

## Social Studies

### Genre

**Online Articles** present facts about real people, living things, places, or events.



### Text Features

A **Toolbar** is a strip of icons, or symbols, on a computer that allows you to visit different features on the Web page.

A **Link** is an electronic connection on a Web page that provides direct access to other documents or information.

### Content Vocabulary

**exaggerating**      **features**  
**superhuman**

# THE TALES ARE GETTING TALLER

by Kyle Seulen

### Links related to this topic

#### Related Articles

- ▶ [Paul Bunyan](#)
- ▶ [John Henry](#)
- ▶ [Davy Crockett](#)
- ▶ [Pecos Bill](#)

**H**ave you ever visited or seen pictures of Puget Sound in Washington State or the Black Hills of South Dakota? If so, you have seen some of Paul Bunyan's greatest work. One time, when Paul was headed out West, he dragged his giant pickax behind him, and the ditch he made with it was the Grand Canyon. This statement may be **exaggerating** the facts just a little. Paul Bunyan really did not make these beautiful places, but the stories we like to tell about him make him one of the heroes of American tall tales. What is a tall tale? Four **features** make a story a tall



This is a link to more information about Pecos Bill.

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Tall Tales



This strip of icons is called a toolbar.



### Tall tale heroes and the regions where they were born

tale. First, the hero must seem larger than life and have **superhuman** skills. Second, the hero usually has a certain job that he does better than anyone else. The hero might be a lumberjack or a cowhand, for example. Third, the hero must solve a problem in a way that surprises the reader or makes the audience laugh. Fourth, the details of the tale are exaggerated to be made greater than they really are. Often, the hero is bursting with courage

and ready to conquer any difficulty. As a rule, the heroes would be a little rough on the outside. Still, they had tender hearts and souls and possessed the most admirable qualities. They were helpful, always available to solve problems and determined to create a better world for their neighbors and friends.

How did the tradition of inventing tales starring characters that were larger-than-life begin? Tall tales probably started as settlers moved into America's wilderness areas. Life on the American frontier was difficult, exhausting, dangerous and uncertain. For the most part, the future was unknown and scary. When the day was done, pioneers gathered around the fire in search of relaxation and entertainment. Telling stories became a favorite pastime. It was a handy art form that could not only entertain but inspire as well. The tales that were told helped the people feel they could overcome danger, just as their favorite heroes had.

As the tales were repeated, they somehow took on a life of their own and grew bigger and better. For example, if someone roped a fierce bear and swung it across town, then in the retelling he roped the same bear and swung it across country. In the

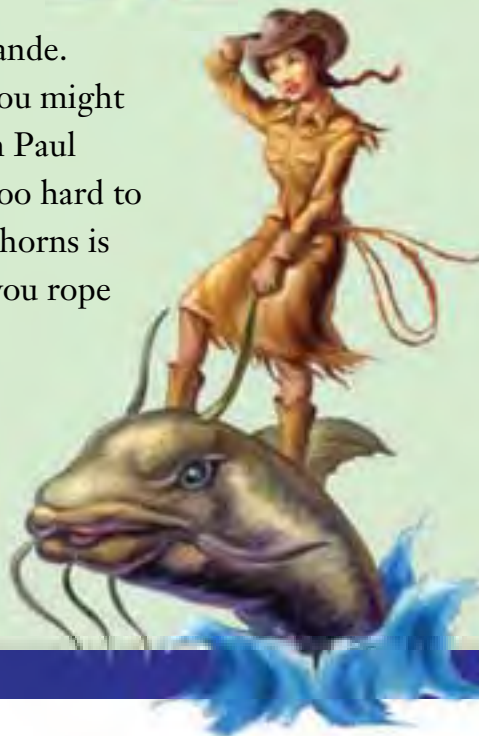
next telling of the story the hero would have swung the bear so far it landed on the moon. Even though no one believed a bear landed on the moon, people certainly enjoyed listening to the story as much as the storyteller enjoyed telling it.

A brand-new tall tale often had the fellow who told it or somebody from the "neighborhood" as its hero. But as the tale became more famous, people began to feel it wasn't "right" that such a wonderful story be told about an ordinary man. The pioneers decided that larger-than-life stories needed to feature larger-than-life heroes. So, they began putting famous characters in the leading roles of the stories they would tell. Some were real heroes of the day such as Davy Crockett or Jim Bridger. Others, like Paul Bunyan and Pecos Bill, were products of the imaginations of good storytellers.

A particular tall tale might also be influenced by events in the region where it was born. People who made their living from the sea liked to hear stories about the adventures of Old Stormalong and his ship. Railroad workers liked to hear stories about John Henry, who could hammer railroad spikes faster than anyone else. Ranchers and cowboys enjoyed hearing about Pecos Bill who roped a mountain lion and rode it a hundred feet at a step. They also enjoyed hearing about Slue-foot



Sue who rode a catfish down the Rio Grande. Speaking of roping, if you feel up to it, you might try to catch a ride to the lumber camp on Paul Bunyan's blue ox, Babe. It shouldn't be too hard to catch him. The distance between Babe's horns is just a little over seven ax handles. Once you rope him and he takes you to the camp, relax by the campfire. The lumberjacks there will probably have another tale or two to share with you!



## Connect and Compare



1. If you were on this Web page what feature would you select to help you find out more information about Babe, Paul Bunyan's ox? **Using Toolbars and Links**
2. If you were to write a tall tale, who would be the hero? Explain your answer. **Synthesize**
3. Think about "The Tales Are Getting Taller" and *Davy Crockett Saves the World*. How do you know that *Davy Crockett Saves the World* is a tall tale? **Reading/Writing Across Texts**



## Social Studies Activity

Use an online encyclopedia to learn more about one hero on the map on page 73. Write a tall tale about the person you choose. Remember to exaggerate the tale.



Find out more about tall tales at [www.macmillanmh.com](http://www.macmillanmh.com)

## Writer's Craft

### Topic Sentence

The first sentence in a paragraph is usually the **topic sentence**. It tells what the paragraph will be about.

# Write About a Hero

## Aliyah, My Hero

by Carla M.

My topic sentence tells about my own hero.

I wasn't afraid to tell how I really feel about Aliyah.

My hero, my neighbor Aliyah, is only seven years old, but she is the bravest person I know. Aliyah has cerebral palsy. Her muscles don't work properly, so she uses a wheelchair. I'd probably be mad at the world if I were Aliyah, but you never even know when Aliyah is having a tough day. She is always smiling.

Doing many everyday tasks is a challenge for Aliyah. Picking up a dropped pencil or getting into a car are complicated tasks. Aliyah gets everything done, but she needs to move slowly and carefully. It's amazing how much patience she has. She almost never gets frustrated.

Aliyah loves jokes, riddles, and games like "Twenty Questions" and "I Spy." Aliyah is so smart that she usually wins.

I know I am lucky to be friends with Aliyah. She has taught me what it really means to be special.

## Your Turn

Write a few paragraphs about your own personal hero. Why is he or she your hero? Tell how you feel about this person. Use the writer's checklist to check your writing.



## Writer's Checklist

- Ideas and Content:** Does my writing say what I mean?
- Organization:** Does my **topic sentence** let the reader know what I am writing about?
- Voice:** Did I express my feelings about my hero?
- Word Choice:** Did I use words that are fresh and new?
- