

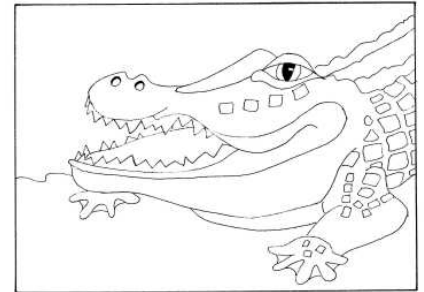
## The Cajun Cornbread Boy

An Educator's Guide

A Picture Book by Dianne de Las Casas

Illustrated by Marita Gentry

Pelican Publishing Company 2009



### About the book

"Dianne de Las Casas mixes humor, high spirits, lively narration and a colorful setting to bring alive the timeless tale of *The Gingerbread Boy* (always a favorite of mine as a child). When a lonely old woman decides to cook up a cornbread boy in her magic skillet, her too-generous use of cayenne pepper in the batter brings about unexpected results and sets the stage for this droll, Cajun-spiced retelling. The author mixes her storyteller's ear for concise, vivid description; rhythmic language; and exciting pacing, with tasty dollops of humor, as she recounts the cornbread boy's meetings with various woodland creatures who want to gobble him up. But the storyteller here gives the 'tragicomic' tale a suitably happy -- and logical -- ending brought about by that 'extra big dash of cayenne' in the hero's makeup. This delectable, delightful retelling is accompanied by lively, appealing watercolor illustrations by Marita Gentry that capture the zest of the tale and the distinctive bayou setting. A pronouncing glossary of Cajun words and phrases, an author's source note, and a mouthwatering recipe for southern cornbread, help make this marvelous book what they would call on the bayou *a thing delish!*" -- Robert D. San Souci, author of *The Talking Eggs: A Folktale from the American South* and *Little Pierre: A Cajun Story from Louisiana*



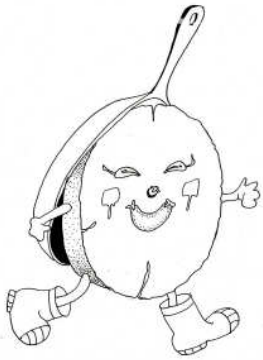
### About the Author

Dianne de Las Casas is a celebrated author, award-winning storyteller and recording artist. Her CDs *Jump, Jiggle & Jam* and *World Fiesta* have been named Audio of the Week by *School Library Journal*. She performs arts-in-education programs and residencies at schools, libraries, festivals, museums, and special events and is a frequent presenter at the International Reading Association, American Library Association, and other literary and education conferences. Dianne loves food spiced with delicious flavor and is always running after new recipes. She lives with her family in the New Orleans area.



### About the Illustrator

Marita Gentry is a professional artist and has her own painting and teaching studio, Studio Marita, in Southern Louisiana. Her vivid illustrations have earned her numerous awards and commissions. An accomplished teacher, she is involved in several artist-in-residence programs each year, helping schools enliven their walls with magnificent murals. While her illustrations are inspired by the wildlife around her, Marita is careful not to chase after too many artful alligators.



**Interview with the Author, Dianne de Las Casas**

**How did you come up with the idea for *The Cajun Cornbread Boy*?**

Several years ago, a teacher asked me to write a play for her class to perform at a special presentation in Washington, D.C. I came up with a twist on the traditional tale of *The Gingerbread Boy*, one of my favorite childhood stories. My stepdad is Cajun and I live in the New Orleans area, so I am very inspired by Cajun and Creole cuisine, as well as the rich culture. The book combines my two favorite things in the world: stories and food! The teacher ended up not using *The Cajun Cornbread Boy* so I added it to my storytelling, spicing up my repertoire. It has been one of my most popular tales.

**What advice do you have for young authors?**

Step 1: Read! Explore the world around you through the power of words. Read as much as you can – both fiction and non-fiction. The more you know about the world, the more you have to write about. Step 2: Write! Keep a journal and jot down your thoughts and ideas. Play with words – don't be afraid to make up new ones. My two favorite children's authors, Roald Dahl (*Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*) and Dr. Seuss (*Green Eggs & Ham*) were masters of word confabulation. Here are a few of my favorite made-up words and phrases:

- Cotton-headed ninny muggins (meaning "fool") – From the movie, *Elf*, starring Will Ferrell
- Muggles (meaning "non-magical folk") – From the *Harry Potter* book series by J.K. Rowling
- Jabberwocky (meaning "non-sense talk") – From "Jabberwocky," a poem by Lewis Carroll
- Frindle (meaning "pen") – From *Frindle* by Andrew Clements
- Fizzwiggler (meaning "mean person") – from *The BFG* by Roald Dahl
- Zizzer-Zazzer-Zuzz (a made-up animal) – from Dr. Seuss's ABC

