



Pecos Bill

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☑ Lesson Objectives

Core Content Objectives

Students will:

- ✓ Identify tall tales as a type of fiction
- ✓ Demonstrate familiarity with the tall tale “Pecos Bill”
- ✓ Identify the characters, plot, and setting of “Pecos Bill”
- ✓ Identify exaggeration and larger-than-life characters as characteristics of tall tales
- ✓ Identify the exaggerations in “Pecos Bill”

Language Arts Objectives

The following language arts objectives are addressed in this lesson. Objectives aligning with the Common Core State Standards are noted with the corresponding standard in parentheses. Refer to the Alignment Chart for additional standards addressed in all lessons in this domain.

Students will:

- ✓ Compare and contrast orally the characteristics of tall tales in “Paul Bunyan” with the characteristics of tall tales in “Pecos Bill” (RL.2.9)
- ✓ With assistance, categorize and organize characteristics about the tall tale “Pecos Bill” into a chart (W.2.8)
- ✓ Add drawings to clarify understanding of exaggerations found in “Pecos Bill” and “Paul Bunyan” (SL.2.5)
- ✓ Distinguish this fantasy from realistic text by explaining that some of the things in the story could not happen in real life
- ✓ Prior to listening to “Pecos Bill,” identify orally what they know and have learned about characters from other tall tales they have heard

- ✓ While listening to “Pecos Bill,” orally predict what will happen next based on text heard thus far

Core Vocabulary

energy, n. Power; the ability to be active

Example: The children had a lot of energy to burn at recess.

Variation(s):

persuaded, v. Caused to do something by asking, convincing, or arguing

Example: The kids persuaded their parents to get pizza for dinner.

Variation(s): persuade

relaxed, v. Not tight or carefully controlled


Example: Pearl relaxed the tension on the leash so her dog could run in front of her.

Variation(s): relax

tame, v. To train to obey people

Example: The cowboy needed to tame his wild horse.

Variation(s): tamed, taming

<i>At a Glance</i>	Exercise	Materials	Minutes
<i>Introducing the Read-Aloud</i>	What Have We Already Learned?	Instructional Master 5B-1; Tall Tales Characteristics Chart Image Cards 1, 4, 8; U.S. map	10
	Background Information or Essential Terms	Image Card 9	
	Purpose for Listening		
<i>Presenting the Read-Aloud</i>	Pecos Bill	Image Cards 1, 4, 8	15
<i>Discussing the Read-Aloud</i>	Comprehension Questions		10
	Word Work: Tame		5
 Complete Remainder of the Lesson Later in the Day			
<i>Extensions</i>	Tall Tales Characteristics Chart	Instructional Master 5B-1 (optional)	20
	Fact or Exaggeration Assessment	Instructional Master 6B-1	
	Drawing an Exaggeration	chart paper, chalkboard, or whiteboard; drawing paper, drawing tools	



Pecos Bill

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Introducing the Read-Aloud

10 minutes

What Have We Already Learned?

Using the Tall Tales Characteristics Chart or students' individual Instructional Masters 5B-1, review what students have already learned about tall tales, specifically the tall tale "Paul Bunyan." Review with students the characteristics of tall tales: they are often set on the American frontier; the main character usually has an amazing or unbelievable childhood; this person usually goes on to have more amazing adventures in life; tall tale characters perform amazing deeds; tall tales have a great deal of exaggeration, which is part of what makes them humorous; and the characters in a tall tale are always larger than life. As you review these characteristics with students, make sure students offer examples from the Paul Bunyan tall tale.

Remind students that Paul Bunyan traveled from the East Coast of the United States, where most early settlers lived, crossed the Appalachian Mountains, and traveled to the West Coast. Show students Image Card 4 (Appalachian Mountains) and Image Card 8 (American Frontier). Trace the route Paul Bunyan traveled using either a U.S. map or Image Card 1 (U.S. Map).

