A Tall Tale (Lesson A)

CONTENT FOCUS: Reading/Language Arts

PROFICIENCY: Intermediate to Proficient

OBJECTIVE: Students identify and speak hyperboles.

ACTIVITIES: Students create exaggerations, learn about characteristics of tall tales, examine materials about the Old West and early American wilderness, read “The Adventurous Life of Pecos Bill,” answer comprehension questions, and underline words and phrases.

PREPARATION:
- illustrated books or other visual material about the Old West and the early American wilderness
- timeline of the Old West
- copies of “The Adventurous Life of Pecos Bill” worksheet for each student

Build Background: Introduce Hyperbolic Expressions

1. To introduce the notion of exaggeration as a narrative technique, initiate discussion with students by using hyperbolic expressions. For example, say: Have you ever heard someone say at dinnertime: I’m so hungry, I could eat a horse. Or, at bedtime: I’m so tired, I could sleep for a year. Write these statements on the board. Explain that these expressions begin with true information and end with something that’s funny, but not really true. The second part of these statements (underline the hyperbolic part of each sentence)—“I could eat a horse” and “I could sleep for a year”—are exaggerations. They go beyond the truth. These statements describe things as greater than they really are. Explain that exaggerations like these are used to help make or emphasize a point. Say: When you say “I could eat a horse,” you are saying that you are very, very hungry. When you say “I could sleep for a year,” you are saying how really, really tired you are.

2. Write some further examples of hyperbole on the board and discuss the real/unreal aspects of them. Hesitate before you write the final part, e.g., “moon,” and see if anyone can supply a good idea. Point out the two parts of the construction, the real and the unreal separated by a comma, and circle the word “so,” which always identifies this kind of expression.

- The kite flew so high, it touched the moon.
- The movie was so long, it went on for years.
- The girl ran so fast, she passed a speeding truck and bus.
- The book was so heavy, it weighed a ton.
3. Now allow students to supply their own exaggerations for the following hyperboles written on the board. (S2.2: Identify an academic or social situation and describe it, using sentences) **OBSERVATIONAL OPPORTUNITY #1**

- The temperature was so cold,…
- The sun was so hot,…
- The building was so tall,…
- The room was so large,…

4. Mention that exaggeration is always found in a type of story called a “tall tale.” Explain the meaning of “tall” used here (hard to believe, exaggerated) and “tale” (story). Point out that tall tales are found in many cultures around the world; for example, John Henry (America), Master Man (Nigeria), and Three Strong Women (Japan). Say: *Tall tales are stories about folk heroes, people who lived long ago and did amazing things. The stories often started because the people really lived and really did big things. Over time, the descriptions of their work grew or became more and more exaggerated.* Ask students to recall any tall tales they may have read and share them with the group. (S5.1: Interpret, narrate, and paraphrase events, using visual information)

5. Give students an opportunity to view illustrated books and other visual material about the Old West and the early American wilderness, where many tall tales take place. For a timeline of the Old West, see the **Resource Links** at the end of this lesson.

---

**Learn**

Read a Tall Tale about Pecos Bill

1. Tell students that they will read a tall tale about Pecos Bill, a folk hero from America’s Old West. Explain that some stories about Pecos Bill say he was wild because he grew up with wild animals—coyotes. Mention that every new tall tale about Pecos Bill adds new imaginative details.

---

**STRATEGY LINK: READING** Grades 4–5 ELLs can use their background knowledge and a story’s titles and pictures to predict the purpose, main ideas, and supporting details of the story before they read it. This can help students focus on a story and increase their reading comprehension, and they can use these prediction strategies in other contexts, both in and out of school.

A Tall Tale (Lesson A)

With a partner, think about the title and the picture and talk about all of your ideas about this story. (Write ideas about the story on the board.) Model: For example, I think one idea is that Pecos Bill did a lot of dangerous or adventurous things. (Give students a couple minutes to discuss their ideas.)

What ideas did you come up with?

What did you think of when you read the title? How many main characters are there and who are they?

What ideas did you think of when you looked at the picture? Where does this story take place—in the city?

What are some things that will happen in this story?

Did anyone think of other stories that you’ve read before? What are the ideas you remember from those stories?

(Afterwards, you can revisit the students’ predictions. They may be surprised that many of their predictions are correct!)

Before you read, always look at a story’s titles and pictures. Try to predict what the story will be about. You don’t have to get all the ideas right—but you can try to think about them. This can help you to understand English stories!

Note: Be sure to explain the meaning of the following words and phrases so that students will appreciate this tale: adventurous, cowboy, wagon, getting on, low, bouncing, cactus patch, coyotes, bothering, adopted, howling, flew, calendar dates, blew, tumbleweeds, mustache, braid, lasso, invention, loop, settle for, mountain lion, bump, drained, ranch, fence posts.

