library/weekly/aa110500a.htm>

### **About Calabria, Italy:**

<http://www.initaly.com/regions/calabria/calabria.htm>

<http://majesticmoose.net/photography/calabria>

Photo gallery of pictures from Calabria

<http://www.glilli.com/Foods.htm>

Calabrese recipe site



## **Discussion Questions:**

**Use these questions as follow up to your visit to  
Wild Swan Theater's production of *Strega Nona and the Magic Pasta Pot*:**

1. Who is Strega Nona? Why does everyone want to see her?
2. Why does Strega Nona need someone to help her around her house? How does it feel to need help? How do you feel when someone helps you? How do you feel when you help someone?
3. Name some of the jobs Big Anthony has to do. Do you have jobs to do at your house or at school. What are some of those jobs?
4. What does Strega Nona tell Big Anthony he must not do? Do you have something valuable that you don't want other people to touch?
5. What does Big Anthony overhear and see when he is working at Strega Nona's house. What does he not see? Why is it important?
6. When Big Anthony tells the Townspeople about the magic pasta pot how do they react? How does Big Anthony feel? Why do you think he is angry? Have you ever felt angry when people have laughed at something you have said? Why do you think he needed to prove that he was right?
7. What is Big Anthony supposed to remember when Strega Nona leaves to visit her niece?
8. What does Big Anthony do when Strega Nona leaves?
9. How do the Townspeople feel about Big Anthony when he makes them pasta?
10. What happens when Big Anthony says the spell to stop the pasta pot?
11. How do you think Big Anthony feels when the pasta begins to bubble out into the town? How do you think the Townspeople feel? Have you ever felt that you were in trouble because of something you have done? Did you want someone to help you fix the problem?
12. When Strega Nona comes into town how does she stop the pasta? What does she make Big Anthony do?
13. Do you think Big Anthony learned a lesson?
14. Would you recommend this story/play to a friend? Why or why not?

## About Calabria, Italy

The history of Calabria is an interesting and varied history. It is located at the southernmost tip (the point of the "boot") of Italy and the terrain includes rugged mountains, vast golden wheat fields, and crystal clear seas. The earliest Greek colonization of the region took place between the eighth and third centuries BC. These first settlers are believed to have arrived from the Greek Island of Eubeo located in the Ionian Sea. Calabria was considered off the "beaten path" in the 5th Century BC when Greeks first settled the region. Removing themselves from the crowded conditions on the Greek mainland, the ancient colonizers gave this larger and lush land its original name -- "Magna Graecia." The name Magna Grecia, translated into English means "Great Greece." Later, the Romans directed them to transform it to Bruttium. In the centuries to follow there was a strange change of names. Eventually it was known as Calabria.



The Calabrian territory is predominantly mountainous and hilly. The landscape is mixed between the continuous mountainous and hilly parts that go down almost above the sea, leaving some level lines in the zones where the rivers flow. Two furrows divide the Calabrian peninsula in three rich mountainous groups of green woods, pastures and spring waters. The conformation of the ground isolates the urban centers where the population is centralized. In the coastal shores there are no harbors. The rugged territory kept Calabria isolated from much of the rest of Italy. It was not well traveled and as late as the 1861 unification of Italy had only one road that traversed the entire region. Many small villages were centered around life that knew only of the area customs and history.



What would you see if you visited a small Calabrian village today? If you venture inland on those impossibly curvy mountain roads, you'll see abandoned railroad tracks everywhere, and you'll drive past countless roadside fountains dispensing natural mineral water. Take your place in line to fill your plastic bottle, or ask a local woman to teach you how to balance a terra cotta jar of it on your head. Driving through the towns, you'll see old men playing cards at tables in the main squares. Grandmothers sit on their doorsteps knitting, weaving or embroidering. You

could spot a group of villagers waiting outside the house of a local *santina*, a psychic who "sees" the souls of the dead, blesses the farm animals or performs miracles. You may meet but unforgettably hospitable villagers wearing voluminous black skirts or colorful traditional costumes. Delicious fish, vegetables, cheese, sausage, salami, wild mushrooms and figs make up the foods of the region. Much of Calabria today is unchanged from ancient times.

[http://www.intercomm.it/badolatomeddream/bad\\_regcalab\\_main.htm](http://www.intercomm.it/badolatomeddream/bad_regcalab_main.htm)

<http://reference.allrefer.com/encyclopedia/C/Calabria.html>

<http://goitaly.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http://www.mediasoft.it/italy/index%5Fen.html>



**Location:** Italy is a country in southern Europe. It is a boot-shaped peninsula that extends into the Mediterranean Sea. Italy is bordered by Monaco, France, Switzerland, Austria, and Slovenia.

