After you listen to the story, “Vasilisa The Priest's Daughter,” check out the activities below. There's something for your inner everyone—the baker, the tailor, the designer, the bather… Click on the one you are most interested in, or try them all!

Activities for the...

**Baker:** Kasha fit for a king [recipe]

**Bather:** A Brief History of Russian Steam Baths, and Beware the Bannik!

**Designer:** Design your own embroidery pattern!

**Lexicographer:** Words and Origins

**Philosopher:** Questions to ponder

**Writer:** Today's Vasilisa

**Extra Curious:** Sources & further reading
For the Baker: Kasha fit for a king (recipe)

Kasha means porridge and is a common dish in Russia. In America, when we think of porridge, we might imagine something like mushy oatmeal, and as a result may not be inclined to get excited. However, there are many variations of kasha from savory to sweet. This kasha, Guryevskaya kasha, is much more like a dessert pudding with fruit!

This recipe was (supposedly) invented for Count Nikolai Guryev in the early 1800s, and would only have been served to the upper class. It could very well have been the kind of kasha that King Barkhat and Vasilisa ate. It is delicious for breakfast or dessert (or in our case today, for our early afternoon tea). Read more about this and other types of kasha.

Ingredients:
2 cups milk
½ cup sugar (or ⅓ cup of honey)
1 teaspoon vanilla
¾ cup of semolina (or for a gluten-free variation, we used ¾ cup of white basmati rice)
4 Tablespoons butter
2 eggs, beaten
Fresh, canned or frozen fruit (thawed)
Sliced almonds (optional)

Bring milk to a low boil. Add sugar and vanilla. Gradually add the semolina (or rice) and stir, cooking about 10 minutes (our rice took about 12 minutes, stirring constantly).

Stir the butter and raw eggs into the cooked porridge. Mix well. Pour into a greased baking pan (we used a round glass baking pan), sprinkle the top with sugar and bake in a hot oven (we turned ours to 350°F). The kasha is ready to come out when a light crust is formed (we baked ours about 20 minutes). Serve with fruit and toasted almonds (optional).

Canned Fruit: Pour syrup from the canned fruit over the porridge, decorate it with the fruit and sprinkle with toasted almonds. Frozen fruit: We heated frozen peaches, raspberries, blueberries, and strawberries in a saucepan with ½ cup of water. This helped speed the thawing and created a nice syrup, which we poured on top. Fresh fruit: Consider adding some jam or fruit syrup as well.
For The Bather: A Brief History of Russian Steam Baths, and Beware the Bannik!

Steam bathing has been a tradition in Russia for centuries. The *banya*, as it is called in Eastern Europe, is a wooden bath house, traditionally with three rooms - an entrance room, a steam room, and a room for washing. Everyone in the village would go to the bath house. If you were very rich, you might have a private one for just your family.

Bathing was (and still is) a social event. Tea and drinks are served in the entrance room of the bathhouse, and people linger to socialize and play games.

In the steam room, rocks or clay balls are heated in a stove. People enter when it is hot - the room can be as hot as 200 degrees Fahrenheit!

People work up a good sweat before they are drenched with cold water.

Bathing was believed to cure illness and to have magical properties. “The people’s first doctor,” a steam bath was believed to cleanse your body and soul, and was part of many important rituals (birth, weddings, and death).

Beware the Bannik!

The Bannik is a little devil who inhabits the bathhouse. Mostly he hides under the benches, but don’t make him angry! He has hairy hands and long claws and might just start throwing hot rocks or boiling water!

For more on the history of baths, check out:

- The Banya of Russia and the History of Steam Bathing
- History of Russian Bath
- The Origins of Bathhouse Culture around the World
For the Designer: Design your own Embroidery!

In spite of Vasilisa's apparent disdain for embroidery, Russian embroidery is an art form that has preserved ancient history where pen and paper have not. Patterns have been preserved from Pre-Christian times, capturing ancient pagan symbols of the past. Every stitch has significance; nothing is random.

Embroidered towels played an important role in community rituals and celebrations. During droughts, epidemics, and disasters, women would come together to make the one-day (obydennoe) towel, which could ward off evil, but only if it were completed in one day. Special signs and patterns were also embroidered on shirt collars, belts, and sleeves to keep evil at bay, and a handmade item by a family member possessed the greatest power.

Design Your Own!

Take a look at these different Russian embroidery designs for inspiration, and come up with a design of your own! Ward off evil, encode a secret, tell a story, or just celebrate!

