

READER'S THEATRE: TALL TALES

Unit Overview

The Tall Tales Unit is a unique way of introducing students to some of the most interesting characters in the world. From Paul Bunyan to Sam McGee, the tales contain extravagantly and humourously exaggerated stories of some incredible exploits. The tall tales genre was popularized in North America in the 1820's and has remained popular to this day.

Readers Theatre is a unique and fresh way of introducing students to a number of delightful plays that have been passed down from generation to generation for centuries. They can also serve as a useful tool for developing a student's oral reading and comprehension skills. Readers Theatre calls upon the students to utilize their voices, facial expressions and hand gestures to interpret the characters in the scripts. The focus is on reading and interpreting the text, not "memory work".

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United States	Slue-Foot Sue and Pecos Bill
Universal	A Porker in the Family

Lessons Include

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 - Creative Writing / Art Activities

Lesson # 1 - Paul Bunyan - An American Tall Tale

Suggested Teaching Strategies

Tall Tales: A tall tale features a larger-than-life or superhuman main character, with a specific task in life. Often, it involves the solving of a problem in a humorous way. Details of the story tend to be exaggerated, describing things as greater than they really are. North American settlers who made their homes in the wilderness popularized the tall tale on this continent. In those days, long before TV and movies, people depended on storytelling for entertainment. After a long day's work, people gathered to tell each other funny tales. Each group of workers, loggers, cowboys, railroad and steel workers had their own tall tale hero.

Readers Theatre has been implemented in many classrooms as a fun and exciting way of reinforcing the instruction of reading, imparting information, and even teaching ideas or concepts. There are a multitude of ways that Readers Theatre can be implemented, ranging from *Circle Reading*, *Instant Reading*, *Co-operative Reading*, or *Staged Reading*. Performance approaches include *Chamber Theatre* and *Story Theatre*. Many of these approaches are outlined in future lessons.

Listed below are a number of suggestions to get started:

- scripts should be read rather than recited
- actors are encouraged to stay in the same spot, instead of moving around the stage
- movements, actions, gestures and expressive voices are encouraged
- simple costumes and props can be used. Even an interesting hat can be an effective addition.

Theme: "Paul Bunyan" - necessity is the mother of invention.

Background: Paul Bunyan is perhaps the most famous character of the American tall tale. He was the greatest logger of all time. A giant of a man, Paul was born in Maine and logged in Canada and various parts of America. He headed a camp of mighty men and could cut down so much timber in one day that 300 mule drivers would have to work day and night to haul his logs to the river. His truest companion was Babe, the Blue ox.

Answers

Comprehension Questions

1. The flapjacks that Sourdough Sam was making fell in the dirt and were ruined, therefore, Paul's men had nothing to eat.
2. Ole made a grill and an eggbeater.
3. He put corn kernels on the grill under the flapjack, so when they popped, the flapjack flipped over.
4. Answers will vary (i.e. strawberries)

JOHN HENRY, THE STEEL-DRIVING MAN

An American Tall Tale



CAST OF CHARACTERS

NARRATOR 1
JOHN HENRY
CAPTAIN

NARRATOR 2
LITTLE BILL
YANKEE

NARRATOR 1: Even as a baby, John Henry loved hammering things. By the time he was ten, he could hammer down fence posts as well as a grown man. Often, when he worked on his parents' farm, he would listen to the far-off sound of the train whistle. It was a sound that seemed to be calling out to him.

NARRATOR 2: One day, a man named *Little Bill*, stopped at the Henry homestead for a drink of water.

JOHN HENRY: Someday, I am going to drive steel for the railway.

LITTLE BILL: I'm gonna work for the railway too. They're digging tunnels through the mountains and they need good men. Why don't you hire on with me?

JOHN HENRY: I've waited long enough to drive steel, Little Bill. You've got yourself a partner.

NARRATOR 1: So, John Henry set out with Little Bill and signed on with the C. & O. Railroad, working on the Big Bend Tunnel.

LITTLE BILL: John Henry, I'm what is called a shaker - I hold the spike in place. You, my friend, are the driver - your job is to hammer the steel drill into the rock to make an opening for the blasting powder.

Fun With Words

Match each word from the play in the left column, with its correct definition in the right.

- | | |
|--------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Florist | a. A firm or company |
| 2. Fragrance | b. A mixture |
| 3. Withered | c. Seller of flowers |
| 4. Swarming | d. A temporary platform |
| 5. Refund | e. Equipment |
| 6. Agency | f. Aroma |
| 7. Billboard | g. Large sign |
| 8. Gear | h. Return money |
| 9. Scaffold | i. Teaming |
| 10. Blend | j. Shrunken |

Creative Writing

Slappy loves to recite poetry when he is painting. Poetry has been a wonderful source of amusement and comfort to people over the ages. A very popular form of poetry in Japan is *Haiku*.

Haiku Poetry.

A Haiku poem usually has three lines. The first line has 5 syllables; the second line 7 syllables; and the third line 5 syllables. It has been described as being almost like a photo of some specific moment in nature.

