BRIDGES EDITION

GENRE readers' & writers' WORKSHOP™

TALL TALES



Davy Crockett

John Henry

Keelboat Annie





retold by Cynthia Swain

Benchmark EDUCATION

Genre: Tall Tales
Level: K/20*

GENRE readers' & writers' WORKSHOP™

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LITERARY ANALYSIS
- Respond to and interpret text
- Make text-to-text connections
- Analyze the genre

READING SKILLS
Comprehension
- Analyze story elements

Word Study
- Description

Tier Two Vocabulary
(see Glossary)

WRITING SKILLS
Writer's Tools
- Idiom

Writer's Craft
- How to write a tall tale

THEME CONNECTIONS
- **Settling America**

*The reading level assigned to this text is based on the genre examples only. "Focus on the Genre," "Reread," and "Writer's Craft" features were not leveled. These sections are intended for read-aloud or shared reading.

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The Readers' & Writers' Genre Workshop series includes eleven fiction and nonfiction genres. There are two titles with multiple stories for each genre.

How to use this book

1. Learn about the genre by reading pages 2–3. Get background information about the stories on pages 4–5.
2. Read the tall tales for enjoyment.
3. Reread the stories and answer the questions on pages 11, 15, and 21.
4. Reread the last tall tale. Pay attention to the comments in the margins. See how an author writes a tall tale.
5. Follow the steps on pages 22–23 to write your own tall tale.
6. Complete the activity on the inside back cover. Answer the follow-up questions.

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Davy Crockett
John Henry
Keelboat Annie

Three American Tall Tales

retold by Cynthia Swain
illustrated by Karen Leon and Susan Spellman

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TALL TALES

What is a tall tale?

A tall tale is an imaginative and usually funny story in which some details and actions are greatly exaggerated, or overstated. Tall tales often feature a hero or heroine who is based on a real person, but he or she becomes larger than life in the stories. The hero is often bigger, stronger, more skillful, and more courageous than an ordinary person.

What is the purpose of a tall tale?

A tall tale entertains people and teaches about good character traits. The hero shows strength, wit, determination, and courage over great odds. A tall tale often shows how human strength, cleverness, and know-how can overcome nature, machines, or just plain evil. The hero or heroine solves problems and beats out bullies in fun ways.

How do you read a tall tale?

The title usually names the hero or heroine. The beginning of the story often tells about the hero's special abilities. Then the author will introduce the problem of the story or the "bully." Ask yourself, "How will the main character use his or her powers to defeat this bad guy?" Then get ready to be amused and surprised.

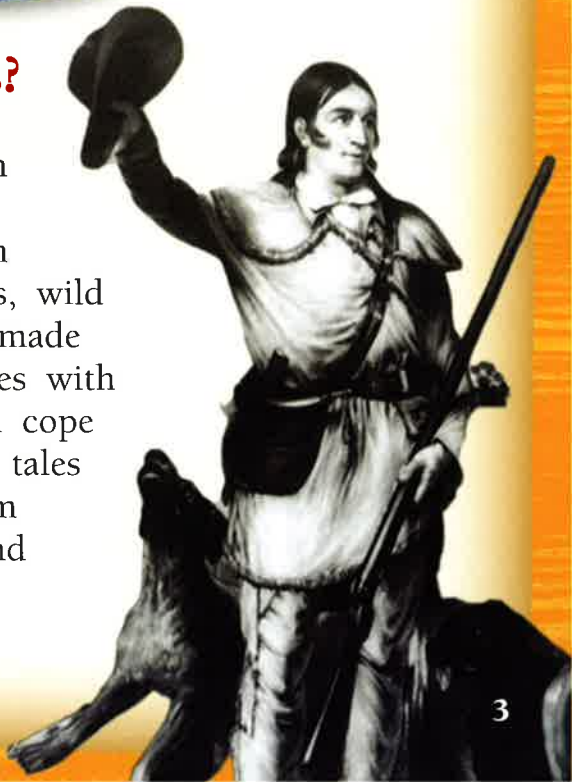
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Features of a Tall Tale

- A tall tale is usually a funny story with exaggerations.
- The main character is a hero or heroine and often is based on a real person.
- The hero may have a helper that might be an animal or object.
- The hero has superhuman strength and skills.
- The hero has to fight or outwit a "bully" in the form of nature, an animal, a machine, or a group of people.

Who invented tall tales?

Many tall tales can be traced back to the 1800s and are set on the American frontier. The brave settlers of these areas faced rough land, raging rivers, terrible storms, wild animals, and "bad guys." People made up tales about heroes and heroines with superhuman powers to help them cope with their difficult lives. The tall tales made people laugh and gave them courage to face their problems and overcome the challenges that lay before them.



