

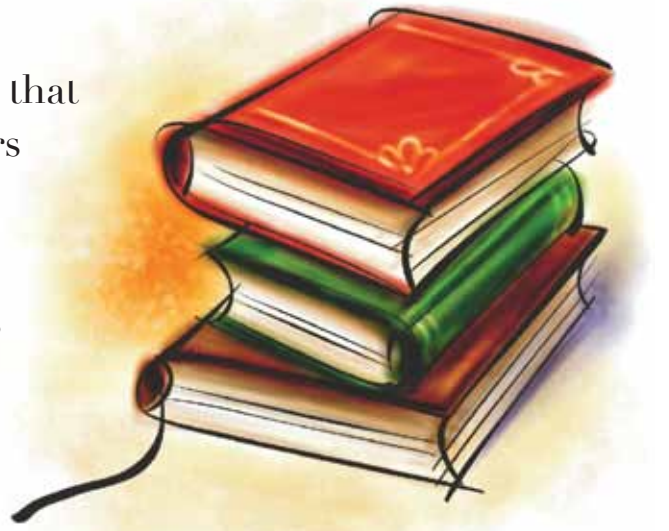
Teaching Tall Tales

Tall tales are exaggerated stories of real-life events. They take the ordinary and over time and retelling make it fantastic! Teach your kid about the tales that populate this playful subgenre as well as how to weave a yarn of their own with these writing and reading comprehension worksheets.

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Tall Tales are stories that were popular with American settlers in the 1800's. these stories involved heroic characters overcoming obstacles through extraordinary acts of speed, strength, or bravery. These stories were told aloud and over time became more and more exaggerated and impossible to believe. Even though the stories were larger than life, they were based on real-life problems faced by people of the time.



Tall Tales generally include:

- a larger-than-life character
- a problem or obstacle
- funny or impossible elements
- action
- a triumph

Read the following tall tales. Which tall tale elements are included in each story? Complete the chart by checking off each one that you find in the story.

| | Larger-Than-Life Character | Problem or Obstacle | Funny or impossible elements | Action | A Triumph |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|--------|-----------|
| Johnny Appleseed | | | | | |
| Paul Bunyan | | | | | |
| John Henry | | | | | |
| Captain Stormalong | | | | | |
| Pecos Bill | | | | | |

Paul Bunyan

Tall tales don't always tell the truth! See if you can separate fact from fiction: read the tall tale of Paul Bunyan below, then list parts of the story that could be true and the parts that probably aren't in the chart on the right.

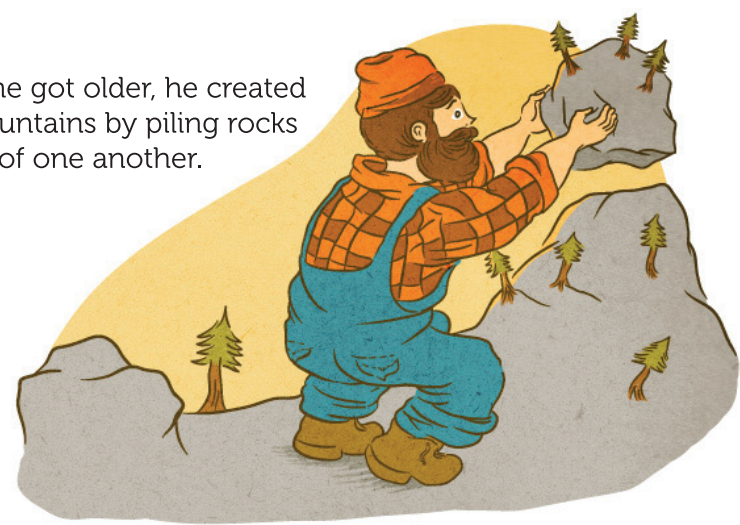
Paul Bunyan was a lumberjack who tamed the great American forests. He and his pet ox, Babe, traveled across the country, where he chopped down the tallest trees all by himself!