2. Distribute copies of the “The Adventurous Life of Pecos Bill” worksheet and select a student to read aloud the title. Then, invite students to read about Pecos Bill. Tell them that when they are finished, you will ask questions about the story. Remind them that this tall tale will contain many exaggerations that are impossible to believe but make the story funny.

3. Have students read the tall tale. Then, ask the following questions and invite students to share their responses:

• What is this story about? (Pecos Bill’s life was filled with adventure.)
• When did Pecos Bill leave home? (when he was three days old)
• How did Pecos Bill show he was smart? (He taught coyotes to sing.)
• (Discuss added illustration.) What is Bill doing? What is he using to pull the moon with? (He is using a lasso to pull the moon closer.)
3.128 A Tall Tale (Lesson A)

- How did Pecos Bill invent the lasso in the story? (He braided hairs from his own mustache.)

- How did Pecos Bill’s life of adventure begin? What happens at the end of this tall tale? (He bounced out of a wagon as a baby and was raised by coyotes; he drained the Rio Grande and settled down on a ranch.)

(R3.1: Demonstrate reading comprehension) OBSERVATIONAL OPPORTUNITY #2

Discuss the Tall Tale

After students have read the tall tale, have them revisit the text with partners to underline words and phrases that make the story a tall tale. Remind them of the pattern, emphasizing “so” in the first part of the sentence. Invite volunteers to read aloud underlined items. Then ask the group if each item is an exaggeration. Students can play a speaking “game” to verify the hyperbole by saying: The sun was so low. (Response): How low was it? (Answer): It was so low, you could reach out and touch it. (R3.2: Identify important literary features of text) OBSERVATIONAL OPPORTUNITY #3

Note: Collect “The Adventurous Life of Pecos Bill” worksheet to redistribute for Lesson B.

ASSESSMENT:

- Use the Observational Assessment Rubric to evaluate students’ reading comprehension and their ability to identify an academic or social situation and describe it using sentences.
- Use students’ underlined copies of the reading passage to assess their ability to identify important literary features in the tall tale.
RELATED LINKS:

Standards: S2, S5, R3

Multilevel Links:
• Beginning students can illustrate and explain an exaggeration in the tall tale.
• Intermediate students can retell the tall tale to the group.
• Above Proficient students can write a new episode for the tall tale.

Language Arts Link:
Students can rewrite the reading passage as a script and act out the tall tale as a play.

Home Culture Link:
Invite students to find tall tales from the cultures of their homeland. Encourage students to share the books with the class or retell the stories.

Resource Links:
You may enjoy the following multimedia resources on tall tales and the Old West:
• American Tall Tales by Mary Pope Osborne, 1991, Knopf Books for Young Readers
• Iva Dunnit and the Big Wind by Carol Purdy, © 1988, Puffin Books
• www.legendsofamerica.com/WE-TimeLine.html
The Adventurous Life of Pecos Bill

Pecos Bill was a cowboy who loved adventure all his life. As a baby, he was traveling with his mama and papa in a wagon along the Pecos River. It was getting on towards evening. The sun was so low, you could reach out and touch it. Papa Bill was bouncing Pecos Bill on his knee. He bounced him so high, Pecos Bill bounced out of the wagon, across the ground, up over a cactus patch, and into the path of coyotes.

“I hope Pecos Bill isn’t bothering those coyotes,” said Mama Bill. “But, I suppose he had to leave home sometime. After all, he is three days old.”

Those coyotes were so friendly, they adopted Pecos Bill. He was so smart, he taught the coyotes to sing. To this day, you can hear coyotes howling all over the West.

The years flew by so fast, the calendar dates blew through the desert like tumbleweeds. Soon Pecos Bill had a mustache so long, he used some of the hairs to braid a lasso. “That’s a mighty fine invention,” said Pecos Bill. “I wonder how it might work.”

He decided to tie a loop in it, swing it around and pull the moon a little closer. “That’s better,” said Pecos Bill. Now you know why moonlight always looks better out West.

Next, Pecos Bill tried to find a horse. He had to settle for riding a mountain lion instead. That mountain lion was so big, it made a mountain look like a bump in the road.

Finally, Pecos Bill decided to build a home. He drained the Rio Grande River to make a ranch. It was so big, the fence posts began in Texas and ended in California.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observational Opportunity #1</th>
<th>If yes, the student describes situations:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S2.2: describes situations</td>
<td>1  ❑ with gestures or using one or two words: hungry, don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2  ❑ with short phrases which may not be fully comprehensible: so hungry gonna eat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3  ❑ with longer phrases or short sentences containing some errors: I gets so hungry, I eat a horse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4  ❑ with production similar to a native speaker's: I'm so hungry, I could eat a horse.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observational Opportunity #2</th>
<th>If yes, the student demonstrates reading comprehension:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R3.1: demonstrates reading comprehension</td>
<td>1  ❑ with gestures or using one or two words: Pecos Bill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2  ❑ with short phrases which may not be fully comprehensible: Pecos Bill he amazing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3  ❑ with longer phrases or short sentences containing some errors: Pecos Bill did stuff real people can no do; he was a cowboy with adventures his whole life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4  ❑ with production similar to a native speaker's: Pecos Bill was a cowboy whose life was filled with adventure.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observational Opportunity #3</th>
<th>If yes, the student identifies literary features by:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R3.2: identifies literary features</td>
<td>1  ❑ underlining examples of exaggeration only if they have help locating them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2  ❑ needing an occasional reminder of what exaggeration is, or finding only a few examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3  ❑ locating some and missing/misidentifying others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4  ❑ locating and discussing several examples</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1—Beginning/Early Intermediate
2—Early Intermediate/Intermediate
3—Intermediate/Proficient
4—Proficient/Above Proficient

