



THEATRE IV Classroom Connections

For Teachers & Students Grades K - 5



In the Classroom

Theatre IV's *Tales as Tall as the Sky* and the Classroom Connections Study Guide are produced in support of the teaching of Virginia state standards, as well as national standards set forth by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE).



At the Library

American Tall Tales, by Mary Pope Osborne

John Henry: An American Legend, by Ezra Jack Keats

Pecos Bill, by Steven Kellogg and Laura Robb

Sally Ann Thunder Ann Whirlwind Crockett, A Tall Tale, by Steven Kellogg



On the Web

The following web sites have activities and information related to tall tales:

All about American Folklore
www.americanfolklore.net

PBS's Between the Lions: Pecos Bill story and game
<http://pbskids.org/lions/pecos>

Tall Tale Heroes
www.millville.org/Workshops_f/Dich_FOLKLORE/FOLKTEXT/lesson2.htm

Tales as Tall *as the Sky* By Cliff Todd



Play Synopsis:

In *Tales as Tall as The Sky* by Cliff Todd, the audience is introduced to some famous American tall tales. Tall tales are stories that exaggerate larger-than-life characters which may or may not be based on a real person. John Henry, Pecos Bill, and Hurricane Hallie prove to be, indeed, larger than life in the imaginations of characters Alice, Dean, and Jerry. In the tale of John Henry, the strong, steel driving man goes up against a jackhammer in a competition and drives his way through a mountain, victorious. In the story of Pecos Bill, the wild Texas cowboy and his horse, Widowmaker, lasso a cyclone, then slide down a thunderbolt, landing in California and creating a "dent" that comes to be known as Death Valley. Finally, the kids make up their own tall tale, with a female character called Hurricane Hallie. In this exciting and fun filled play, Alice, Dean, and Jerry learn that tall tales can trigger their imaginations and prove more fun, even, than video games!

Reading Tall Tales is like...

Often in tall tales, two different things are compared to describe something in a different or funny way. **Similes** are used to make these comparisons. A **simile** is a comparison between two different things using the words "like" or "as."

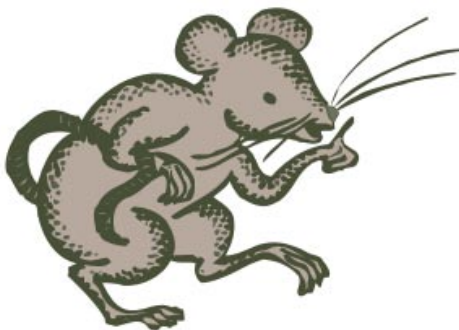
Similes:



The thunder is as loud as a lion's roar.



That lunch smelled like a skunk.



He is as quiet as a mouse.

It's Your Turn:

Fill in the blanks below to complete the sentences using a simile to compare two different things.

1. School is as fun as _____.
2. Bobby is strong like a _____.
3. Puppies are as cute as _____.
4. Jumping into puddles is like _____
_____.
5. The castle smelled like _____.
6. Today it was as cold as _____.
7. The car looked like a _____
after the wreck.

Think About It

The name of the play is *Tales as Tall as the Sky*. There is a simile in the title. Why do you think the playwright (the writer of the play) chose that title? Can you think of another title for this play? Write it below:

Fact or Fiction?

Some folk tales are tall tales that feature larger-than-life characters that solve a problem in a funny way. Sometimes these characters are real people whose life experiences have been exaggerated, while other stories feature made up people.

See if you can tell which of the following sentences describe real folk heroes. Underline the name in each sentence that you think tells about a real folk hero. Look for clues in the sentence - some may surprise you!

Meet a Real Folk Hero: Johnny Appleseed

Johnny Appleseed, whose real name was John Chapman, was born on September 26, 1774 in Massachusetts. By the age of 25, John had planted many apple trees in New York and Pennsylvania. When the Northwest Territory opened for settlement in the early 1800's, John Chapman moved west to help settle this new wilderness. He traveled and worked alone, carrying with him an axe, a sack of apple seeds, and a pot for cooking his meals. He spent his days clearing the land and planting neat rows of apple trees. John Chapman was a kind, friendly man who became very popular with other settlers. He continued planting apple orchards for almost 50 years and became known throughout the land as Johnny Appleseed.



Take it One Step Further

Go to a kid-friendly web site such as www.yahooligans.com and see what you can find out about Johnny Appleseed. For example, you may find stories, a history, puzzles, and games.

1. Johnny Appleseed's real name is John Chapman and he loved apple trees.
2. Paul Bunyan had a big blue ox named Babe.
3. John Henry was a very strong baby who reached for a heavy hammer instead of a bottle.
4. Calamity Jane's real name was Mary Cannery and she rode for the Pony Express.
5. When Pecos Bill was two weeks old, he wrestled a bear down and tossed it around.
6. Davy Crocket was elected to the U.S. Congress when Andrew Jackson was President.

