

Jayna Wenger
Grade 3
Cauliflower Pizza
Teacher: Stacey Gonsalves, Hart Ransom Elementary School
County: Stanislaus
Illustrated by: Inderkum High School

Cauliflower Pizza

Once upon a time, there was a little cauliflower plant that was hated and bullied by other veggies, like the tomato. They all said, "Why do people plant you? Nobody eats cauliflower!" Cauliflower felt really sad and he didn't like being bullied. Cauliflower tried to think of what foods he could be in, but all he could think of was fondue and veggie dip. Then he thought about what other veggies could be in, like tomatoes can be in salsa and the sauce on pizza. Broccoli and potatoes can be used for baked potatoes. Snap peas can be a good and healthy snack on their own. Onions and bell peppers can be in fajitas. Now he is trying to think about how nutritious he is and how he grows. Cauliflower is rich in antioxidants and fiber and has many of the vitamins that a person needs in their diet. What's not to like about that?

Meanwhile, Ms. Yum was in the kitchen in the middle of making pizza for dinner. All of a sudden, Cauliflower heard Ms. Yum yelling, "There is no more flour for the pizza crust! Oh shoot! Dinner is ruined, and may just have to wait!" So Ms. Yum made her way outside to tend the garden while she thought about what she'd make for dinner instead of pizza. She weeded the tomatoes, but couldn't use them as a substitute for flour because they're already in the pizza sauce. She watered the broccoli and thought, "No, broccoli is too green to make into a crust." She passed the snap peas and corn knowing those wouldn't work for pizza. She didn't feel like experimenting with onions because they always make her eyes water and cry. Then she stumbled upon the cauliflower. "Hmm," she thought. "I've never used this for baking, but this just might work." So, she clipped a head of cauliflower and headed back to the kitchen. "Maybe if I grind up a head of this vegetable that nobody uses, then I just might be able to make a pizza crust out of it," she thought. "After all, it is white just like flour!" Ms. Yum continued with her experiment using cauliflower, and sure enough, it worked! By adding a little Parmesan to the cauliflower, she was able to make what looked like a decent crust for her pizza.

Just then, Ms. Yum looked outside and saw her neighbor, Nick Pepper, restaurant owner and chef of Pepper's Perfect Pizzas, coming home for the day. He didn't look so happy. So, Ms. Yum walked outside to see if she could brighten his day. After talking with Nick Pepper, she found out that his restaurant wasn't doing well. As a way to comfort him, Ms. Yum invited him for dinner. She jokingly said that she already messed it up and couldn't believe she was inviting a chef to her house for dinner, knowing her substitution for pizza crust. But, she invited Nick for dinner anyway because it was the thought that counted.

Ms. Yum and Nick Pepper ate the new creation together for dinner, not knowing how the pizza was going to taste. They realized that this substitution of cauliflower for a flour crust worked! Not only was the crust delicious, but they also discovered that it would be an alternative to wheat pizza. Maybe this could be just the thing to help Nick Pepper's restaurant?

The next day, with Ms. Yum's permission, Nick picked cauliflower and took it to his restaurant. He tested it on his menu that day and the rest is history. The cauliflower pizza was so good. It was amazing! He put it on his menu for good and this cauliflower substitution was just the ticket to turning around his business. Now everybody that goes to Pepper's Perfect Pizzas goes there every day and gets cauliflower pizza because it is awesomely good. In addition, cauliflower plants all over the world were happy that they were liked and being picked for delicious, mouthwatering pizzas.

Sofia Magni
Grade 4
Colors Don't Matter
Teacher: Kevin Crivelli, Sacred Heart School
County: Stanislaus
Illustrated by: Woodland High School

Colors Don't Matter

In Riverside, California, a red bell pepper named Isabella was peacefully sleeping when her alarm went off. She sat up and screamed, "I better get ready for school." She hurried downstairs where her parents were waiting for her.

Her mom said, "Hurry! Your friends are waiting for you."

"Okay."

As Isabella and her friends were walking to school, they giggled when they saw a yellow bell pepper across the street. When Isabella sat in her first period class, an unexpected girl walked in. She was the yellow pepper she had seen while walking to school.