Legend says he was so big when he was born, it took five storks to carry him to his parents, and his first bed was a lumber wagon. After just a week of being born, he was able to fit in his father's clothing. When he was old enough to speak and laugh, the vibrations broke all the windows in the house, and scared the frogs and fish right out of nearby ponds!



When he got older, he created the mountains by piling rocks on top of one another.



His pet ox, Babe, was just as big. It's said that the Great Lakes started off as his foot-prints!



True

Make-Believe

John Henry

Tall tales don't always tell the truth! See if you can separate fact from fiction: read the tall tale of John Henry below, then list parts of the story that could be true and the parts that probably aren't in the chart on the right.

John Henry was a steel-driver who worked on the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway. He was the fastest steel-driver who ever lived! He was over seven feet tall and 300 pounds of muscle, and could hammer faster than any person you've ever met.



One day, his boss came to work with a mechanical steam-powered hammer. "This machine can drive ten times as many holes as any person, and will save us money and time!" he said joyfully.

"I beg to differ," said John. "No machine can replace me or any of my co-workers. I challenge you and your hammer to a contest. Let's drive clean through that mountain, and we'll just see who – or what – finishes first."

The man and the machine set off on a race. The steam hammer was fast, but John Henry was a lot faster!



He finished drilling through the mountain in ten minutes flat, the steam hammer far behind him.



| True | Make-Believe |
|------|--------------|
| | |

Johnny Appleseed

Tall tales don't always tell the truth! See if you can separate fact from fiction: read the tall tale of Johnny Appleseed below, then list parts of the story that could be true and the parts that probably aren't in the chart on the right.

He wore clothes made of rags and feed sacks, and he often wore a cooking pot on his head! He became a recognizable figure across the American west. No one knew him very well, but families recognized him by his unique appearance. When children saw him coming, they begged their mothers to let them go outside to meet him. After 200 years, some of the trees he planted are still standing and growing apples!



Johnny Appleseed was born John Chapman in 1774. He roamed the Western frontiers, planting apple trees across the country so that families settling in the lonely West would always have food to eat. His life's goal was to spread knowledge of farming and conservation. He recognized the importance of growing plants and farming, especially in the early days of the American west when transportation was not yet up and running, and food could not be shipped across the country the way it is today.

| True | Make-Believe |
|------|--------------|
| | |

Captain Stormalong

Tall tales don't always tell the truth! See if you can separate fact from fiction: read the tall tale of Captain Stormalong below, then list parts of the story that could be true and the parts that probably aren't in the chart on the right.

Captain Alfred Bulltop Stormalong was one of the greatest sailors in the world, and perhaps the largest too. He was born in Massachusetts. As a boy he was a bit different than other boys his age. He was already 2 fathoms--or 12 feet--tall! Some people say he grew up to be more than 30 feet tall. Captain Stormalong's ship was named the Courser, and was so wide that it couldn't even fit in the Boston Harbor. Its mast was so tall that it scraped the moon, and its keel was so deep that it scraped the ocean floor.



Captain Stormalong was famous for many things. But perhaps his most famous story was how he defeated the kraken--a giant sea creature! The enormous kraken was half octopus and half sea snake, and could crush a ship with just one swipe of its tentacles. The first time they battled, Stormalong jumped out of his ship, creating a tidal wave that went all the way to China.



He swam to the bottom of the sea to face the kraken, but it was too fast and got away. So the next time, Stormalong was ready with a lasso, and looped a giant rope around the kraken's neck, just like the cowboys do. The angry kraken swam and swam, towing the ship behind it, when suddenly it swam into a mighty whirlpool. The kraken and the ship went 'round and 'round until finally Stormalong let go of the rope. His ship was flung through the air and safely back onto the water, while the kraken went down in the whirlpool, never to be seen again.