Background Information or Essential Terms

Tell students that today's tall tale is "Pecos Bill." Tell students that the character Pecos Bill is a cowboy. Share with students that cowboys are men who work on a ranch—or an area where cattle graze—and take care of the cattle. Ask students what they think women who do this type of work are called. Cowboys were common on the frontier because many people raised cattle for food, sold their milk, or sold the cattle themselves to make money.



← **Show image 6A-7: Pecos Bill rides a mountain lion**

Ask students to describe what they see in the picture. Remind students that tall tale characters have amazing adventures and that this illustration hints at some of the adventures the cowboy Pecos Bill has.

Show students Image Card 9 (Pecos River). Have a student find east Texas and the Pecos River (in west Texas) on a map.

Purpose for Listening

Tell students to listen carefully to find out what amazing adventures Pecos Bill has in today's tall tale on the American frontier.



Pecos Bill

◀ Show image 6A-1: Bill's family packs up to head west

The greatest cowboy that ever lived was the one they called Pecos Bill.

Bill was born in East Texas and might have lived there forever, but one day his Pa came running out of the house shouting to his Ma, "Pack up everything we got, Ma! There's neighbors moved in near about fifty miles away, and it's gettin' too crowded around here."¹

So Bill's folks loaded a covered wagon with everything they owned and headed west.² It was a long, hard journey. The children were packed in the back of the wagon, all eighteen of them.³ They fussed and hollered and fought as the wagon bounced along. The children were so loud that Bill's ma said you couldn't hear the thunder over the noise.

- 1 That would be like seeing no other buildings from here to _____.
[Name a familiar place that is about 50 miles away.]
- 2 Why was the West less crowded?
- 3 [Point to the wagon in the illustration.]



◀ Show image 6A-2: Baby Bill falls out of the wagon

One day the wagon hit a rock and little Bill fell right out. With all the fussing and fighting, nobody noticed. The wagon just kept on going. So Little Bill found himself sitting in the dirt along the banks of the Pecos River,⁴ and that's how he came to be named Pecos Bill. But that was later.

Little Bill was not your average baby. He didn't cry. He just crawled along on the dusty plain, keeping his eyes peeled for whatever came along. And the first thing to come along was a coyote.

When the coyote saw this dirty, naked little creature crawling around on all fours, she thought he was a cute little animal, even if his ears were mighty small. Little Bill reached up and patted the coyote's head and said, "Nice doggie!"⁵

- 4 a real river in Texas

- 5 Do you think these things really happened, or are they exaggerations?



← **Show image 6A-3: Young Bill howls at the moon with coyote pups**

6 Baby coyotes are called pups. What animal do you think coyotes are like?

7 Do you think a young boy can really become a member of a coyote pack, or is this an exaggeration? This humorous detail makes Bill seem larger than life. This is another _____.

8 What do you think Bill sees?



← **Show image 6A-4: Bill meets a man on a horse**

9 What does that mean if Bill was wearing his birthday suit?

10 Why does Bill think he is a coyote? [Point to the man in the illustration.] Do you think the cowboy believes him?

11 or convinced

The doggie—I mean coyote—liked Little Bill. She took him home and raised him with her pups.⁶ The coyotes taught Bill to roam the prairies and howl at the moon. They taught him the secrets of hunting, how to leap like an antelope, and to run like the wind. They taught him how to chase lizards and lie so still that he was almost invisible.⁷

The years went by—eighteen of them to be exact—and Bill grew up strong and healthy. One day he was out hunting along the Pecos River when he saw a most unusual sight. It seemed to be a big animal with four legs. Or was it six legs? And why did it have one head in front and another on top?⁸

Well, it turned out to be a horse with a man riding it, something Bill had never seen before. Bill scurried around the horse a few times. Then he slowly crept forward and took a sniff of the man's boot.

"Boy," said the man, "what are you doin' scampering around down there in your birthday suit?"⁹

"Sniffin'" said Bill. "I'm a coyote!"

