

Exploring Tall Tales Upper Elementary

Language Arts Literacy Indicators:	3.1 [1, 4, 7–8, 12]	3.2 [1, 3, 6–8]	3.3 [1–2, 5, 7, 9]
	3.4 [1, 3, 6, 8–9, 13–15]	3.5 [8, 10]	
Cross-Content Workplace Indicators:	1 [1]	3 [1–2, 8–10]	4 [2–9]

Mr. Hall wanted his students to be able to recognize and identify the features of tall tales and the importance of exaggeration to this genre by recalling and retelling examples from tales they had read.

Mr. Hall's third-grade class was seated on the carpet in the listening area. Displayed on a table were selections such as *Pecos Bill*, *Paul Bunyan*, *Sally Ann Thunder and Whirlwind Crockett*, and *American Tall Tales*. There was also a listening center with recordings and tapes. Mr. Hall began the lesson by asking students whether they recognized any of the books or other materials on the table. Several students said they did, and he asked, "What do you know about th

"The characters are not real," said C

"They lived a long time ago," said Luiz.

"They're always bragging," offered Ussuri.



Mr. Hall then asked students to take a minute to write in their learning logs everything they know about "these kinds of stories that we call *tall tales*." He reminded them that their ideas might come from something they read, saw, or heard. After a few minutes, he asked students to stop writing and share their ideas with a partner. Then he introduced *Johnny Appleseed*, a tall tale adapted by Steven Kellogg, and invited students to listen for any features in this story that are like the features for tall tales they mentioned in their learning logs.

When he finished reading, Mr. Hall said to the class, "Ussuri told us that these stories have bragging in them. Did you hear any bragging in *Johnny Appleseed*?" Several students volunteered that nobody could plant that many apple trees in so many places. Mr. Hall said, "That's probably true. So there does seem to be some sort of bragging in this story. Does anyone know another word for *bragging*?"

Nicha said, "Isn't this called *exaggeration*?"

Mr. Hall responded, "That is a good word." Then he wrote it on chart paper. Next, he wrote, "I'm so hungry I could eat a horse!" and asked, "Can anyone tell me what they think this statement means?" Several students shared their ideas. Mr. Hall explained that this is an example of exaggeration that people use every day. "Can anyone give other examples of exaggeration?"

Focus

Rich classroom environments contribute to the development of literacy.

By organizing a literacy curriculum around literary genres, teachers provide a context for students to learn about the various types of literature and the characteristics of each.

Vocabulary and concept development are promoted through discussion.

Chris volunteered, “Yeah, my big brother says I exaggerate when I tell him about all the hits I got in my baseball games.”

“Good example, Chris,” Mr. Hall said. “Can any of you think of more examples in the tall tale you just heard? Think about what was exaggerated in *Johnny Appleseed*.” As students shared details from the story that supported their answers, Mr. Hall listed the examples on the chart paper. He then asked, “Why do you think the writer has chosen to use exaggeration?” Some students said it made the story funny and more interesting to read.

“Now we are going to get into groups to read other tall tales to see whether they also make use of exaggeration. Each group will select a tall tale to read and will prepare a retelling to share with the class. You may choose to use a story map to help you keep track of the details while you are reading. Your retelling should include such story elements as plot, character, and setting, as well as examples of exaggeration in the story. We will add these examples to the list we have just started.”

The next day, groups read their selected stories and practiced their retellings for presentation to the class. Mr. Hall and the class discussed similarities and differences among the tall tales. He then engaged the class in a discussion of situations in which exaggeration might be used today.

Understanding author’s purpose contributes to literacy development.

Opportunities for self-selected reading increases motivation.

Critical thinking is developed when children are encouraged to move beyond the analysis of single texts and to explore literary, linguistic, and artistic connections among multiple texts.

Possible Assessments:

1. Evaluate retellings for accuracy and inclusion of all story elements.
2. Have students self-assess by completing the following sentence stems in their learning logs.
The tall tale I enjoyed most was_____.
Something I learned from reading the tall tale was_____.
One thing I can do better as a reader is_____.
3. Assess students' understanding of exaggeration by having each student finish several open-ended statements as an exaggeration. For example:
I was so tired this morning I could have _____.
The cafeteria food is so_____.
My father is so_____.

Questions for Reflection:

1. How could use of performance or visual arts enhance the students' appreciation and understanding of tall tales?
2. How could the strategies used in this lesson on tall tales be used with other literary genres?
3. How else could the teacher elaborate on the concept of exaggeration?

Extension Activities:

1. In their journals, students write about a time they exaggerated and describe the consequences.
2. The teacher and children create a bulletin board with a map of the United States. On it, they locate and label the settings of the tall tales read.
3. Students create a Venn diagram to compare two tall-tale heroes they have read about, or they compare two versions of the same tall tale. How do they compare? Which did they like better and why?
4. Students learn and sing some folk songs, e.g., "John Henry."