

Passage #1
Information on Tall Tale

Have you ever read a story that you just knew was pulling your leg? Chances are it might have been a tall tale!

“Tall tales” are stories that are told as if they were true but contain exaggerated or unbelievable parts. Some tall tales are exaggerations of real events, while others are completely make-believe. Tall tales are usually very funny because the exaggerations in the story tend to be the main focus of the whole story.

A key part of American folk literature, tall tales are believed to have started from the bragging contests that tough American frontiersmen would start when they gathered around a fire. Most tall tales come from the 1800s, when courageous explorers had exciting adventures on their way to the Wild West.

Popular tall tale characters from American folklore include Johnny Appleseed, Pecos Bill, Paul Bunyan and John Henry. For example, Paul Bunyan is a legendary lumberjack of gigantic proportions.

Along with his blue ox named Babe, Paul Bunyan is said to have created logging in the United States, created the Great Lakes to water Babe, cleared all of North and South Dakota for farming and trained ants to do logging work. Of course, there’s not a shred of truth to it, but it does make for a good story!

Although no one knows for sure, many people believe these stories are called tall tales because they describe heroes that are larger than life. The heroes of tall tales are taller, bigger and stronger than real people — even if the tall tale is based on a real person!

For example, here is how one story describes Paul Bunyan’s birth:

It took five giant storks to deliver Paul to his parents. His first bed was a lumber wagon pulled by a team of horses. As a newborn, Paul Bunyan could yell so loud he scared all the fish out of the rivers and streams. His parents had to milk two dozen cows morning and night to keep his milk bottle full, and his mother had to feed him 10 barrels of porridge every two hours to keep his stomach from rumbling and knocking the house down.

Could you imagine a baby like Paul Bunyan? Yikes! It’s easy to see, though, why such exaggerated details in a story led to them being called tall tales.