"No, you ain't," said the man. "You're a man, like me."

"Nooo!" howled Bill. "Coyoteeeee!"¹⁰

"What makes you think you are a coyote?" said the man.

"I have fleas!" said Bill.

"So what?" said the man. "Lots of men here in Texas have fleas."

But Bill was not **persuaded**.¹¹ He was sure he was a coyote.

"Here's the thing," said the man. "Coyotes have pointy ears and big bushy tails. And you don't."



← **Show image 6A-5: Pecos Bill looks for his tail**

“Yes, I do!” cried Bill. He felt sure he had a tail, just like all the other coyotes. He looked over his shoulder but couldn’t see one. He reached back to grab his tail but he could not feel one. He backed up to the river and looked for his tail in the reflection, but it was not there.

Bill was surprised. He thought for a moment. Then he decided the man must be right. If he didn’t have a tail, he couldn’t be a coyote. If he wasn’t a coyote, he must be a man.

Bill decided he’d have to say farewell to his four-legged friends and try living as a man. He went to stay with the man, who just so happened to be a cowboy.



← **Show image 6A-6: Pecos Bill and the cowboy at the campfire**

12 Why did the man call him Pecos Bill?

The man gave Bill some clothes to wear and a horse to ride. He also gave him a nickname: Pecos Bill.¹² At first Bill had trouble living like a man. He couldn’t stand the way his clothes scratched and pulled at his skin, or the way his boots came between his bare feet and the good old dirt. And he couldn’t see the need for a knife or fork when it was just as easy to use your fingers to pick up your meat and tear it with your teeth.¹³

13 In the rest of the story, the author will sometimes use the name Bill and other times use the nickname Pecos Bill.

Bill learned to act like a man, but he still had a spark of wildness in him, and it would flash out from time to time. One day he was out riding on his horse when he was surprised by a mountain lion. The mountain lion scared Bill’s horse away and charged right at Bill. But Pecos Bill was too quick for that mountain lion. He dodged the big cat, then hopped right onto his back.



← **Show image 6A-7: Pecos Bill rides a mountain lion**

The mountain lion was not happy, no sir. He bucked. He snarled. He tried to twist around and bite Bill. Bill held on to the lion’s neck with one hand. With his other hand, he waved his cowboy hat in the air and shouted “Yahoo!”

The mountain lion did everything he could to shake Bill off, but it was no use. Finally, he gave in and let Bill ride him. Then, Bill put

a saddle on the lion and rode him like a horse. Bill had tamed the mountain lion.

Another day, Pecos Bill was attacked by a giant rattlesnake. This particular rattlesnake was a mean old fellow who thought he was the king of the whole desert. He struck at Bill's heel, but Pecos Bill was too quick for that rattlesnake.



◀ **Show image 6A-8: Pecos Bill tickling a giant rattler**

Pecos Bill grabbed the rattler by the neck and squeezed him hard. The snake wriggled and writhed in Bill's grip.

"Say 'uncle' if you've had enough!" said Bill.

"G-g-g-uncle!" said the snake, gurgling out the sounds as best as he could.

Bill **relaxed** his grip¹⁴ a bit and asked the rattler, "Who's the boss around here?"

"I was . . ." said the snake. "But now you are."

"Well then," said Pecos Bill, "How'd you like to work for me?"

"Sure thing!" said the rattler. The rattler just looked at Pecos Bill with admiration and purred like a kitten. Pecos Bill had squeezed all the meanness right out of that snake!¹⁵

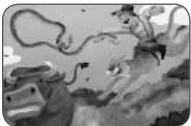
◀ **Show image 6A-9: Pecos Bill ropes a cow with his rattlesnake lasso**

Next, Pecos Bill rolled the rattler up into a coil and rode away on his mountain lion. On the way back to camp, he spotted a runaway cow. He grabbed the rattler and tied a loop at one end of him to make a lasso.¹⁶ Then he rode after the cow, swinging his lasso above his head. When he was close enough, he tossed the looped end of the snake over the cow. Pecos Bill jumped off the mountain lion and pulled the lasso tight, stopping the runaway cow right in his tracks.

