

TALL TALES

Tall tales are a special kind of folk literature. Tall tales are *American folklore*.

Tall tales began being told early in United States history. When the first settlers came to this country and began moving west they found themselves faced with seemingly impossible tasks. The huge job of clearing the land to build homes, cities, and railroads gave the workers a chance to invent stories about their surroundings and "larger-than-life" people, who like the storytellers themselves, felt *nothing* was impossible.

The stories that arose from this feeling of America's bigness were not only common in the lumbering and railroad towns of the West—they were told in every part of the country and described many types of work.

When discussing and reading tall tales, keep in mind that some of these legendary heroes were real people. They were talked about because they did extraordinary work at their jobs. As other workers related the incredible effort that these "heroes" showed while working, the stories grew, and grew, and grew until the real live people were no longer human, but fictitious super-beings. For this reason, such stories are called "tall tales."

Perhaps the best example of a tall tale that grew from a real man's life is Davy Crockett. Davy Crockett was a backwoodsman who lived in the mountains of Tennessee. He cleared the land, built homesteads, ran for Congress, and died while fighting at the Alamo in 1836. These things really did happen, but as the story goes, "An extraordinary event once occurred in the land of Tennessee. A comet shot out of the sky like a ball of fire. But when the comet hit the top of a mountain, a baby boy tumbled off and landed upright on his feet. His name was Davy Crockett."* The story continues to quickly "grow" from this point on.

Here is a list of other American tall tale heroes (and heroines):

Johnny Appleseed	Paul Bunyan	Joe Magarac
Pecos Bill	Febolb Feboldson	Mose
Jim Bridger	John Henry	Stormalong
Strap Buckner	Casey Jones	Sally Ann Thunder Ann Whirlwind

Use this list for the activities on the following pages. Many book of tall tales include historical information on each character in the stories. The encyclopedia may also have entries on the many legendary American heroes.

* From *American Tall Tales* by Mary Pope Osborne.

NAME _____



Pick five of the characters from the list on page 120 and draw them on the map in the location where they gained their fame. Illustrate a scene from the corresponding tall tale when you draw each character.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

TALL TALE ACTIVITIES

1. Pick 5–10 tall tale characters and place them on a time line showing each character's beginnings in American history.
2. Think of a "tall tale" that a friend, parent, grandparent, or other relative has told you. Recount it briefly in a paragraph. Illustrate your tale.

or

Think of a famous person from today's times that would make a good character in a tall tale. Write a modern-day tall tale about the person you choose.

3. From the list on page 120, choose three characters and research them in the library. For each hero, explain if the character grew from a real person's life story, or if he/she was totally imaginary. Then tell about the tall tale in your own words.
4. Make a *real* tall tale. Using sheets of 8 1/2" x 11" paper, illustrate the scenes from your favorite tall tale. (Draw the pictures vertically on the paper.) When you are finished, tape the sheets in order and hang your creation high up on a wall (ceiling if necessary) to display your "tall tale."