**Capital:** Rome is the capital of Italy.

**Size:** Italy covers 116,306 square miles (301,230 sq km), including the islands of Sicily and Sardinia.

**Population:** The population of Italy is about 57,634,300 (as of July 2000).

**Flag:** Italy's flag is made of three equal-sized rectangles of red, white and green. The green is by the flagpole.

**Other Countries Located Within Italy:** San Marino is located within Italy near the eastern coast. The independent Vatican City (Holy See) is located within Rome.

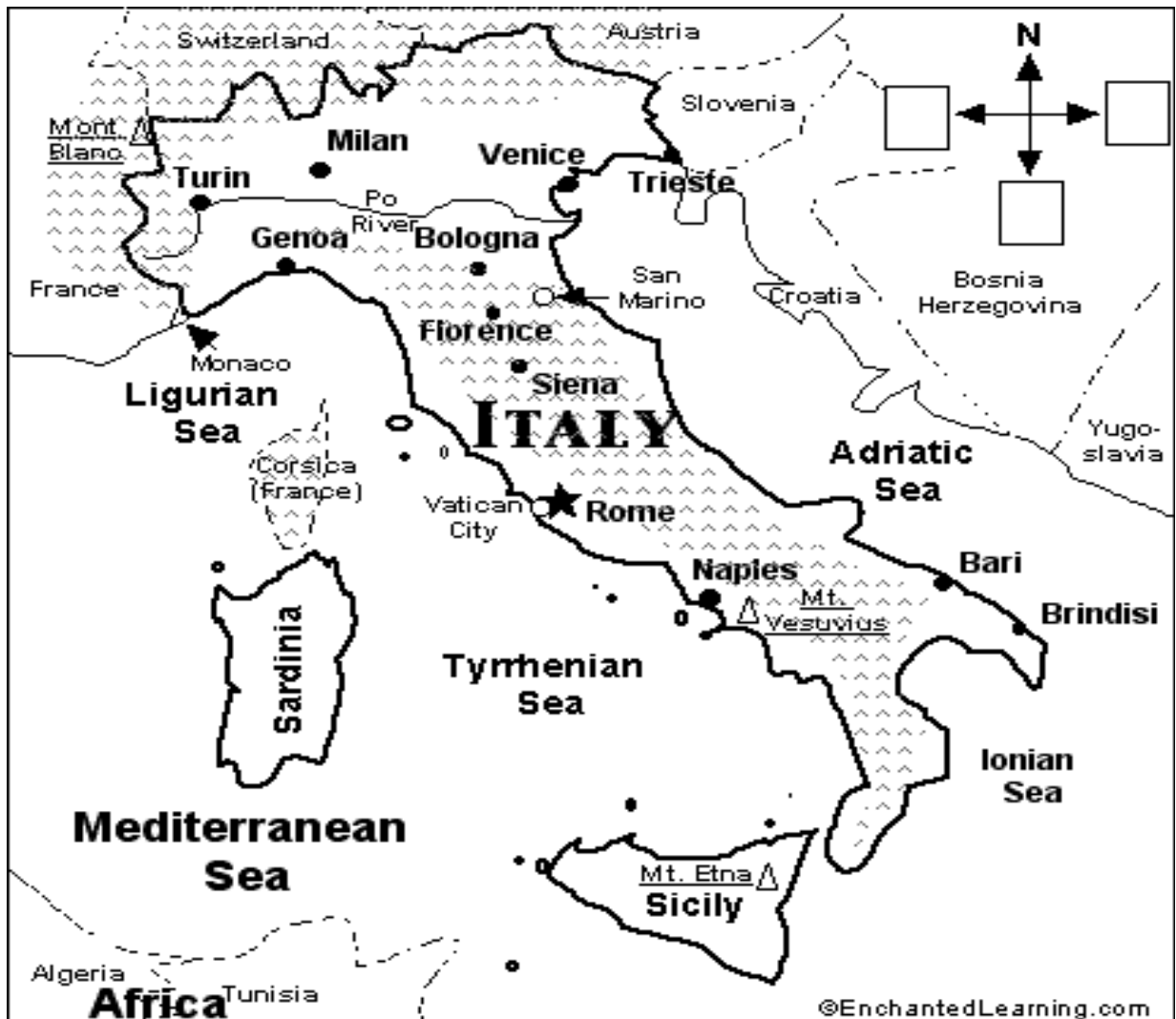
**Climate:** Italy mostly has a mild, Mediterranean climate. The far north is cold and mountainous; the south is rugged, hot and dry.

