# *Tell Me a Story*
# Storytelling—Tall Tale Style

**Grade**: Upper Elementary/Middle School

**Purpose/Objective**: Students will understand elements of tall tales. They will be able to write and/or tell their own tall tale.

**Lesson Plan**:
[Use Teacher Resource Information: Tall Tales]

1. Introduction: Ask a volunteer to tell a story about something that happened to him or her (ex. missing the school bus, attending a sporting event, going out for ice cream, etc.). Record a general outline of the story on the board or chart paper. (This may be used as a journal writing activity) Explain to the class that they are going to write stories, but they are going to be tall tales.
2. What is a tall tale? Explain some of the basics of what a tall tale is to students and explain why people would tell these stories. Model for students how one might revise the story in the tradition of the tall tale. Tell the same story, adding exaggerations throughout the tale (ex. the student runs to school faster than the bus and is the first to sit down in class; the basketball team scores 1,000 points; the child polishes off the biggest ice cream cone in the world in one sitting).
3. Read a tall tale story aloud to the class. A story about any of the following would be appropriate: Pecos Bill, Paul Bunyan, Flatboat Annie, Davy Crockett, Mike Fink, Sally Ann Thunder, Johnny Appleseed, Old Stormalong. A fun, new, original tall tale in the style of the above mentioned characters is Swamp Angel, by Anne Isaacs.
    a. Have students identify different tall tale elements in each of the stories you read. Consider the following:
        i. Let the characters come alive in your mind.
        ii. Imagine the setting. Picture where and when the events take place.
        iii. As you read each hyperbole, picture what is being described.
        iv. As you read, notice the connection between events. Events can be related chronologically, but in tall tales, events are usually related in terms of cause and effect; that is, the first event is the cause of the second, and the second is the effect of the first.
        v. Ask yourself: What makes the most important character a hero or heroine?
4. Tall tales in our lives today. Storytelling is a form of entertainment that we may not think a lot about today. What do we have for entertainment today? Do any of these things incorporate storytelling elements? (TV, movies, music, even video games, etc.) Any of the following activities may illustrate the use of tall tales, or elements of tall tales:

a. Ask students to tell family stories that they hear a lot when their family gathers that may be considered a tall tale.
b. Have students compare the similarities and differences between the heroes/heroines in the tall tales that they read in class and superheroes, such as Superman or Spider Man. Have students list some of the qualities shared by all of the tall tale heroes and heroines (strength, helpfulness, humor, bravery, perseverance, etc.).
c. Ask students if they think that people we admire today as heroes (sports figures, movie starts, music stars, people like policemen, firefighters, etc.) share any of those qualities found in tall tales, or folk heroes. List the similarities and differences among those qualities.

5. Write your own tall tale. Have students write their own tall tale. Students should consider character, setting, exaggeration, and conflict. Tall tales focus on a problem that the character has to solve.
    a. Have students follow a writing process by thinking about the following items:
        i. Possible problems a character needs to solve
        ii. What qualities the character will possess
        iii. Setting—either a place like a forest, or a specific place, like the city where you live
        iv. Story elements and plot should be important to that area
        v. Exaggeration elements
    b. Students should write a rough draft. Hand out the *Tips for Writing and Telling a Tall Tale*.
    c. Have a peer review session to fine tune story. Students may practice telling their stories to each other.
    d. Hand in final draft of the tall tale. Have students complete the *Tall Tales Checklist*.
    e. Possible Extension Activity: Have students present their tall tales in front of the class or at the class/grade rendezvous.

**Sources**: Some parts of this lesson were adapted from The Kennedy Center: ArtsEdge (http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/content/2267/)

# Tips for Writing and Presenting a Tall Tale

## *Writing your story*

**What can you write about?**

1. A conflict or contest.
2. A strange natural wonder or weird situation.

**Things to help your story.**

1. Include a partner or sidekick.
2. Include real and made up locations.
3. Choose a nickname for yourself. Examples: One-eyed Jack, Three-fingered Bob, Peg Leg Smith, Rock Hopper, Bucket Mouth.
4. Make your story sound old fashioned. Avoid using words like "See ya", "guys", "cool".
5. Be descriptive so your reader can "experience" your story.

## *Telling your story*

**Write a story you <u>really</u> like**.

- It must have a good beginning.
- It should contain a climax (high point of excitement).
- It needs a good ending.

**Read your story out loud**.

- This gives you a chance to see how your words sound.

**Visualize the setting, characters and sequence**.

- "See" your story as though you were watching a movie.
- "Watch" it as it moves from scene to scene.
- Once you have it in your head, all you have to do is describe it!

**Map the story**.

- Put down in writing the setting, order of events, key phrases and characters.

**Tell the story to yourself**.

- Get comfortable with it. If it doesn't sound right to you it won't sound right to your listeners.

**Practice, Practice, Practice**.

- Tell your story to your parents, your brothers and sisters, your dog or cat—even to yourself in the mirror!

**Source:** American West Heritage Center Research Files

## Tall Tales Checklist

**Instructions:**

Use the following checklist to determine if your story has the characteristics of a tall tale. Check those statements that apply to your story and write a short explanation for each.

___ The story has many exaggerations in it.

___ The main character has a problem to solve.

___ The main character is bigger than life and has super-human abilities.

___ The plot of the story is funny and impossible.

___ In the end, the main character solves a problem, overcomes an obstacle and/or defeats a "bad guy."

___ The story includes lots of action.

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