Pecos Bill brought the cow back to his friend, the cowboy. After that he taught all the cowboys at the ranch how to use a lasso to catch a runaway cow.¹⁷ He taught them other things, too. He taught them how to **tame** wild horses by riding them, just as he

14 or loosened his hold

15 Would you call this an amazing feat? Do you think Bill really squeezed all of the poison out of the snake, or is this an exaggeration?



16 A lasso is a rope tied in a circle to catch a cow.

17 Bill just invented catching cattle with ropes! Could a cowboy really rope a cow with a rattlesnake? This is another _____.

18 *Tame* means to train to obey people.

19 Why do you suppose Bill's voice sounded like a coyote howling at the moon?

20 A cyclone is a real storm, like a tornado. Do you think a man would be able to ride a cyclone, or is this an _____? [Pause to let students fill in the word *exaggeration*.]



← **Show image 6A-10: Pecos Bill rides a cyclone**

21 *Energy* means power to keep moving.

22 Did Bill really build the Grand Canyon, or might this be an _____? [You may want to ask which other tall tale hero supposedly created the Grand Canyon.]

had done with the mountain lion.¹⁸ He even taught them how to sing cowboy songs around the campfire at night, in a voice that sounded a lot like a lonesome coyote howling at the moon.¹⁹

Pecos Bill was famous for his riding skills. He once rode a wild mustang called the Backbreaker that no one else could ride. But that story pales in comparison to the time he rode something that no other man had before, and I reckon no man ever will again—a cyclone!²⁰

That's right. Pecos Bill lassoed a cyclone with his rattlesnake lasso and jumped on its rip-roaring back. The cyclone spun furiously, trying to throw Bill off. It went spinning this way and that way across the deserts of Arizona, trying to knock Bill off by rising up into the air and digging down into the ground. Pecos Bill didn't let go until the cyclone spun itself out of **energy**,²¹ and by that time the two of them had carved out a deep canyon. If you ever go to Arizona, you can still see that canyon today. It's called the Grand Canyon.²²

Discussing the Read-Aloud

15 minutes

Comprehension Questions

10 minutes

1. *Literal* What amazing adventures does Pecos Bill have? (He was raised by coyotes; he defeats a giant rattlesnake; he tames a mountain lion; he rides a cyclone; etc.)
2. *Evaluative* What is the setting of this tall tale, or where do most of Bill's adventures take place? (Texas) Why do you think this tall tale takes place in Texas? (Answers may vary, but should include that Texas was part of the American frontier and many tall tales are set in the frontier.)
3. *Evaluative* What are some things in this story that can happen in real life? (A family can travel west looking for a new home; people can raise cattle; etc.)



◀ **Show image 6A-9: Pecos Bill ropes a cow with his rattlesnake lasso**

4. *Evaluative* Do you think a cowboy could really lasso a cow with a snake? What are some other things in this story that probably cannot happen in real life or are examples of exaggeration? (A boy cannot be raised by a coyote pack; a man cannot squeeze the meanness out of a snake; a man cannot ride a mountain lion or a cyclone; etc.)
5. *Evaluative* Are tall tales fiction or nonfiction? (fiction) How do we know this is a tall tale? (Answers may vary, but may include that there is exaggeration and a main character that seems larger than life and has amazing adventures.)

[Please continue to model the *Think Pair Share* process for students, as necessary, and scaffold students in their use of the process.]

I am going to ask you a question. I will give you a minute to think about the question, and then I will ask you to turn to your neighbor and discuss the question. Finally, I will call on several of you to share what you discussed with your partner.