**Major Rivers:** The major rivers in Italy are: the Po River (which flows from the Alps near the French border, through Turin, and eastward into the Adriatic Sea), the Arno River (which flows from the north-central Apennines, through Florence, and into the Tyrrhenian Sea), and the Tiber River (which flows from the north-central Apennines, south through Rome, and into the Tyrrhenian Sea).

**Mountain Ranges:** The Alps are a mountain range located along the north of Italy. The Apennines are another mountain range that runs through the center of Italy.

**Highest Point:** The highest point in Italy is Mont Blanc, in the Alps on the border of Italy and France. Mont Blanc (Monte Bianco) is 15,770 feet (4,807 m) tall.

**Lowest Point:** The lowest points in Italy are at sea level (the level of the Mediterranean Sea).



<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/resources/ngo/education/ideask4/k4story.html>

Using the directions below to fill in the map of Italy.

1. A major industrial area in Italy extends along the Po River valley, roughly from Genoa to Turin to Milan to Venice to Bologna. Color this area on the map brown.
2. The Alps are a mountain range that borders Italy on the north. Color this area purple.
3. The Apennines are a mountain range that runs through the peninsula of Italy. Color this area gray.
4. Italy is shaped like a boot. Color the toe of Italy green; olives are grown in this region.
5. Find Calabria at the tip of Italy. Color this area pink.
6. Color Sardinia black.
7. Color Sicily orange.
8. Color the Mediterranean Sea (including all the other smaller seas that surround Italy) blue.
9. Color Europe (except Italy) yellow.
10. Color Africa red.
11. Fill in the rest of the directions in the compass rosette (it is located in the upper right hand corner)

## Language Arts Activities for your Classroom

### Create a Story Map

Read *Strega Nona* to your students. Have them list the locations in which the story takes place. Have your students map a plot line and match the plot to locations in the story. Create a town map that shows the geographical plot of the story. Have your students work at their desks to map the plot or have them work together to help you create a map of the story on the chalkboard or bulletin board.

### Create a Strega Nona Puppet Show

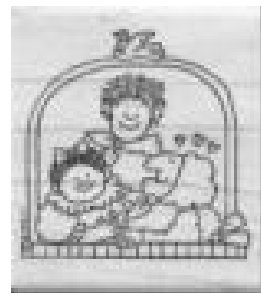
Use the illustrations in *Strega Nona* as a guideline. Ask your students to create backdrop illustrations of the locations in the story. Create simple puppets using cardboard (manila file folders work well) of the characters in the story. Make Strega Nona, Big Anthony, the Pasta Pot, the Townspeople. Use choral reading techniques to tell the story. Take the voices of Strega Nona, Big Anthony, the Townspeople, and the Narration. Perform your puppet show for another class. How creative can you be with the Pasta Pot?

### Write your Own Strega Nona Story

Big Anthony gets into a lot of trouble when he uses Strega Nona's magic Pasta Pot. What other kinds of trouble might Big Anthony get into! Review the plot and the characters in the story with your students. Ask your students to brainstorm other magical objects that Strega Nona might have: a love potion, a magic comb that transforms sheep's wool into sweaters, a magic ring that makes the wearer sing opera, etc. Ask them to imagine what might happen if Big Anthony used another magic object. Have them think about situation conflict and resolution. Using the basic plot format, have your students write a story called *Big Anthony Strikes again*. You could write this story as a whole group activity, small group or individually.

Story starter questions:

- What does the magic object do?
- What makes the magic object work?
- How does Big Anthony find out about this object?
- Why does Big Anthony want to use it?
- What happens when Big Anthony uses the magic object?
- How does Strega Nona find out?
- How does Strega Nona resolve the problem?
- What consequence does Big Anthony face?



## Bibliography

### **Other *Strega Nona* stories by Tomie de Paola:**

Strega Nona Takes a Vacation

Strega Nona : Her Story / as told to Tomie de Paola

Strega Nona Meets Her Match

Merry Christmas, Strega Nona

Big Anthony: His Story / as told to Tomie de Paola

Big Anthony and the Magic Ring

### **Other books by Tomie de Paola:**

26 Fairmount Avenue

Adelita: a Mexican Cinderella Story

The Art Lesson

Bonjour, Mr. Satie

Days of the Blackbird : a Tale of Northern Italy