You may not know, but different-colored bell peppers cannot hang out together. However, as soon as Isabella saw this girl, she wanted to talk to her.

Isabella really went against the rule and asked the yellow bell pepper her name.

"My name is Kennedy," she whispered.

Isabella really wanted to talk to Kennedy some more, but she knew better than to talk during science class. Miss Maggie reminded us that on these hot days, we need to be careful.

She said, "Bell peppers are susceptible to sunscald, which occurs when ripening fruit is not adequately shaded by leaf cover."

I made sure to take notes because I don't want my beautiful red skin to turn ugly from the sun.

In her second period history class, Isabella saw Kennedy again. She really wanted to talk to her, but was worried that her friends would see her talking to a yellow pepper.

In history, Isabella took more notes. Mr. Gregory always talked a lot and expected us to write everything he said. Today, we wrote about the explorers.

Bell peppers were carried throughout the world by Spanish and Portuguese explorers. The misleading name “pepper” was given by Europeans when Christopher Columbus brought the plant back to Europe.

After history, the day started to go by quicker, except for the incident at lunch. Isabella saw Kennedy in the cafeteria and said, “Let’s talk after school. Meet at Star Bush. No one can see us.”

As she finished saying this, Isabella saw her friends, so she said, “Gotta go,” and ran off.

In her last class, Mr. Krivelli asked if everyone was ready to share facts for the research paper they were writing. Of course, Johnny just blurted out his fact. “There are nearly 200 different varieties of bell peppers grown throughout California for both fresh market and processing.”

Mr. Krivelli said, “Excuuuusse me!” Do you need five minutes just to have the Johnny Rooney show? Or, may we continue working without your interruption?”

Even though Mr. Krivelli always makes me laugh, I was anxious to leave so I could talk to Kennedy.

Finally, the bell rang. I went to Star Bush right away. I waited five minutes, but I was patient because I wanted to talk to Kennedy so badly. When she arrived, I asked her if she’d like to hang out with me.

She said, “We’re not allowed to hang out with other colors, but I really want to hang out with you.”

I said, “Yes! Let’s hang out, but we have to keep it a secret.”

She said, “Yes! Let’s go to your field.”

We stem-bumped and both said, “Mission accomplished!”

But, when we turned around, we knew we spoke too soon. We saw my friends walking toward us.

They asked, “Why are you hanging out with this yellow pepper?”

I said, “She’s nice.”

My friend Mia explained in a sassy voice, “You know red bell peppers are better than yellow because one serving of red bell peppers is an excellent source of vitamin A and vitamin C and a good source of vitamin B6.”

Kennedy quickly said back, “You’re ridiculous! Don’t you know that all bell peppers are an excellent source of dietary fiber and provide small amounts of several other vitamins and minerals?”

“No, I didn’t. Stop trying to be a smart aleck,” Mia said.

“I’m not. I just want to hang out with your friend Isabella. We can all hang out together because we have more in common than you think. Our different colors on the outside don’t change who we are on the inside.”

“She’s right,” Isabella said. “Let’s just all hang out together.”

The girls decided Kennedy was right, so they all went to Isabella’s field and played together. They continued to play together often and other bell peppers living around them also learned that colors don’t matter because anyone can be a good friend.

Evelyn Does
Grade 5
Audrey and Ava the Avocados
Teacher: Brianna Perez, St. Anthony School
County: Merced
Illustrated by: Florin High School

Audrey and Ava the Avocados

Hi, my name is Audrey and my sister's name is Ava. We are twin avocados. We live in California and are six years old. Tomorrow is our first day of school. You might not know this, but, when an avocado is six years old, they start school, and today is our first day! We're really excited to make friends, learn to grow, and look nice while people inspect you to make sure you're good to go. You also get taught what to do while you're in the store and what you do when you are bought.

We will be in school for six years, making us 12 years old when we graduate. A normal avocado usually takes five to eight years to grow from a seed. But, today is our first day! Our teacher's name is Ms. Victoria and she will be our teacher for all of our years in school. After the first two months, I realized that she is nice, but when she's mad, she acts like an old grumpy lady. We made friends with some other avocados named Abby and Alexa. They're really nice and cool.