**Interview with the Illustrator, Marita Gentry**

**What inspires you as an artist?**

I am inspired by everyday life and the things I see around me such as animals, my cats, my garden, and my family. Animals as well as people provide great facial expressions through their thoughts and actions. When I worked on the paintings for *The Cajun Cornbread Boy*, I went to the dark and beautiful Bayou Manchac to take pictures of the surroundings and wildlife. The cypress trees in the book came from pictures taken at Chico State Park. I am also inspired by my memories. The old woman in the story is a combination of little old ladies from my childhood as well as my own grandmothers. The scarf on the old lady's head was inspired by the farmer lady who sold milk to my family when I was a little girl. Art is everywhere. Just take a look around.



**What advice do you have for young artists?**

Draw, draw, draw! Draw things you find around you. Draw what you see. Your art does not have to be realistic. Be okay with your own style. Don't be afraid to stray outside of the lines. You have to learn to break boundaries to really draw. It is also important to use your time in school to learn what you can. Art is about reading, math, and social studies. Reading makes your imagination more vivid. You have to be aware of the world around you to draw it.



**Language Arts**

**Word Whizzling** (Dianne's made-up word for finding new words in another word or phrase)

How many words can you whizzle from CORNBREAD? The words have to be 3 or more letters. We found 50 words but there are more!

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**Twisted Tales Writing Exercise**

*The Cajun Cornbread Boy* is a twist on the traditional tale of *The Gingerbread Boy*.

- How would you "twist" the story of *The Gingerbread Boy*? Write your version.
- Take a traditional tale (i.e., Little Red Riding Hood, 3 Little Pigs, Goldilocks & the 3 Bears) and twist the tale. Think of how to "redo" the title (i.e., Goldie Bears & the 3 Locks)

**Alligator Alliteration**

In *The Cajun Cornbread Boy*, the boy meets a "rascally raccoon," a "fierce fox," and finally, an "artful alligator." The repetition of consonant sounds or letters in a series of successive words is **alliteration**. Examples: The "sh" sound in Sheila's shimmering shells or the "k" sound in Carl's cool kite.

*Activity:* Create an alliterative sentence. Make them funny and trade them with your classmates. Read them out loud.

**Rollicking Rhythm & Rhyme**

In *The Cajun Cornbread Boy*, there is a rhythmic rhyme that "runs" throughout the book "Run, chère, run, as fast as you can! You can't catch me – I'm full of cayenne." Rhyme is a repetition of identical or similar terminal sounds in two or more different words. Example: tall and small; boy and toy; cherry and strawberry. Can you write your own rhyme about Cornbread Boy?

### **Tasty Tongue Twisters**

A *tongue twister* is a phrase that is designed to be difficult to say properly. Some tongue twisters are natural (cinnamon or spaghetti are often tongue twisters for young children) while others are deliberate and used for fun. Example: "Cajun Cornbread Boy" (Try saying it three times fast without any mistakes!) Can you make up your own tasty tongue twister?

### **Math**

#### **Cooking Up Some Math**

In *The Cajun Cornbread Boy*, the old woman bakes a cornbread. Cooking is a great way to learn about math. Cooking teaches geometry, fractions, measurements, addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. Here is the recipe for **Southern Cornbread**.

#### **Ingredients**

- 2 c. self-rising cornmeal
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 2 c. buttermilk
- 4 tbsp. bacon drippings or vegetable oil

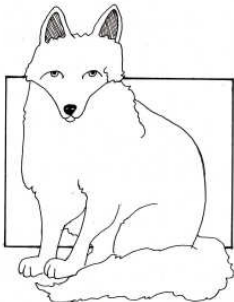


Heat oven to 450 degrees. Grease a cast iron skillet with 2 tbsp. of bacon drippings or vegetable oil, coating entire pan and leaving remainder at the bottom. Heat skillet in the oven. Mix cornmeal, eggs, buttermilk, and 2 tbsp. drippings. Pour batter into hot skillet. Bake for 35 minutes or until golden brown. Cut into 6-8 wedges.

Note: If you sprinkle a little cornmeal in hot pan before adding batter, it will add a crispier texture. Optional: To spice it up, add a dash of cayenne pepper. Ooh yeah, *cher!*

#### **Math Challenge:**

- What if you wanted to bake a smaller cornbread? Cut the recipe in *half* (1/2). Write the halved recipe.
- What if you wanted to make 2 pans of cornbread? *Double* (X2) the recipe. Write the doubled recipe.
- If you were to cut the cornbread into 8 triangular wedges (from a round iron skillet), how many cuts would you need, cutting across the entire *diameter* of the cornbread? Answer: 4 Activity: Demonstrate this by passing out paper plates to the students. Have them "cut" their cornbread by drawing the wedges.
- Place students in groups of even numbers. Pass out paper plates. Have them figure out how to cut the cornbread into even wedges for everyone in the group.