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The Origins of Three Tall Tales

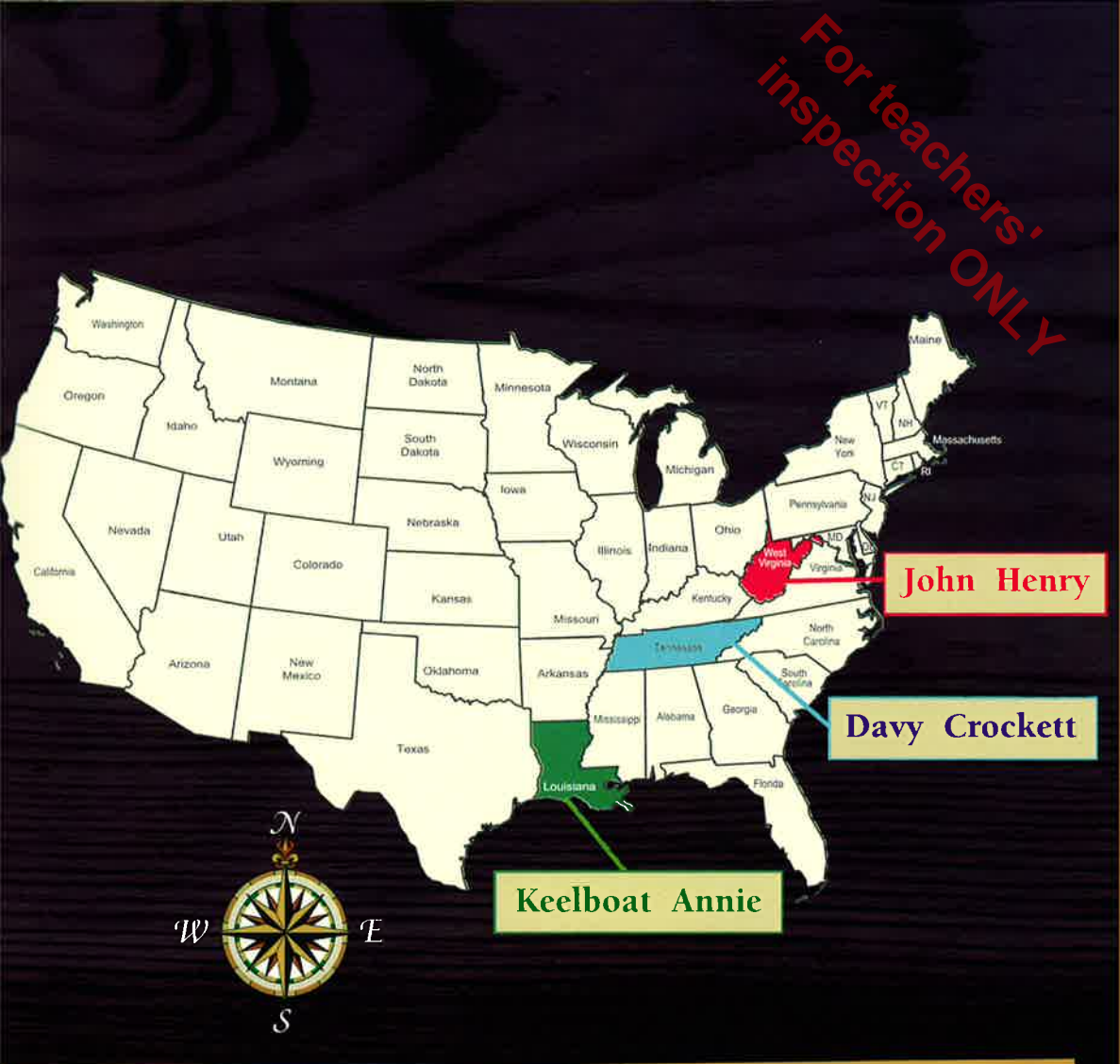
The heroes and heroines in some tall tales were based on real people. Others are fictional characters invented to represent hard-working people who were important to the times, such as loggers, steelworkers, cowboys, and riverboat captains.

Davy Crockett, a Tennessee Tall Tale: Davy Crockett (1786–1836) loved adventure and exploring the wilderness. His hunting skills helped keep the frontier army from starving. Davy was known for telling humorous stories about his hunting, such as the time he killed seventeen bears in one day. A series of comic almanacs with tall tales about his adventures was published in 1835 and 1836. He served in the U.S. Congress and died as a true hero while fighting at the Alamo.

John Henry, a West Virginia Tall Tale: No one knows if John Henry really existed. It is believed that he was born into slavery around 1850. After the Civil War, it is said that John Henry, now a free man, went to work on the railroads rebuilding the South. Railroads hired thousands of men to smooth rough terrain, cut through mountains, and lay track. One of these projects was at Big Bend, West Virginia, the location of the tall tale.

Keelboat Annie, a Mississippi Delta Tall Tale: Annie was a fictitious character, the pilot of a flat-bottomed boat on the mighty Mississippi River. She was a beautiful African American woman, seven feet tall and three hundred pounds of muscle. She wore a necklace made with one tooth from each of the hundreds of bullies she had met and conquered. In some stories, she is called Annie Christmas because she loved to haul cargoes of toys to hand out to children.

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Tools Writers Use

Idiom

Idioms (IH-dee-umz) are phrases that make language more colorful and interesting. Idioms do not use the literal (exact) meaning of the phrase. Consider the sentence "Ken is such a penny pincher that he won't buy an umbrella to keep off the rain." This does not mean that Ken actually squeezes coins. Instead, it means that Ken does not like to spend money. Since idioms are commonly used in conversation and writing, people grow to understand what they mean in a particular culture.

Davy Crockett

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