Six years have passed and today is our last day of school. We're really sad because we got to know our teacher and class really well and now we have to leave. We're also scared because we heard from some other avocados that humans are terrible to avocados. The day has finally come for our new chapter. We're kind of excited to go inside the inspection factory. We just got picked and inspected. Tomorrow we will be bagged and dropped off at the supermarket.

It is the next day and they're bagging my friends and family. We hope we get bagged together. Yes! We got bagged with our family and Abby and Alexa's family! Now we are on our way to the supermarket. We just arrived at the grocery store and in the morning, we are getting put on the shelves. There are white walls and gray shelves and all types of fruits and vegetables getting ready for the customers to come. We're all so nervous, but it's about to open so we

have to get ready for the customers. They are so many people passing by and getting a bag of avocados and we are the next bag up!

Finally, we see a mom and her daughter looking at the avocados and we're scared that the rumors are true about humans. The mom and her daughter just picked us up. I'm so scared that the rumors are true. We just got scanned and put in her car. Now, we are on our way to their house. We just got put in the refrigerator and it's a little cold, but we have been in colder weather so it's okay. The mom grabbed the bagged we're in and I wonder what she's going to do. We can see there's a bowl and a spoon. Then, she turned us into guacamole. But, it's not a sad story. When the mom was about to throw our seeds and skin away, the daughter got our seeds and planted them in the ground. Now we are a beautiful avocado tree.

Hailee Luiz
Grade 6
The Wonderful World of Wool
Teacher: Jed Merrihew, Scott Valley Junior High
County: Siskiyou
Illustrated by: Florin High School

The Wonderful World of Wool

One day a girl named Mary went to the mailbox and found a very interesting envelope addressed to her. It was from a wool buyer that her family had always sold their wool to.

She went inside, opened the envelope and started reading the enclosed letter. It said that the buyers had kept tabs on some of the wool that was sent to the market over the years and they thought that she might like to know what happened with the wool that was sold to them. Mary had one sheep in particular, Marshmallow, that was her favorite, so she decided to look for information on Marshmallow.

After reading the letter, she discovered when Marshmallow was a yearling, her wool went to a wool insulation factory in San Francisco, California. Mary didn't know that sheep wool could be turned into insulation, so out of curiosity, she searched sheep wool insulation facts on her laptop.

One article Mary read said that wool is a natural insulator because it has a crimped nature that traps air in thousands of very small pockets.

After Mary tired of looking up wool insulation facts, she grabbed that letter and read on. One year, as she found out, Marshmallow's wool had been sent to a factory and it was used to make lipstick and lotion. She didn't understand this process, so again she turned to her computer and searched, "How is sheep's wool used to make lipstick and lotion?"

She learned from one article that lanolin is extracted by washing the wool in hot water with a special wool scouring detergent to remove dirt, wool grease (crude lanolin), and anything else stuck to the wool. She found out that lanolin is used on baby, skin care, shaving, hair care, manicuring, and suntan products, as well as several types of makeup.

When she turned back to the letter after about 30 minutes of researching, she found that another year her wool had been sold to a clothing and textile company. That year, the wool was shipped to China instead of being processed in California.

After Mary finished reading the letter, she was curious about how much wool was produced in California versus how much was processed. She found out that just in California, over 400,000 wool-producing sheep provided 2.6 million pounds of wool in 2013, but only 0.03% of that wool was processed in state.

Later that night, Mary showed the letter to her mom and she told her what she had learned about different ways wool could be used.

“How do people make wool into yarn?” Mary asked.

“I don’t know. Why don’t we go find out?” her mother replied. Her mother pulled out her laptop and looked for a hand spinning club nearby.

“Here we go!” she exclaimed an hour later. She had found a group on Facebook and messaged them asking if Mary and her mother could come see how to use wool to make yarn. They agreed to let them come to their next meeting, which was in a week.

The next week, Mary and her mother arrived at the building the spinners used to hold their meetings. The president of the club, Maggie, showed them the fleeces that they used to make the yarn. They were already skirted and cleaned, with all of the belly, leg, face, and head wool taken out, leaving the fleece with the usable wool.

After Maggie had shown them the fleeces, Mary saw how the spinners had to card the wool and separate the fibers using a carding paddle.

“After the fibers are separated, you move onto roving. Roving is the final step before spinning the wool into yarn,” Maggie explained. “We don’t have a tool, so we use spice lids with a hole in the middle and we push the carded wool through it, making thin strips.”

The three walked over to a circle of women using spinning wheels. “And then the final step is to use the spinning wheels to make it into yarn!” Maggie said.

“How much yarn can one fleece make?” Mary asked.

“Well, 1 ounce of yarn can make up to 110 yards of yarn and most fleeces are 2 to 30 pounds,” Maggie replied.

“It’s amazing how much you can do with wool, and I never would have known if it hadn’t been for that letter!” Mary exclaimed. “I wonder what will happen to Marshmallow’s wool this year!”

Allee DePalma
Grade 7
Alison and the Secrets Behind Makeup
Teacher: Rexann Casteel, Gratton Elementary
County: Stanislaus
Illustrated by: Inderkum High School

Alison and the Secrets Behind Makeup

One day Alison's teacher assigned an essay. "I want the essay to be something you're passionate about," she said.

Later, Alison's mom asked her, "How was school?"

"It was good. I have to write an essay about something I'm passionate about, but I don't know what to write about."

"Well, you're passionate about makeup, right?" asked Mom.

"Yeah, I guess."

"You have been doing it for three years and it's all you talk about," her dad said.

"Yeah, you're right," said Alison, "but if I write about makeup it would only be about the process of putting on makeup. I don't think people would find that very interesting."

"Well, then don't write about the process of putting on makeup. Write about the process of how makeup is made," said Mom.

"There is actually a lot of agriculture behind it," said Dad. "You should look into it. I promise you'll be surprised."

"Okay, I'll look into it tomorrow," said Alison.

The next morning, she talked to her friend Hannah.

"What are you going to write about for your essay?" asked Alison.

"I'm going to write about dance. How about you?"

"I'm going to write about makeup, but I need to look into it more," said Alison.

"Do you want to hang out after school and research it then?" asked Hannah.

"Sure! I'll ask my mom to pick us up," said Alison.

When they got to Alison's house, they began researching.

"Hmmm, what's this?" asked Hannah, pointing to a link on the screen.

“Plant makeup? I’ve never heard of that,” said Alison.

“Let’s look into it more,” said Hannah.

“It says that plant makeup is handmade with 100% natural ingredients – roses, flowers, roots, berries, and herbs. I had no clue all that was put into makeup!” Alison said, eager to learn more.

“Is that the same as regular makeup?” asked Hannah.

“We should look more,” said Alison. “Ohhh, it says here that plant makeup is a bit different from regular makeup.”

“That makes more sense,” said Hannah. “It also says that plant makeup is gentle on the skin and sometimes not as pigmented. We need to try plant makeup sometime.”

“Definitely,” agreed Alison.

“Now, let’s look at what plants go into regular makeup,” said Alison.

“Sounds good,” said Hannah. “Look at this....”

“It says aloe vera, rosemary, lavender, basil, and geranium go into makeup,” said Alison. “What’s a geranium?” asked Hannah.

“It says geranium is a popular flowering decorative plant and a key ingredient in lots of cosmetic products,” Alison said.

“Wow, it’s such a beautiful plant,” said Hannah.

“Wait, you’ll never believe this,” said Alison.

“What?” asked Hannah.

“It says that the use of cosmetics dates back to 7,000 years ago!” said Alison.

“You’re kidding!? How long even is that?” said Hannah.

“Back in Ancient Egyptian times,” said Alison.

“That’s crazy,” said Hannah.

“Look, it talks about the advances in history,” said Alison.

“It says that people in Ancient Egypt used very harmful chemicals to make the makeup such as malachite, black coal, and lead,” said Hannah. “But, now they make makeup out of natural ingredients.”