6. *Evaluative Think Pair Share:* Do you think Pecos Bill's life was exciting? (Answers may vary.) Which of his adventures was the most exciting? (Answers may vary.)
7. After hearing today's read-aloud and questions and answers, do you have any remaining questions? [If time permits, you may wish to allow for individual, group, or class research of the text and/or other resources to answer these questions.]

Word Work: Tame

5 minutes

1. In the read-aloud you heard, “[Pecos Bill] taught them how to *tame* wild horses by riding them down, just as he had done with the mountain lion.”
2. Say the word *tame* with me.
3. If something is tame, then it is not wild; it is trained to obey people.
4. The pony learned to be tame by having people ride it.
5. Do you know of something that is tame? Try to use the word *tame* when you tell about it. [Ask two or three students. If necessary, guide and/or rephrase students’ responses: “One example of something that is tame is . . .”]
6. What’s the word we’ve been talking about?

Use a *Making Choices* activity for follow-up. Directions: I am going to read several examples. If what I describe is considered to be tame, say, “A _____ is tame.” If what I describe is not considered to be tame, say, “A _____ is not tame.”

1. a show horse (A show horse is tame.)
2. a pet dog (A pet dog is tame.)
3. a tiger in the jungle (A tiger in the jungle is not tame.)
4. a pet kitten (A pet kitten is tame.)
5. a shark in the ocean (A shark in the ocean is not tame.)
6. a pet rabbit (A pet rabbit is tame.)
7. a mountain lion in the desert (A mountain lion in the desert is not tame.)
8. a bear in the woods (A bear in the woods is not tame.)



Complete Remainder of the Lesson Later in the Day



Pecos Bill

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Extensions

20 minutes

Tall Tales Characteristics Chart (Instructional Master 5B-1, optional)

Tell students that they have heard their second tall tale. Tell students that they are going to fill in their Tall Tales Characteristics Chart with information from today's read-aloud. Read the first column of the chart aloud to students. Then solicit examples from students to fill in each row in the Pecos Bill column. For example, in the "Amazing Childhood" row, you might suggest Bill growing up with a coyote pack; in the "Creations/Inventions" row, you might suggest Bill inventing cattle roping; in the "Amazing Adventures" row, you might suggest Bill squeezing the meanness out of a rattlesnake; in the "Humor" row, have students share anything they found humorous about the tall tale; and in the "Exaggerations" row, you might suggest Pecos Bill riding a cyclone. You may also wish to have students use Instructional Master 5B-1 to fill in the chart individually. Then ask students: "How is this tall tale similar to the tall tale you have already heard? How is it different?" As students share other similarities and differences, expand on their responses with richer and more complex vocabulary.

10 Fact or Exaggeration (Instructional Master 6B-1)

Using Instructional Master 6B-1, have students distinguish what could be real and what is purely fiction in the tall tale, "Pecos Bill." [Write the words *Fact* and *Tall Tale* on the board for students.] Directions: I am going to read seven statements. If the statement is something that could really happen, or is a fact, write *fact*; if the statement is something that could not really happen and is a tall tale exaggeration, write *tall tale*. I will read each statement before you write your answer. Let's do the first one together.

1. The Pecos River is in Texas. (fact)
2. The coyote took Bill home to her den. (tall tale)
3. Pecos Bill lassoed a tornado. (tall tale)
4. Cyclones are real storms with very strong winds. (fact)
5. Cowboys take care of cattle. (fact)
6. A rattlesnake can be used as a lasso. (tall tale)
7. A coyote looks like a small wolf. (fact)

Drawing an Exaggeration

Have students think about all of the exaggerations they heard and saw in the two tall tales they've heard so far ("Paul Bunyan" and "Pecos Bill"). You may wish to have students share these out loud with the class as you note the examples on chart paper, a chalkboard, or a whiteboard. Then ask students to choose one of these exaggerations to illustrate and write a sentence about. If time allows, have students share their pictures and sentences with a partner or with the class.