Tall Talk...

Tall tales are a fun way to explain how and why things in nature are the way they are. People long ago didn't know what caused things like lakes and mountain ranges to be formed. They didn't understand what made thunder or waves on the water. They made up stories to explain those things they didn't understand.

One example of a tall tale is the story of how Lake Michigan came to be. According to the tale, Paul Bunyan dug the grand lake as a watering hole for his big blue ox, Babe.

Today we know that tall tales are not true, but they sure make great stories.

The Little People of Luray Caverns

A long time ago little, tiny people lived in the mountains of Virginia. They were so tiny that when people of your size and my size came along, the little people had to scurry quickly away to avoid being stepped on. The little people wanted to live with their new neighbors. They tried to say hello and be friendly, but couldn't because the big people were so busy going about their business that they never looked closely enough to notice their little neighbors. Then, the mayor of the little people had an idea. He gathered up all the little people and together they dug under the feet of the big people to create a world all their own. In the end, all their digging created the Luray Caverns of Virginia.

Pick a subject and make up your own tall tale to explain some of Virginia's natural features, like the Natural Bridge, the James River, or the Blue Ridge Mountains, using the story frame provided.

Title:

Who

Wanted to

Tried

Couldn't because

Then

In the end

Try This!

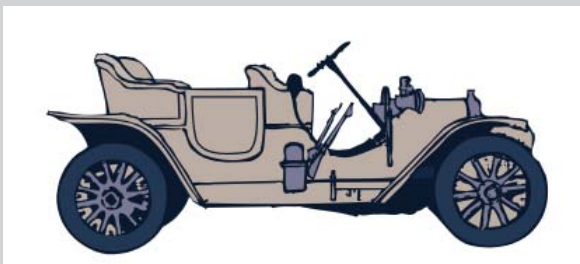
The story of Pecos Bill explains the existence of Death Valley, California. According to the tale, how was Death Valley formed? Locate Death Valley on a map of the United States.

Tales as Tall as the Sky... is the best play ever written!

While this may be an **exaggeration**, the play *Tales as Tall as the Sky* is fun because it brings to life many popular folk tales called tall tales. The key to a tall tale is exaggeration. In folk tales, a person's real skills are often exaggerated to make them seem even more incredible. So, while you may think that *Tales as Tall as the Sky* is the best play you have ever seen, it probably isn't the best play ever written.

Here's another example of an exaggeration:

1. I have an old car.
2. That car was around with the dinosaurs.

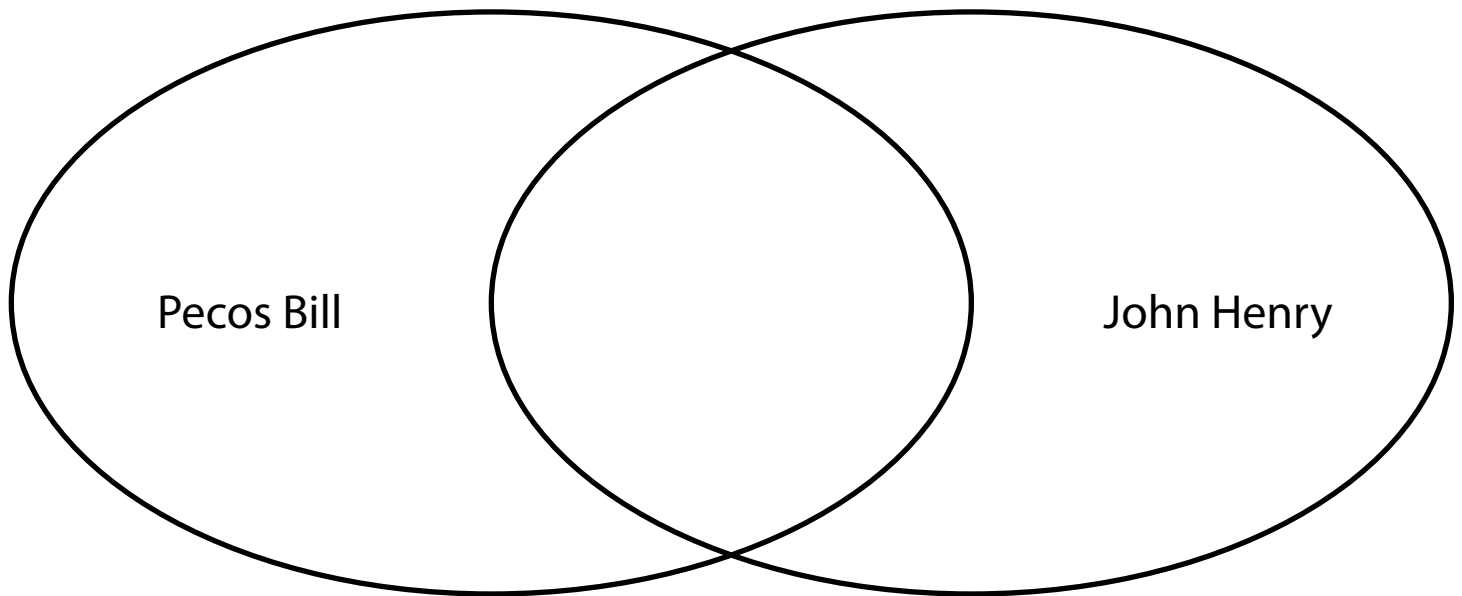


Read each sentence below. Circle the sentence if it is an exaggerated sentence. Discuss why you think the sentence is an exaggeration.

1. Our swing set is the best on the block.
2. I live in the biggest house in the whole universe.
3. That bike is so small that it was made for an ant.
4. Daddy is as old as the world.
5. The bed was very comfortable.
6. The hammer made a huge hole in the wall.
7. The ocean goes on forever.
8. My dog Spot is as stinky as a skunk.
9. David's shirt is red like a tomato.
10. Kate is very hungry.

Pecos Bill & John Henry

Two Incredible Men...



The following events happened in the “life” of either Pecos Bill or John Henry. Place each in the correct category. Then, list three characteristics that both men had in common in the center of the Venn Diagram.

1. He hauled bales of hay as his first job on a farm.
2. He married Polly Ann.
3. He lasso-ed a cyclone with a rope.
4. He died with a hammer in his hand.
5. He married Slue Foot Sue.
6. As a baby, he drank panther’s milk & used a bowie knife for a teething ring.
7. He saved a train headed for unfinished tracks.
8. He worked on the Big Bend Tunnel as a steel drivin’ man.
9. He was born in the state of Texas and raised by Coyotes.
10. He rode a horse called Widowmaker, who ate dynamite.

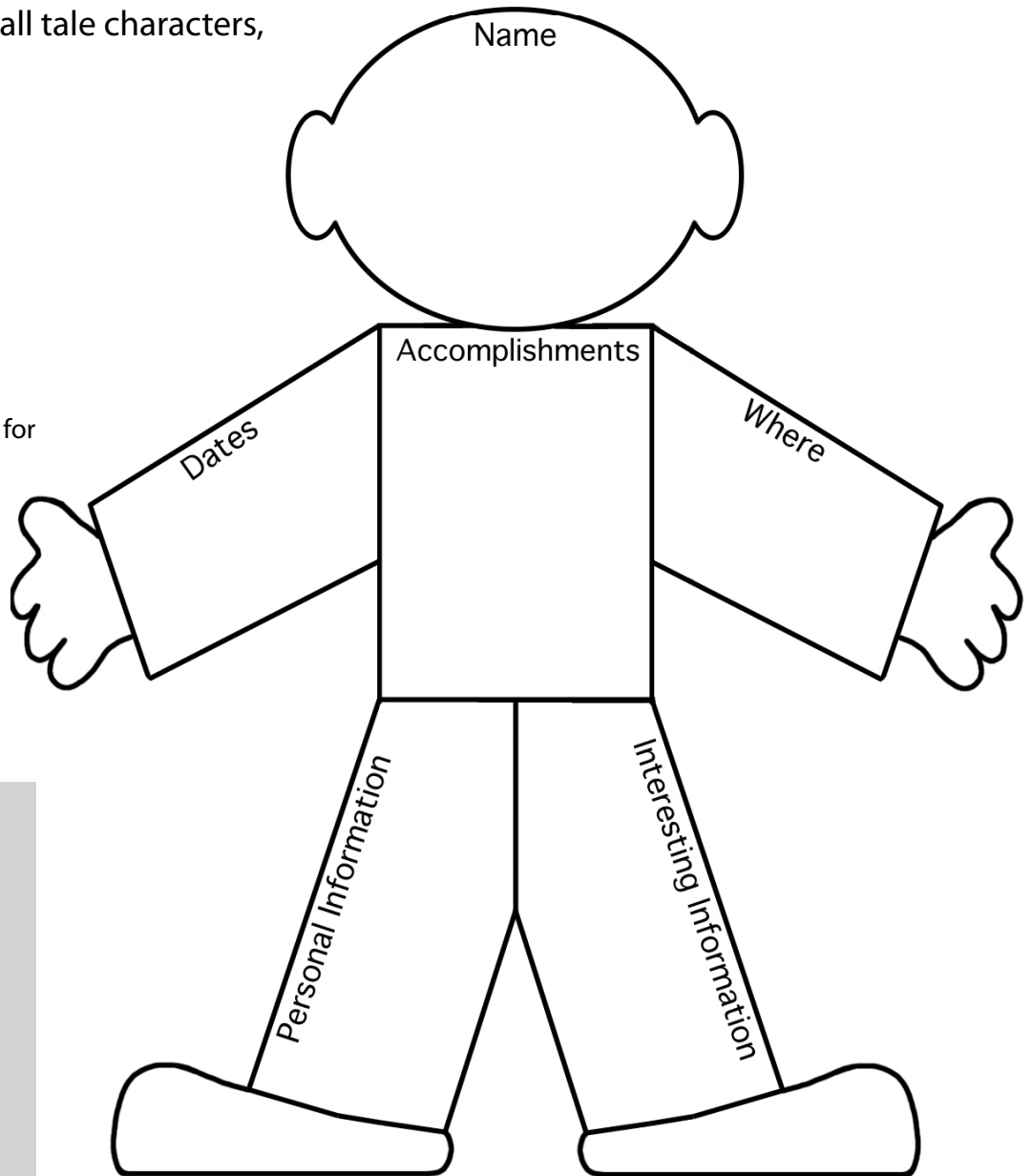
Incredible Characters...