“Why in the world would anyone put that on their face?” asked Alison.

"I have no clue," said Hannah.

"I wonder where they grow the plants to make the makeup?" asked Alison.

"It says that they grow the plants in regular gardens and there's actually one here in town," said Hannah.

"Girls, time for dinner!" yelled Alison's mom.

"Coming!" they yelled back.

They rushed downstairs to eat.

"What did you find?" asked Mom.

"We found out that makeup has been around for 7,000 years!" said Alison.

"And nowadays they make makeup out of plants, like aloe vera and lavender! They grow in gardens. There is even one here in town," added Hannah.

"So now do you believe that there is more to makeup?" asked Mom.

"Yes," said the girls.

"See, I was right," said Dad. They all laughed.

After dinner, Hannah went home. Alison finished her paper and went to bed. The next day, Alison read her paper to the class and got an A+. Her teacher then asked, "How long have you been doing makeup?"

"Oh, about two or three years now," said Alison.

"You know if you keep practicing what you're doing, you'll make it far, trust me," said the teacher. "One day, I'll see your name on Broadway!"

Will Magni
Grade 8
Backyard Basil
Teacher: Elaine Magni, Sacred Heart School
County: Stanislaus
Illustrated by: Woodland High School

Backyard Basil

The world may have shut down, but my mom's kitchen didn't. Mom has always made it a priority to prepare home-cooked meals on a daily basis, so when the world shut down on March 13, 2020, she went above and beyond to make our daily routines as normal as possible. Mom keeps a sign in our kitchen that reads, "The kitchen is for dancing," and that dancing certainly didn't stop either!

It had been three weeks since school had shut down, and my mom was trying everything she could to make sure we were still having fun, so she asked our landscaper Abraham to help us plant a backyard garden as a surprise.

On April 3, after my sisters and I had finished all our schoolwork, my mom told us she had an extracurricular activity planned for us to do outside. When my sisters and I walked outside, we saw Abraham with shovels and plants. He was there to teach us how to plant a garden. I recognized the basil right away because my mom used basil to make one of my favorite dishes, pesto!

"Is this garden located in a good spot for the basil to grow?" I asked.

Abraham responded, "Definitely! California's Central Valley is a great place for basil to grow because it grows best in locations that get six to eight hours of full sun daily. Without heat, basil won't grow well."

"How long will it take before the basil is ready to be harvested? I'm ready to eat some of my mom's homemade pesto today. It's the best!"

"Don't worry, buddy. It doesn't take long at all, but there are some important things to remember:

1. After the seedlings have produced their first leaves, prune to above the second set. This encourages the plants to start branching, resulting in more leaves for harvest.

2. Every time a branch has six to eight leaves, repeat pruning the branches back to their first set of leaves.
3. After about six weeks, pinch off the center shoot to prevent early flowering. If flowers do grow, just cut them off.

“That sounds easy enough. I’ll be sure to take extra care of this plant so I can eat some pesto in the next few weeks.”

Abraham taught me how to get my hands dirty, and we dug in the ground and inserted three basil plants. Just to make the extracurricular activity a bit more fun, my sisters and I had a dirt fight that included a lot of laughter.

Before Abraham left, I asked, “How often should we water?”

Abraham said, “The soil should be kept moist, but well drained. The basil will do great in the raised bed you have because it will allow for better drainage. Plants get thirsty just like we do, so give them a drink of water every day.”

Abraham was right. After only four weeks, the basil was ready for its first harvest. I thought it would be a lot more complicated to pick the basil, but it was quite simple. We harvested early in the morning because that’s when the leaves are the juiciest. All we had to do was gently pull on the leaves and they fell right into our hands. My mom said our first harvest had produced enough basil to make a small batch of pesto.

We brought the basil into our kitchen, where my mom gently washed it before putting it in the food processor with all the other ingredients for pesto. I was happy because I knew that it would be a great dinner and even more satisfying because we grew the plant ourselves.

At dinner, I was a little sad because I thought this would be the only batch of pesto we’d get from our homegrown basil, but my mom had some exciting news for us. Basil doesn’t stop growing until the plant fully dies off in mid-November or when the weather changes.