Sample

The rain showers down
On muddy fields of clover
I wish it would stop



Getting your inspiration from the play you have just read, (especially the artwork of Slappy) create a haiku poem of your own.



PAUL BUNYAN - CROSSWORD PUZZLE



ACROSS

3. Was Babe an Ox?
5. A type of hardwood tree.
6. Another way to spell axe.
7. A northern U.S. state.
10. Dough used as leaven in bread.
14. A small, round fruit.
17. Most delicious.
18. A direction.
19. Give forth, hand over.
20. Away over "there".

DOWN

1. A mixture of flour, milk, and eggs.
2. A banquet or large meal.
4. "Sourdough _____"
8. Tool used in the making of flapjacks.
9. Did it take 6 storks to deliver Paul?
11. Paul's blacksmith.
12. Usual, common.
13. Foam.
15. Allow.
16. Positive, certain.

Comprehension Questions

1. What character flaw did Marusia have?

- 1b. What dilemma did Marusia's character flaw present to Ivan?

2. Briefly describe the three tricks that Ivan played on Marusia during their walk.

3. Do you think it was fair of Ivan to employ this strategy to keep the coins? Defend your answer.



Investigation

Investigate and describe the process of **churning**. What ingredients go into the process? What is involved in the process? What is the end result?

Frogs

Dylan makes use of the common bullfrog in his aborted churning experiment. There are many other kinds of frogs found in almost every part of the world. Many have fascinating names - *The Cricket Frog, The Dwarf African Clawed Frogs, The Tomato Frog, and The Argentinian Horned Frog*. Investigate a type of frog of your choosing and provide at least a half page of information. Be sure to include such pertinent facts as appearance, habitat, diet, enemies, etc.



Fun With Words

"Frogs A Hoppin'" features an example of a simile:

[the frogs] went . . . all over the floor like three wet socks

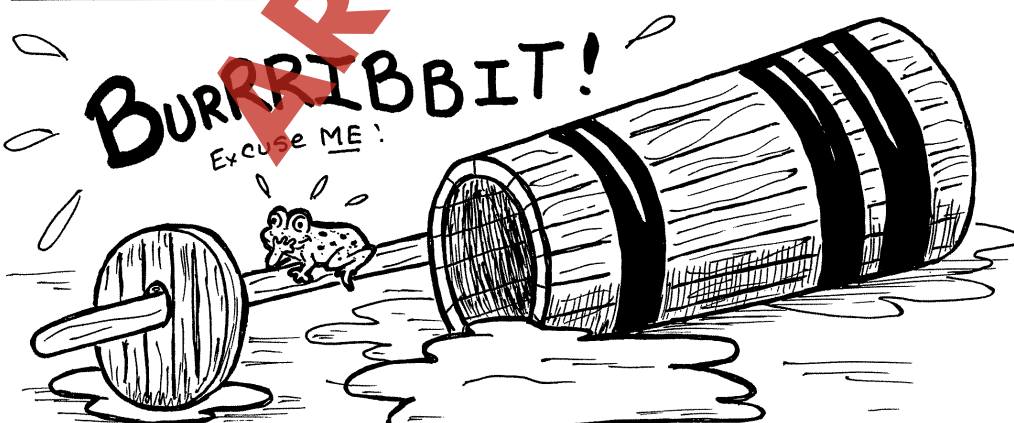
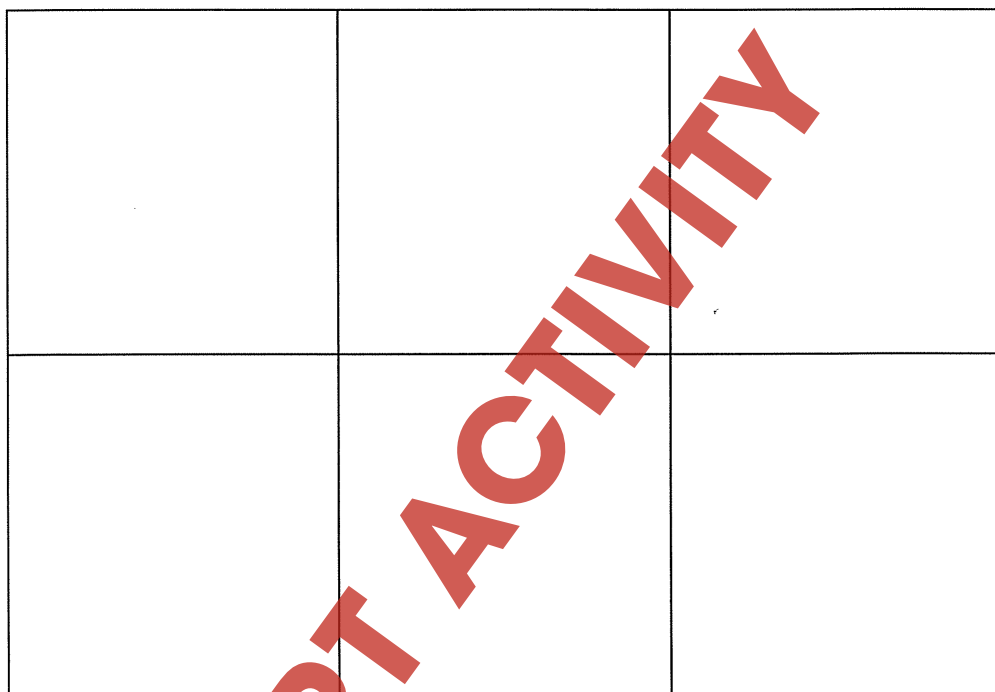
Define a **simile**: _____