Tales as Tall as the Sky mentions some incredible occupations (or jobs) of tall tale characters, such as:

- Steel Driving Man**
- Cowboy**
- Trapper**
- Explorer**
- Steamboat engineer**

Create an outrageous character for your own tall tale. Would the character be a man or a woman? What would be his or her occupation? What would be his or her name?

Use the graphic organizer to help create your character.



Questions to Consider

1. What would a tall tale character of today be able to do? What incredible abilities would he or she have?
2. What mysteries of science would your tall tale explain? How?
3. Choose events in the life of either Pecos Bill or John Henry (from the opposite page) and put them in order below.



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Theatre IV
Presents...
*Tales as Tall as
the Sky*
by Cliff Todd

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Cross-Curricular Ideas

to tie in Tall Tales

Geography:

Research the natural features that are *explained* by tall tales such as *Pecos Bill* and *Paul Bunyan*. Where are they located? How were they really formed?

History:

Many tall tales are folk tales set in the newly explored and settled American West. Research Western Expansion during the 1800's. Why do you think tall tales came out of this historical event?

Science:

The exaggeration in tall tales include characters who can do things that defy the laws of science. For example, Pecos Bill lasso-ed a cyclone. Research the weather conditions that cause cyclones, and the physical forces involved in cyclone winds.

Art:

A good story 'paints a picture' in the mind of the reader. Choose your favorite tall tale and illustrate your favorite scene. What picture is in your imagination?

Music:

Go to www.ibiblio.org/john_henry/songlist.html and listen to music about John Henry. What do you notice about the characteristics of this folk music?

Mathematics:

Take a poll among your classmates as to whether they like Pecos Bill, John Henry, or Hurricane Hallie the best. Create a bar graph of the results. Be sure to label your graph.

Language Arts:

Read examples of the different types of folk tales, including tall tales, trickster tales, legends, and fairy tales. How are these stories similar and different? What unique characteristics differentiates each type?

Behind the Scenes

It Takes a Team to Put on a Play!

Who's Who on the Theatre Team

Actors are the people who perform the story on stage. You see them every time you come to the theatre.

There are a lot of people on the Theater Team you never get to see. The team works hard to get a show ready for you. Here are a few:

The **Director** tells the actors where to move on the stage and oversees the work of everyone involved in the play.

The **Stage Manager** is responsible for calling lighting and sound cues and for supervising the technical crew.

The **Playwright** writes the musical or play. What they write tells the actors what to say on stage.

The **Prop Master** is in charge of the objects used by the actors on stage.

The **Costume Designer** plans the clothing the actors wear, called costumes. Costumes give clues about when and where a story takes place, and the characters who wear them.

The **Lighting Designers** plan the kinds of lights to show the setting and mood of each part of the story.

The **Set Designers** plan the scenery for the play.

In Front of the Stage: Did You Know?

You are an Important Part of the Theatre Team!

It wouldn't be a performance without you. Your part is to pretend with the actors that the action of the play is real. Part of this pretending includes accepting certain theatre ways called **theatre conventions**.

1. Actors sing songs that tell you about the story.
2. Actors talk to the audience.
3. The same actors may play many different characters.
4. Settings are suggested by flipping a panel on the set, and by props.

How to Play Your Part

Attending a play is different from watching television or going to the movies. The actors are right in front of you. You will have to watch and listen carefully to understand the story. The story is told through words, songs, actions, costumes, props, and set.

Remember

Watch with your eyes
Listen with your ears
Keep your mouth quiet
so everyone can hear
Clap with your hands
And laugh out loud
You're a member of the audience,
a jolly good crowd!



Our actors like to hear from their audience!

Write about or, send drawings of the performance to the address to the right.

THEATRE IV

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