- [Russian Embroidery on Pinterest](#)
- [Embroidery at The Russian Museum of Art](#)
- [An Overview of Russian Embroidery](#)

The Color Red

Embroidery was stitched in red, the most beautiful color, on linen cloth. The word used for red in Russian is "krasny" which actually means beautiful. Today, the word krasny is used for the color, and a new word, krasivy, is used for beautiful. For the embroiderer, red was associated with two vital forces: the life-giving warmth of the sun and the energy of human blood.

Images & Symbols

Geometric designs are considered an ancient language, encoding ideas about the world before written language was born. Squares and dots are often interpreted as planted fields, zigzag lines symbolize water, and petaled flakes and encircled crosses signify the sun. The Slav Goddess Mokosh often appears, with birds and deer, her arms raised in blessings of fertility and good harvest. A spiral indicates the universe. A crescent moon represents fertility. An ear of corn, prosperity. Birds, especially peacocks and pigeons, indicate good fortune. The Tree of Life represents the center of the world, the place from which the whole world arises. Learn More About Ancient Russian Symbols.
**For the Lexicographer: Words and Origins**

**anteroom** (noun) - An small room, leading to a larger one, typically an entrance or waiting room. In the bathing house, there is an entrance room with pegs for clothes and benches for waiting or socializing. King Barkhat was changing in this entrance room (anteroom) while Vasilisa went ahead and had her bath!

**viand** (noun) - (usually plural, viands) An item of food: an unlimited assortment of viands. Late Middle English: from Old French viande 'food', from an alteration of Latin vivenda, neuter plural gerundive of vivere 'to live'

**Russian Words & Their Meanings**

barkhat - velvet
vasily - royal or kingly
vasilisa - royal or queenly
kasha - porridge

**What is the difference between a Tsar and a King?**

The word “tsar” came from the ancient Roman title, “caesar,” and implies a “supreme ruler” or emperor. A king is a male monarch, and while a ruler of his own territory an emperor, who would hold the power over an entire region. In that context, a tsar would be more powerful than a king. In this story, Barkhat is a king; in “The Soldier and Death,” the soldier was dealing with a tsar.

**Why does Vasilisa’s last name change depending on whether she is a “boy” or a “girl”?**

You might have noticed that both Vasilisa’s first name and last name change, based on whether she is being referred to as a man or a woman. As a woman, she is “Vasilisa Vasilyevna.” As a man, she is referred to as “Vasily Vasilyevich.”

In Russia, last names are a key to a person’s family, origins, and gender. Men and women in a family commonly have a variation of the same last name; there is often a masculine and a feminine form of the name. Often, the feminine surnames are modified to end in “a” or “aya.” There are some gender-neutral name endings, such as “ich” and “ko.” It’s interesting that while “ich” is considered a gender neutral last name (at least today), in the story, Vasilisa’s last name changes to a more feminine form when she is referred to as a woman. Learn more about the history of last names in Russia.
For the Philosopher: Questions to ponder

Vasilisa likes to ride horses, hunt, and drink vodka--things that “only men do.” Are there things you feel like you can’t do because you are a boy or a girl? What are they? Have you ever broken these “rules” and done it anyway?

People often mistake Vasilisa for a man, and she doesn’t correct them. Why do you think that is?

Why does the king want to know whether Vasilisa is a boy or a girl so badly?

Why would the king go to a witch for help? What do you think of the witch’s tests?

If you were the king, how would you have tested Vasilisa to figure out her true identity?

If you were Vasilisa, how would you have responded to King Barkhat’s tests?

Why doesn’t the king just ask Vasilisa whether she’s a girl or a boy?

We don’t hear much about Vasilisa’s father, the priest, except that he gives her the king’s letters. What do you think her father thinks about her “manly” activities and her visits to the king?

Barkhat means “velvet” in Russian. Coincidentally, Vasilisa means “royal” or “queenly” and Vasily means “royal or “king.” Why do you think the storyteller chose these names?

Send us your thoughts and questions at storiesforscamps@scoundrelandscamp.org!
For the Writer: Create Today’s Vasilisa

Retell Vasilisa’s story, but in modern day times!

Who is your “Vasilisa” character?

Where does your character live, and who does your character live with?

Who tests your character?

What kind of tests do they give your character?

How does your character outwit them?
For the Extra Curious: Sources & further reading

Steam Baths


Kasha


Embroidery, Color, & Symbolism


Last Names


Lexicography
Definitions from