Invent three similes of your own:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Art

Create a **comic strip** with at least six frames outlining the adventures of Dylan Sylvester. Be sure to colour your finished product. You may wish to include dialogue in balloons above the characters.



Fun With Words

In each of the following groups of words, underline the one word which does not fit. Then write a sentence explaining why it does not belong.

1. rogues villains heroes rascals

2. absurd sensible unreasonable ridiculous

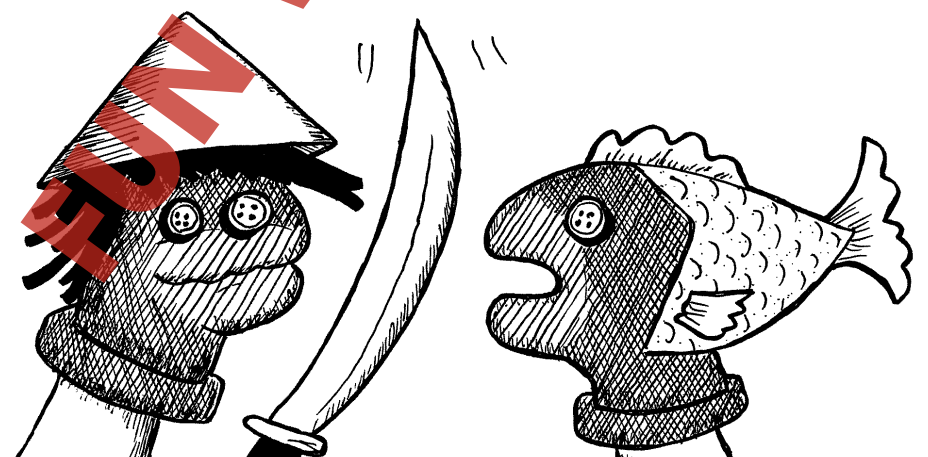
3. splendor glamour beauty poverty

4. hindrance benefit profit advantage

5. merely only happily simply

Art

Individually or in small groups, organize a puppet play using this play as the script. The students may wish to make modifications to the play. Puppets can be made from old socks, buttons, and fabric scraps. A puppet theatre can be made from cardboard, construction paper and fabric.



JOHN HENRY, THE STEEL-DRIVING MAN WORDSEARCH

Find the following twenty words connected with the script you have just read. The words are all in a straight line horizontally, vertically, or diagonally - they can be forward or even backward!

Y R A N I D R O A R T X E N Q
 W F E S S L R A E V S R O I F
 P K V M S D M X J N E I X X U
 H D I A M U A G N I T S A L B
 K N A W S A R E M I N B J X H
 D E L C N I H E T W O J M O P
 R G L A H U Z E D S C J E S M
 V E B E K I P S G E E K N A Y
 S L K E L M N Z I D R M H H V
 W L K A O Q K G B B E H O L D
 W I E C H Z J N E J O L S H M
 N R H N Q S D O S N Y T S A H
 U D J B N A T L E S G Y E R O
 I W X Y I U S S W R T H Y L
 K I I H O D T G B Q S T T K D

JOHN HENRY, THE STEEL-DRIVING MAN WORDSEARCH

(Answer)

Find the following twenty words connected with the script you have just read. The words are all in a straight line horizontally, vertically, or diagonally - they can be forward or even backward!

Y R A N I D R O A R T X E N Q
 W F E S S L R A E V S R O I F
 P K V M S D M X J N E I X X U
 H D I A M U A G N I T S A L B
 K N A W S A R E M I N B J X H
 D E L C N I H E T W O J M O P
 R G L A H U Z E D S C J E S M
 V E B E K I P S G E E K N A Y
 S L K E L M N Z I D R M H H V
 W L K A O Q K G B B E H O L D
 W I E C H Z J N E J O L S H M
 N R H N Q S D O S N Y T S A H
 U D J B N A T L E S G Y E R O
 I W X Y I U S S W R T H Y L
 K I I H O D T G B Q S T T K D

ANSWER KEY

ACHING
 ASSURED
 BEHOLD
 BLASTING
 COMPETITION

CONTEST
 DRILL
 EXTRAORDINARY
 HASTY
 HOMESTEAD

HONEST
 LEGEND
 MUSCLES
 REALIZE
 SHAKER

SLEDGEHAMMER
 SPIKE
 STEAM
 TUNNELS
 YANKEE

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 BEHOLD
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