Throughout the summer and early fall we had an abundance of basil. My mom made pesto to put on our sandwiches, our pasta, and even made a spicy version with Fresno chile peppers. The food was even better because it was made with homegrown basil, love, and a lot of dancing in the kitchen.

Catherine Gruen
Honorable Mention
Queen of the Almonds
Teacher: Ingrid Gruen, Signum Crucis Academy
County: San Bernardino
Illustrated by: TBD

Queen of the Almonds

Carmelita had been only five, but she was the Queen of the Almonds. She could dance like a fairy and sing even sweeter, and she was the Queen of the Almonds.

She would sit between the orchard trees, the soft pink petals kissing her tender face. The rolling windswept Spanish hills smiled down on her.

Others would have said she owned nothing.

But Carmelita had owned everything.

She had Mamá and Papá. She had a beautiful orchard of almonds.

She had a home.

This was her life. This was what made her happy, what brought her up when she fell down, rubbing dirt off her knees, wiping tears from her eyes. She had loved each tree. Each branch and leaf and flower.

She couldn't imagine anything different, or anything better.

Then her Mamá died.

The trees seemed to mourn, shredding their fiery leaves with fervor.

Overcome with grief, her Papá sold the house, the orchard and all their land. Gripping his daughter's hand, they left Spain and flew to America, where it touched the Pacific Ocean. California.

A fresh start, her Papá called it.

There were no almonds in the city.

Carmelita grew up. Her teachers praised her fast learning, her ability to grasp a subject and conquer it with the strength of Beowulf.

However, nothing could make Carmelita feel as happy as she was when she was the Queen of the Almonds.

“Almonds are sensitive souls,” her Mamá used to tell her. “The trees won’t like it if they’re placed in the wrong conditions. They must live in a hot, dry climate. Only someone with patience can coax an almond from a shy sprout.”

Now Carmelita felt like the shy sprout. A flower closed up, refusing to show what could be beautiful petals.

Her Papá noticed. The summer after middle school finished, he took her in their old car, and they drove until the cities disappeared, giving way to farmland.

Entering Stanislaus County, they saw rows upon rows of almonds. The familiar pink petals rained down.

A smile spread across Carmelita’s face.

The cool breeze washed over her like Mediterranean waves.

They parked at an empty plot of land.

“I quit my job,” her Papá said suddenly.

Carmelita stared at him shock.

“We’re moving,” he explained. “Here. Your Mamá wouldn’t have wanted us to waste our lives in a smoky city. We belong here.”

It was hardest to start from scratch, but here Mamá had always told her that hard work and care made even the poorest place beautiful.

They cut down the weeds and prepared the soil first. Then they connected the plow to the tall dirt-covered tractor, and plowed the land so it became a hedge orchard, with horizontal lines running between each row of trees. Each row would alternate varieties so there could be cross-pollination.

The almond trees love the sun, Carmelita remembered. In the sweet California sun, they got an excess of that.

They cared for the orchard as it grew. When the first frost came, they kept the irrigation system going so the water would release enough energy to keep warmth in the trees.

When squirrels came to eat the nuts, they painted the fence in hot sauce, which worked to repel them.

Then the orchard flowered. Soon, it was ready to harvest.

When the drupes began to peel, it was time to harvest. Carmelita, her Papá and some neighbors did so together, going through each row with a “shaker.”

Now, Carmelita is getting ready to leave for college. She will be working toward a major in agricultural engineering, so she can help her Papá keep their orchard forever, and help others have their own.

Her bags are all packed.

There are tears in both of their eyes.

Her Mamá once told her, “Sometimes, las almendras, the almond trees look like they are dying, when the autumn comes. But they always come back, every time spring comes again.”

Immortality is not living forever. Memories keep a person alive.

Carmelita’s Mamá is alive.

The winter had come, but the winter had passed.

Now the petals of the shy, closed-up flower are unfurled, strong in the warm spring sun, held up with memories of her beautiful Mamá.

And now Carmelita is Queen of the Almonds again.