### **Science**

#### **Beautiful Bayou**

In *The Cajun Cornbread Boy*, the boy wants to cross the bayou. What is a *bayou* (pronounced BYE-yoo)? A *bayou* is a creek, secondary watercourse, or minor river that is tributary to another body of water; any of various usually marshy or sluggish bodies of water. (*Miriam-Webster Online*)

**Habitat is Home**

For the raccoon, fox and alligator, the *bayou* is a natural *habitat*, the place where a plant or animal naturally or normally lives and grows. What other animals might make the *bayou* their *habitat*? What kinds of plants might make the *bayou* their *habitat*?

Activity: Draw a bayou with the animals and plants native to that *habitat*.



**Why do Cypress Trees Need Knees?**

In *The Cajun Cornbread Boy*, the trees in the bayou are Cypress trees. The little stumps sticking out of the water next to the trees are called cypress “knees.” They are actually roots that grow out of the water to allow the tree to “breathe.”

**Social Studies**

**Cajun Country**

Cajun comes from the word “Acadian.” The Acadians, French people settled in what is now Canada (Nova Scotia area), were evicted from their home by the English from 1755-1763. They were placed in crowded ships, which traveled down the eastern seaboard. Many of the “Cajuns” (as they became known) ended up in French colonies in swampy Louisiana. When France relinquished control of Louisiana to Spain in 1769, the Spanish rulers allowed the Cajuns to continue to speak their own language and practice their native religion. The Cajuns settled in southern Louisiana, living west of what is now New Orleans, mainly along the Mississippi River. Later, they were moved by the Spanish colonial government to areas west and southwest of New Orleans, in a region later named Acadiana.

Activity: *Cartography* – Draw a map of Canada and the United States. Map the sea route from Nova Scotia to Louisiana.

**Cajun French Words**

- Bon Jour (bone - ZHOOR) - French for “Hello”
- Boudin (BOO - dan) - Delicious Cajun sausage made of rice and meat
- Cayenne (KIE – yan) - Spicy pepper that is ground into a powder and used to flavor food
- Cher (sha) - French for “Dear” (when speaking to a man or boy)
- Chère (shair) – French for “Dear” (when speaking to a woman or a girl)
- Grand-mère (gron – MAIR) – French for “grandmother”
- Mes Amis (mez a - MEE) - French for “My Friends”

**Cajun Music**

Cajun music is rooted in the ballads of the French-speaking Acadians. Typical instruments in a Cajun band include the accordion, fiddle and triangle.

Activity: *Fais Do Do* (Fay Doe Doe) – A Fais Do Do is a Cajun dance. Look at pictures of the accordion, fiddle & triangle. Draw a picture of a Fais Do Do with people playing all three instruments.



**Drama/Theater**

Act out the story of *The Cajun Cornbread Boy* using Dianne de Las Casas' story theater script on her website. Create a puppet play using Dianne de Las Casas' puppet theater script on her website.

**Art**

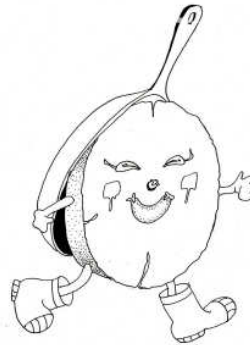
Draw your own version of Cornbread Boy. How would he look if he were a cornbread muffin, a cornbread pone (in a corn shape), or a cornbread square?

**Crafts & Games**

**Cornbread Boy Plate Puppet**

*Materials:*

- Paper plate
- Crayons/markers
- Construction paper
- Popsicle stick
- Glue or tape