NOTES:
A Tall Tale (Lesson B)

CONTENT FOCUS: Reading/Language Arts
PROFICIENCY: Intermediate to Proficient

OBJECTIVE: Students write simple exaggerations.

ACTIVITIES: Students discuss exaggerations they identified in “The Adventurous Life of Pecos Bill” and create their own exaggerations.

PREPARATION:
• copies of “The Adventurous Life of Pecos Bill” worksheet from Lesson A for each student
• copies of “Let’s Exaggerate!” worksheet for each student

Build Background: Review Tall Tale and Hyperbolic Expressions
1. Remind students that in the previous lesson, they read “The Adventurous Life of Pecos Bill.” Ask: What is this kind of story called? (tall tale) Why is this story called a tall tale? (It tells about a folk hero who did amazing and unbelievable things; it uses a lot of exaggeration to describe a folk hero and what he did.)

2. Redistribute copies of “The Adventurous Life of Pecos Bill.” Allow students to reread the story silently to themselves, select students to reread each of the paragraphs orally, or reread the story orally to the class. Remind students that in the previous lesson, they identified the things in the story that were exaggerated. Have students select some of those exaggerations and explain what is unbelievable about them. Point out how these exaggerations often add a humorous element to the story. (R3.2: Identify important literary features of text) OBSERVATIONAL OPPORTUNITY #3 (See rubric in Lesson A.)

Creating Exaggerations
1. Explain to students that everything in a tall tale is not exaggeration. Say: Some of the ideas in a tall tale could really happen. That is what helps to make the tall tale interesting. At times it seems real, but then things happen that are not real. Encourage students to identify realistic elements in “The Adventurous Life of Pecos Bill.” (For example, Pecos Bill could have really traveled with his parents in a wagon; a father could really bounce an infant on his knee; the sun could really appear low in the sky; Pecos Bill could have really had a mustache; Pecos Bill could have really built a ranch and a fence.) (R3.3: Read critically and apply learning strategies to interpretation)
3.134 A Tall Tale (Lesson B)

Note: If students find it difficult to express this information, simply ask leading questions and have students give yes/no answers; for example, ask: *Could the sun appear low in the sky? Could someone reach out and touch the sun?*

2. Tell students that they are going to have a chance to practice writing their own exaggerations. You will give them a sentence that expresses something realistic, and they will change the sentence into an exaggeration. Provide these examples on the board, pointing out the addition of “so” to the first part of the sentence containing the exaggeration:

- The actor spoke loudly. (realistic)
- The actor spoke so loudly, people could hear him five miles away. (exaggeration)
- The wind was strong. (realistic)
- The wind was so strong, it blew the moon across the sky. (exaggeration)

3. Distribute the “Let’s Exaggerate!” worksheet. Remind students that what they add to the sentence should be something unbelievable. (W4.1: Write simple sentences to describe)

Present, Discuss, and Illustrate Exaggerations

Select students to read some of the sentences they completed. With the input of other students, decide whether these sentences are actually exaggerations and discuss why. Allow students to illustrate one or more of their exaggerations.

ASSESSMENT:

- Use the Observational Assessment Rubric to evaluate students’ ability to distinguish between realism and exaggeration in the tall tale.
- Use students’ sentences on the worksheet to assess their ability to write exaggerations.
RELATED LINKS:

Standards: R3, W4

Multilevel Links:
• Beginning students scan work in pairs and read the exaggerations they wrote on the “Let’s Exaggerate!” worksheet.
• Intermediate students can locate exaggerations in other tall tales.
• Above Proficient students can write their own tall tales or take a realistic biography and make it more like a tall tale by adding exaggeration to it.

Home Link:
Have students take “The Adventurous Life of Pecos Bill” home and read it to their family members. Have their family members identify the exaggerations.
Let’s Exaggerate!

1. The dog was smart.
The dog was so smart, ____________________________
______________________________.

2. The tree grew tall.
The tree grew so tall, ____________________________
______________________________.

3. The pizza was delicious.
The pizza was so delicious, ____________________________
______________________________.

4. The girl was thirsty.
The girl was so thirsty, ____________________________
______________________________.

5. The boy was happy.
The boy was so happy, ____________________________
______________________________.