Stories for Scamps

Presents

Activities for Scamps

based on

Baba Yaga

A Russian Folk-tale by Alexander Nikolaevich Afanasyev
Retold by Gretchen Wirges

After you listen to the story, “Baba Yaga” check out the activities below. There’s something for your inner everyone—the builder, the baker, the geographer, the philosopher...Click on the one you are most interested in, or try them all!

Activities for the...

Architect, Designer, or Builder: Make Baba Yaga’s House!

Baker: Russian Bread & Hospitality (and a recipe for cherry pletyonka)

Geographer: Baba Yaga’s Forest (The Taiga)

Lexicographer: Words and Origins

Philosopher: Questions to ponder

Extra Curious: Sources & further reading
For the Architect, Designer, or Builder: Draw, Design, or Build Baba Yaga’s House!

Baba Yaga lives in a little hut in the woods. The hut is on chicken legs, and stands with its back to all visitors until they say, “Little hut, little hut, stand with your back to the woods, and your front to me!” Then it turns around. Whether you go in or not—well, that’s up to you!

Draw, design, or build your version of Baba Yaga’s house! (Get really ambitious and build it actual-size in your yard—with permission, of course.)

Looking for inspiration? Here’s one architect’s plans for Baba Yaga’s house!

Ivan Bilibin, “Baba Yaga’s Hut” from Wikimedia Commons
For the Baker: Russian bread & hospitality (and cherry pletyonka)

Russia is an enormous country, and traveling can be daunting, especially long ago when you would be traveling by horse, cart, or on foot. Because villages and cities were so spread out, it could take a long time for news to travel, too. Sometimes the only way you might have news was when a visitor would arrive.

It is a Russian tradition to open doors to guests, even strangers. Even Baba Yaga will offer refreshments to her guests! Hosts would come outside, bow to their guests, and offer them bread and salt—bread for health, and salt (which once was rare) to show prosperity. Guests would bring presents, too, and all the best food would be laid out on the table: bread, pie, fish, meat, and even dessert. Learn more about the tradition of bread and salt.

We are a tad early for cherry season, but we couldn’t resist this recipe for cherry pletyonka—both bread and dessert! Pletyonka means “braided bread.”

Ingredients for the dough:
2 ⅓ cup of flour
½ cup milk
2 teaspoons active dry yeast
1 egg
5 Tablespoons of sugar
½ stick butter, softened
1 Tablespoon vegetable oil
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
pinch of salt

Ingredients for the filling:
2 cups of cherries
3-5 Tablespoons sugar
1-2 Tablespoons cornstarch
1 egg yolk (and a teaspoon of milk) for brushing
powdered sugar for dusting
In a bowl mix lukewarm milk, 1 tablespoon of sugar, 2 tablespoons of flour and yeast. Cover and leave in a warm corner so that the yeast activates.

Add an egg, the remaining sugar, vanilla, vegetable oil and a pinch of salt. Work the mixture with a whisk until smooth, add the remaining sifted flour and start kneading the dough with your hands or a mixer (using dough hook).

Add the softened butter, work the dough for another few minutes and round it into a ball. You should have a very soft (but not sticky) and elastic dough.

Put the ball into a large clean bowl, cover, and let rise in a warm place for an hour. Then punch down the dough, again round it into a ball, and leave for the second proofing for another hour.

Meanwhile, remove the pits from the cherries, add a pinch of the cornstarch and set aside.

Sprinkle the baking surface with flour, roll the dough into a large oval (when ready), and dust the middle section with cornstarch.

Spread the cherries onto the cornstarch and sprinkle the berries with some sugar, and then with the last of the cornstarch so the filling does not bleed while baking. Next, make parallel cuts on the edges of the dough (check out the photos in the Russia Beyond recipe here).

To make a braid, fold top and bottom flaps to cover the filling. Then start folding side strips over the berries: one right, one left, right, left, until you’re done with your braid.

Cover the cherry braid with a clean kitchen towel and let rest and rise for around 20 minutes. Then, gently brush it with egg yolk mixed with a tablespoon of milk or water.

Bake for 25-30 minutes at 350°F until the braid is richly golden-brown.

Wait until the braid has completely cooled before eating it! Otherwise, you will have a mess. Generously dust the cherry braid with powdered sugar and enjoy.
For the Geographer: Baba Yaga’s forest (The Taiga)

The Russian boreal forests, also known as the “taiga”, make up one fifth of the world’s forests, and is the largest forested region in the world, around 12 million km², larger than the Amazon Rainforest.

The boreal forests are the northernmost forests in the world. They extend across Russia, Alaska, Canada, North America, and Scandinavia (latitudes between 50-70°). These forests live on previously ice-covered or glaciated soils and the flora and fauna living there are well-adapted for the extreme cold.

Russian boreal forests, from HVCF of Russia, World Wildlife Fund

Russian boreal forests are filled with birch, pine, spruce, and fir trees, with a few deciduous trees in the mix. Home to reindeer, brown bear, moose, wolf, red fox, lynx, the Amur (Siberian) tiger, and the Far Eastern leopard.

Boreal forests are an essential part of the global carbon cycle, storing in their soil more carbon than all tropical and temperate forests combined (338 petragrams, or 338 trillion kilograms). Russia alone holds almost 50% of the northern hemisphere’s terrestrial carbon (135.7 trillion kilograms), much of which is frozen in peat and held in permafrost. As global temperatures rise, carbon previously stored in the soil is now being released into the air.

About one-third of Russia’s taiga forests remain untouched by humans. However, most intact forest is considered “industrial forest” under Russian law. Deforestation for logging, agriculture, and mining threaten the taiga forests, particularly as global demand for timber has increased (as much as 20,000km² of forest lost per year). As global temperatures rise—and more quickly in the boreal regions than elsewhere on earth—the heat and earlier snowmelt have created dryer conditions for these forests, which are resulting in more frequent and larger wildfires.

Learn more about boreal forests, how a map can help, and what’s happening in Russia’s forests right now.
For the Lexicographer: Words and Origins

crock - an earthenware pot or jar

Old English croc, crocca, of Germanic origin; related to Old Norse krukka (jar) and probably to Dutch kruik (jug or pitcher) and German Krug (jug).

gruel - thin liquid porridge, oatmeal or other meal, boiled in milk or water

Middle English: from Old French, of Germanic origin.

peasant - a poor farmer who owns or rents a small piece of land for cultivation; a person of low social status

Late Middle English: from Old French paisent ‘country dweller’, from pais ‘country’, based on Latin pagus ‘country district’.

prosperous - successful

Late Middle English: from Old French prospereus, from Latin prosperus ‘doing well’.

spite - a desire to hurt, annoy, or offend someone

Middle English: shortening of Old French despit ‘contempt’, despiter ‘show contempt for’.
**For the Philosopher:** Questions to ponder

Why did the father take his daughter to the woods?

Why would he leave his daughter with Baba Yaga?

Where does Baba Yaga go when she goes out?

Does Baba Yaga know about the mice?

Where did that dog learn to talk?

Is Baba Yaga good or bad in this story?

Did each sister get what she deserved?

Send us your thoughts and questions at storiesforscams@scoundrelandscamp.org!
For the Extra Curious: Sources & further reading

Baba Yaga

Baba Yaga’s House


Bread & Hospitality


Taiga Forest


Lexicography
Definitions from