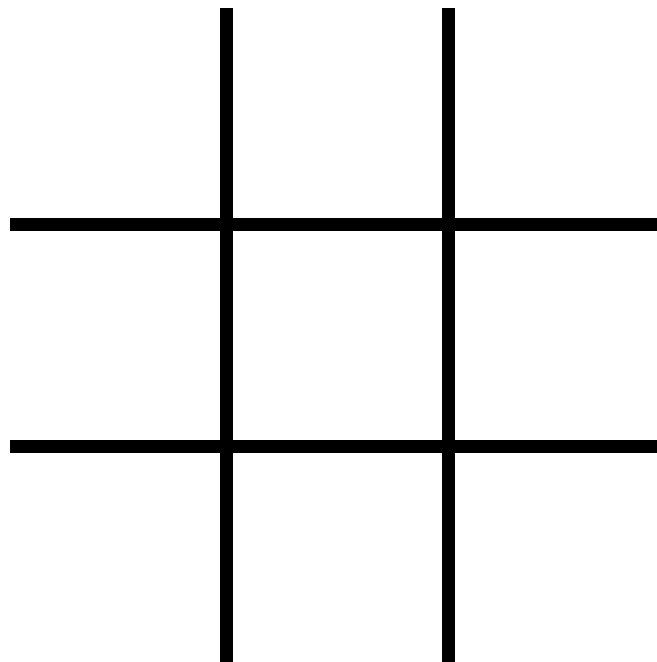
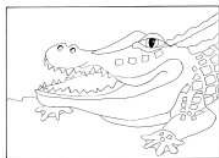
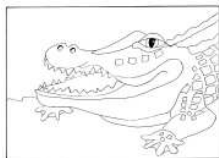
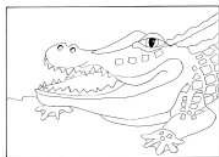
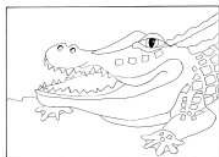


*Instructions:*

Draw Cornbread Boy's features in the front of the paper plate. Color with markers or crayons. Using 12" long strips of 1" wide construction paper, create legs by folding the construction paper accordion style. Using 6" long strips of 1" wide construction paper, create arms by folding the construction paper accordion style. Glue or tape the arms and legs to the Cornbread Boy. Glue a popsicle stick at the bottom.

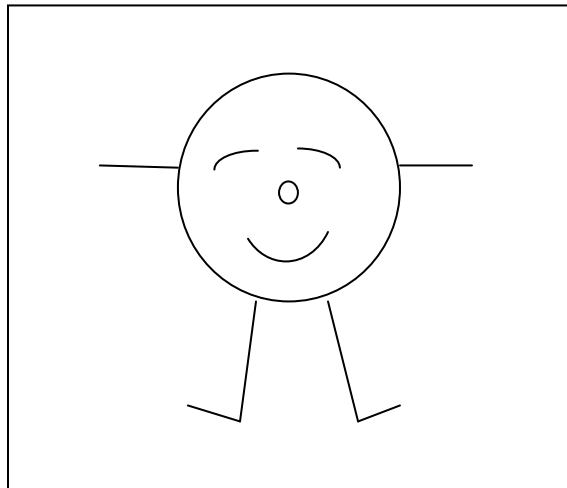
**Cornbread Boy Tic Tac Toe**

Print the alligator and Cornbread Boy. Cut them out. Draw the grid to play Tic Tac Toe.



**Don't Bake the Cornbread Boy Game (Variant of Hangman)**

Just like hangman, the object of the game is to guess the letters of the word. Create a square. This represents the oven. Inside, a simple cornbread boy will be drawn each time a letter is guessed incorrectly (round circle for body, arcs for eyes, a tiny circle for a nose, a smile for the mouth, lines for the arms and legs). The player(s) gets 9 guesses (1 body, 2 eyes, 1 nose, 1 mouth, 2 arms, 2 legs). Blanks should be drawn below the "oven" when the word is determined. Players take turns guessing the letters. Each time a letter is incorrect, the "Baker" draws a piece of the Cornbread Boy. If the players guess all the letters correctly, they win the game. If the Cornbread Boy is drawn in his entirety and gets "baked," the players lose the game.



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**Feed the Gator Beans & Rice (Say “No” to Cornbread!)**

Game Objective: Toss the beans & rice bag into the Alligator's Mouth.  
In Louisiana, red beans and rice is a staple, usually eaten on Mondays.

*Materials:*

Tissue Box with wide opening  
Green & white Construction Paper  
Glue  
Crayons/Markers  
Sandwich zip bags  
Dry beans  
Uncooked rice  
Clear packing tape

*Directions:*

To create the gator box, cut out a gator head with a wide mouth from construction paper. Cut out teeth and eyes and glue them to the gator. Glue the gator head to the top of the tissue box. To create the beans & rice bags, make smaller 2 1/2” bags from the zip bags, using the packing tape to seal up the sides. Fill up with equal parts of beans and rice. You want the rice and beans to be visible, thus the clear zip bags.

*To Play:*

Place the box, gator side up, about 4 feet away from the players. Up to 4 players take turns “feeding the gator.” Each toss into the gator's mouth is 1 point. The bag has to go into the box to count as a point. The first person to score 9 points wins.





**Cajun Cornbread Boy Kickin' It "Venn" Style**

What does Cornbread Boy have in common with Gingerbread Boy? What parts of the story are different? Use the Venn Diagram to illustrate the commonalities and differences.