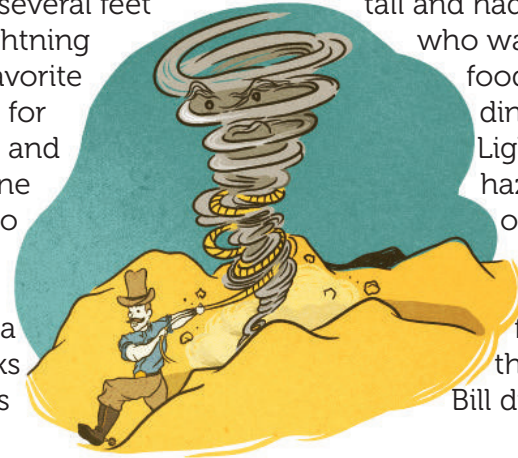
True

Make-Believe



Pecos Bill

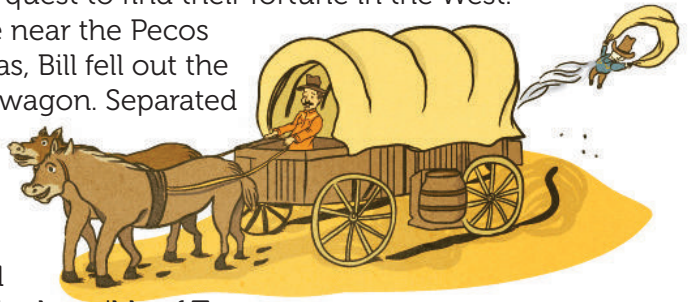
When he grew older, he became an extraordinary man! He was several feet tall and had a horse named Lightning who was just as fantastic. Lightning's favorite food was dynamite, which he ate for dinner every night! Together, Bill and Lightning tamed the hazy afternoon on the horizon. He grabbed his trusty lasso and wrangled it into submission – but it put up a fight first! The Grand Canyon marks the path the tornado took as Pecos Bill dragged it behind him.



Tall tales don't always tell the truth! See if you can separate fact from fiction: read the tall tale of Pecos Bill below, then list parts of the story that could be true and the parts that probably aren't in the chart on the right.

| True | Make-Believe |
|--|--------------|
| <p>Old Bill had a woman named Slue Foot Sue, who was just as tall as him and ten times as pretty. He was determined to marry her, and one night, while trying to impress her, he shot out the stars, leaving only one for her to marvel at – the Lone Star of Texas.</p> | |

It's said that when Pecos Bill was just a baby, he was traveling with family across the country in a covered wagon, the way many people did on their quest to find their fortune in the West. Somewhere near the Pecos River in Texas, Bill fell out the back of the wagon. Separated from his parents, he spent his childhood being raised by coyotes in the wilds of Texas.



Tall Tales: Fantastic Feats

Tall tales show characters overcoming obstacles, winning battles, or completing amazing feats through superhuman speed, strength, or bravery. Choose your favorite tall tale character. Write and draw to show the problem faced by your character, as well as the solution. Then think of another funny or impossible solution to the problem.

