

Mark Twain & Tall Tales

4 days

English: High School

DESIRED RESULTS

What are the “big ideas” that drive this lesson?

- ❖ Tall tales have been a focal point of American culture for quite a while, helping to guide Americans through particular challenges in any given period. Mark Twain was an important contributor to this literary form.

What are the “essential questions” that students must answer in order to understand the “big ideas?”

- ❖ How did Samuel Clemens’ (later known as Mark Twain) travels influence his writing?
- ❖ What is a tall tale?
- ❖ How did Mark Twain’s tall tales compare to other famous tales?
- ❖ How can a tall tale portray or explain a particular event or phenomenon?

CORE UNDERSTANDINGS

Identify what students will know and/or be able to do.

- ❖ Students will understand the impact of Clemens’ journeys on his writing.
- ❖ Students will know the characteristics of the genre referred to as the tall tale.
- ❖ Students will be able to write a tall tale based on the story “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County.”

LIST SUGGESTED ASSESSMENT(S)

- ❖ Students will make a written or oral presentation of a tall tale based on the story’s ending of: “Well, thish-yer Smiley had a yellow one-eyed cow that didn’t have no tail, only jest a short stump like a bannanner, and....”
- ❖ Classroom discussion surrounding the tall tale characteristics discussion.
- ❖ The examination of the examples of tall tales within the frame of Paul Bunyan and Clemens’ work.

LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND “COMMON CORE” CONNECTIONS

What are the specific activities and sequence of instruction that will be used to engage students in this lesson?

Procedure:

- ❖ Activity #1—Lecture and PowerPoint presentation on Samuel Clemens' background,
- ❖ Activity #2—Explanation of tall tale characteristics
- ❖ Activity #3—Oral and written examples of tall tales taken from Samuel Clemens' works
- ❖ Activity #4—Read text selection, such as the Paul Bunyan piece.
- ❖ Activity #5—Have the students create their own tall tales after reading and discussing the text selection. When doing this, students can work either individually or in pairs. Their written or oral presentation of a tall tale will be based on the story's ending
 - “Well, thish-yer Smiley had a yellow one-eyed cow that didn't have no tail, only jest a short stump like a bannanner, and....”
- ❖ Activity #6—Students will then present their tall tales to the rest of the class by reading aloud, and answering any questions about their tales that may arise from the students and/or instructors

“COMMON CORE” CONNECTIONS:

- ❖ [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3](#) Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).
- ❖ [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.5](#) Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.
- ❖ [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.9](#) Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics.

MATERIALS AND ATTACHMENTS

- ❖ *Holt American Literature* text– “The Celebrated Jumping Of Calaveras County”
- ❖ *Twain Short Stories*, P.F. Collier & Son Company, New York 1928
 - “Decay of the Art of Lying” 1867
 - “How to Tell a Story” 1897
- ❖ Mark Twain-*Roughing It*. University of California Press. Original publication 1872.
 - Lady and mosquitoes—Chapter 2, page 7
 - Coyote and dog—Chapter 5, page 30
 - Buffalo and Bemis—Chapter 7, page 41

Tarantulas and darkness—Chapter 21, page 144
Horse purchase—Chapter 24, page 159
Landslide dispute—Chapter 34, page 222
Seeing a woman—Chapter 57, page 392

- ❖ Story of Minnesota's Paul Bunyan:
bunyan<http://www.paulbunyantrail.com/page17.html>

SUGGESTED LESSON EXTENSIONS TO ENHANCE STUDENT LEARNING

- ❖ Students could reflect on their process of creating a tall tale through written work, such as a paragraph or short essay about what they had learned from viewing or reviewing the various tall tales in class, then explaining how they believe that their tall tale compares to that standard.

Tall Tale Stories

Writer/s' Name: _____

Who will your tall tale character/s be?

Jim Smiley

"a yellar, one-eyed cow"

What are five personality traits or physical characteristics of your tall tale characters? (List only things that you might be able to exaggerate about)

What situation (with a story problem) will your tall tale character find himself/herself in? (Break your situation into a "first," "second," and "third", and include any interesting details below)

What is the gambling situation involving the cow? Who placed the bets? What was the setting?

First, this will happen...

Second, this will happen...

Third, this will happen...

Suggestions for writing your tall tale:

Describe the situation by using strong adjectives and similes or metaphors. Include exaggeration, and make it sound extraordinary in some way.

Use details to describe the situation in which your main character will display extraordinary talent. What are the circumstances? What problems arise? How does the feat get performed? Include details. Include great word choices and maybe a simile or a metaphor. What happens at the end? How does your main character feel about it? Is there a reward or a gift because of this? How can you leave your reader satisfied with the ending?

Paul Bunyan

The Giant Lumberjack

A Minnesota Tall Tale

Baby Paul Arrives



Imagine, if you can, the excitement that was caused by the birth of Paul Bunyan!

It took five giant storks, working overtime, to deliver him to his parents.

He cut his teeth on a peavy pole and grew so fast the after one week he had to wear his father's clothes. His lungs were so strong that he could empty a whole pond of frogs with one "holler".



Paul's clothing was so large they had to use wagon wheels for buttons. They used a lumber wagon drawn by a team of oxen as a baby carriage. When he outgrew this his parents put him on a raft off the coast of Maine.

It is said that rocking in his sleep he caused huge waves which sunk many ships.

He would eat forty bowls of porridge just to whet his appetite.



As a child, Paul played with an axe and crosscut saw like other children played with toys. On his first birthday his father gave him a pet blue ox named Babe.

Babe grew to be seven axehandles and a plug of tobacco wide between the eyes and as a snack would eat thirty bales of hay...wire and all.

Paul and Babe were so large, the tracks they made galivanting around Minnesota filled up and made the 10,000 lakes.



The year of the two winters the snow was so deep Paul had to dig down to the trees to continue logging operations.

It got so cold that the boiling coffee froze so fast it was still hot when frozen.

When the men spoke, their words froze in mid-air and when it thawed in the spring there was a terrible chatter for weeks.

In the early days Paul's smoking never bothered anyone, but in later years he started blowing his smoke west to keep his forest air fresh. This is what caused the smogs on the west coast.



When Paul was short of help, he trained some enormous ants to do all kinds of logging work.

They weighed over 2,000 pounds and ate nothing but the best imported Swedish snuff.

The ants did the work of 50 ordinary men. In the winter, Paul had them fitted with warm mackinaws to keep them from hibernating



Lucy, the Purple Cow, was a champion producer and furnished Paul's dairy products. She was contented so long as the grass was green, so in the winter Paul fitted her with green glasses to make the snow look like grass.

The year of the two winters it got so cold her milk turned to ice cream before it hit the pail. That was the winter Paul invented the double-deck ice cream cone.