

## Let's Work Together Teaching Guide

Dear Teacher,

Tall tales began as campfire stories told by American pioneers. The stories about the adventures of men and women like Johnny Appleseed, Paul Bunyan, and Thunder Rose stretched the truth to entertain men alone in the wilderness on dark nights. Children love reading and listening to tall tales about the adventures of a hero or heroine who has superhuman strength and powers! The delight for readers starts when the storyteller exaggerates events and invites them to believe the events are true and actually happened. In these tales filled with humor, the hero or heroine does outrageous things like moving mountains or blowing away a dangerous storm and often doesn't realize there's anything unusual about this behavior. When you immerse your students in tall tales, you nurture their creativity and ability to imagine the romps and adventures of folklore characters that are larger than life!

Laura Robb

### START WITH YOURSELF:

Introduce students to this genre filled with rollicking adventures by reading aloud tall tales about Pecos Bill, Paul Bunyan, John Henry, Dona Flor, Sally Ann Thunder Ann Whirlwind, or Davy Crockett. After completing each read aloud, invite students to turn and talk about the structure of tall tales. Here are elements your read alouds can help students understand:

- The protagonist has extraordinary strength and abilities.
- There's lots of exaggeration and stretching of the truth.
- Sometimes the exaggerations make you laugh.
- Many stories are about characters from American history.
- The tales are a mixture of truth and fiction. It's a story that could almost make sense, except for its unbelievable elements. These elements can make the story funny and exciting.

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## Tall Tales

BY LAURA ROBB

Penguin Random House Education  
1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019

PRHElementaryEd.com

Queries:  
k12education@edu.penguinrandomhouse.com

- The person telling the story narrates it as if all the happenings were true and factual.
- Some tall tales are based on real people like Davy Crockett and Johnny Appleseed while others are fictional.
- All tall tales have the elements of fiction: protagonist, antagonists, rising action, other characters, problems, and climax.

### GATHER TALL TALE BOOKS

Head to your school library and ask the librarian to pull tall tale picture books and collections for your class. You can also touch base with your community public librarian, and check out books. Bring tall tale books into your class, so students read and discuss them at school.

### MOVE TO STUDENTS:

Display tall tale books on tables and desks and invite students to choose two to three and browse. Once they've selected a "good fit" book (see pages 2–3 in the realistic fiction guide), invite students to chunk their books. Give them sticky notes and have them divide the book into three to five chunks. When chunking, students can place a sticky note at the end of a chunk and write "stop to think" on each note.

After students complete a chunk, pair them up, and have them select and discuss a few questions/prompts from the list below. Remind students to offer text details and/or inferences to support their thinking.

- Who is the protagonist? What qualities of the protagonist are realistic and what are superhuman? Fold a page in your notebook lengthwise, head the page, and write the title and author of your book. On the left side write "Realistic Qualities" and on the right side write "Superhuman Qualities." List two to three qualities under each heading and explain what details in the story helped you decide.
- Describe two superhuman feats the protagonist accomplished. Who or what did each amazing feat help?
- Discuss two to three big problems the protagonist solves. Describe how he/she solves each one.
- Discuss two to three exaggerations in this tall tale. Explain why you think the author exaggerated these.
- Identify two to three parts you found funny. Share them with your partner and help him/her understand why you found them funny.

### TEACHING TIP

To avoid having to replace books if they get lost, books checked out from libraries should remain at school.

## TEACH STUDENTS HOW TO WRITE WHOPPERS

Whoppers are one-sentence tall tales. You can model how to write them in a *shared writing lesson*. First, write a few whoppers to build students' mental model of what they are like. Here's what I write as models for students:

- The sun was so hot that on the third day, the cornfield turned into popped corn.
- Wind gusts were so powerful that the hats on men, women, and children flew off their heads and formed a mountain in front of my house.
- The hail was so large that men and women used the frozen balls to play golf.

### Help students notice these elements of whoppers:

1. Whoppers start with something that could be true: hot sun, wind gusts, large hail balls.
2. Then comes the whopper that could happen, but is an exaggeration.

Organize students into groups of four and have each group write one whopper, then share it with the class. Write students' whoppers on a chart. Here are two from fifth graders:

1. The sun was so hot last Saturday that my mom fried eggs for breakfast on the sidewalk.
2. It rained so hard and so much that my dad turned our basement into a swimming pool.

## NOTEBOOK WRITING

- Choose a question that you and your partner discussed. Head a page in your notebook, and write the title and author of the tall tale you read and the question you chose. Jot notes for your response. Then, turn those notes into complete sentences that include text evidence.
- Create a comic strip of a favorite, exaggerated event in your book.
- Choose the tall tale book you enjoyed reading the most. In your notebook, explain why you enjoyed it.

## ADDITIONAL IDEAS

## for Engaging Students in Tall Tales

- Dress up as a favorite tall tale character and present a talk that includes two to three amazing feats you did.
- Prepare some interview questions for the protagonist of a tall tale you enjoyed. Have a classmate use the questions to interview you and then answer as if you are the character.
- Choose one adventure from a tall tale book you enjoyed reading and turn it into a short graphic text.
- Work with a few classmates and dramatize a part of a tall tale. Practice your scene and present it to the class.
- Pretend you and your classmates are sitting around a campfire at night in the woods. Take turns telling a favorite part of a tall tale to the group.
- Write five to ten one-sentence whoppers. Create a book with a cover, dedication, and one page for each whopper, and then illustrate each page. Write an “about the author” on the last page.

**TEACHER'S NOTES:**

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.