Character: _____

Problem: _____



Solution: _____

Alternative Solution: _____



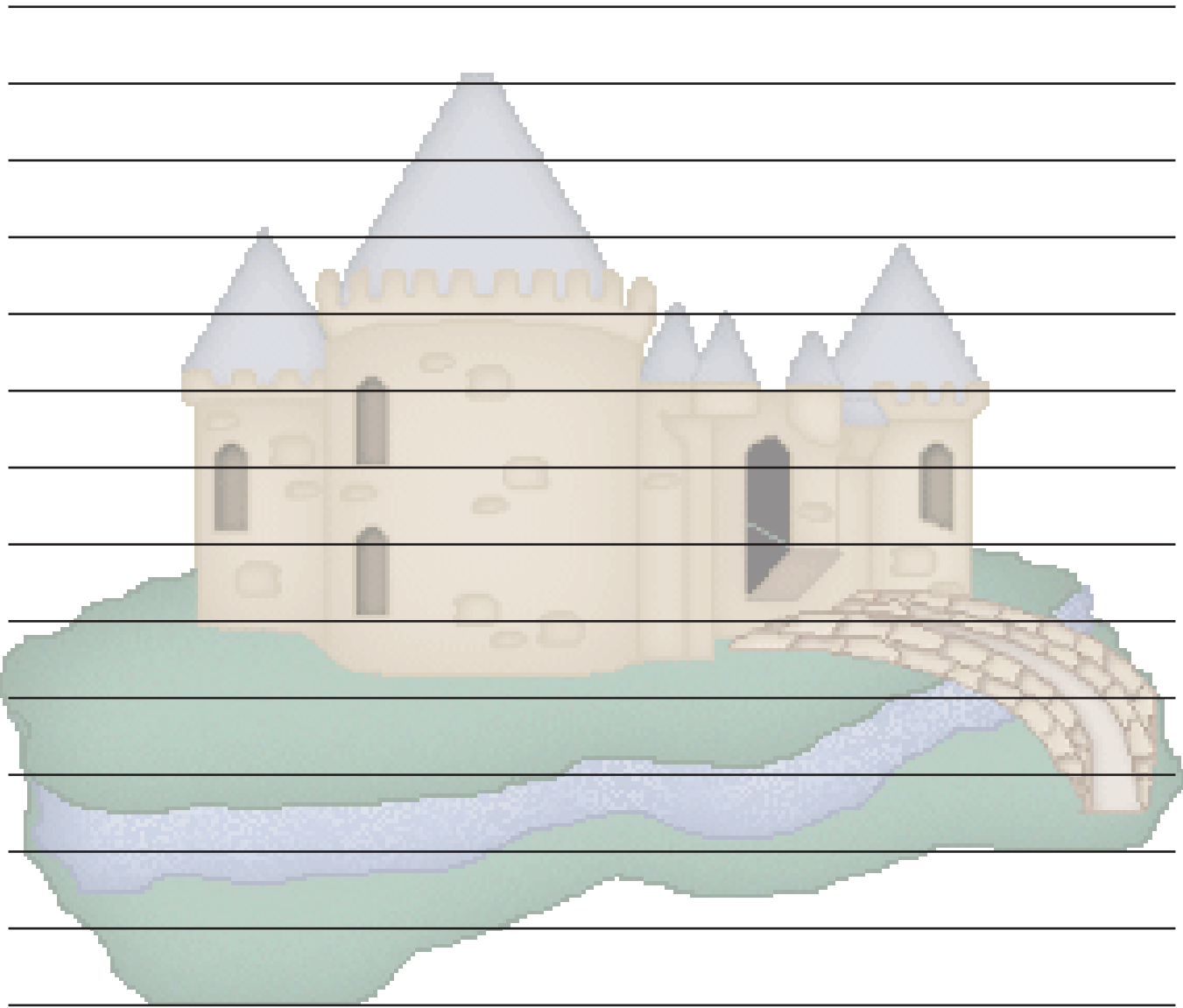
Make up a tall tale about yourself using a favorite trait that you like about yourself. Turn your favorite trait into an exaggeration, and then into a story!

Title: _____

Written by: _____

Real-Life Trait: _____

Exaggerated Trait: _____



Answer Sheets

Teaching Tall Tales

John Henry Tall Tale

John Henry **Answers**

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One day, his boss came to work with a mechanical steam-powered hammer. "This machine can drive ten times as many holes as any person, and will save us money and time!" he said joyfully.

"I beg to differ," said John. "No machine can replace me or any of my co-workers. I challenge you and your hammer to a contest. Let's drive clean through that mountain, and we'll just see who – or what – finishes first."

The man and the machine set off on a race. The steam hammer was fast, but John Henry was a lot faster!



He finished drilling through the mountain in ten minutes flat, the steam hammer far behind him.



| True | Make-Believe |
|---|--|
| John Henry was a steel-driver who worked on the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway. | John Henry was the fastest steel-driver who ever lived. |
| He could hammer faster than any person you ever met. | He was over seven feet tall and 300 pounds of muscle. |
| The mechanical steam-powered hammer was faster than a human, and could save time and money. | John Henry was able to drive through the mountain faster than the machine. |
| | John Henry drilled through the mountain in ten minutes flat. |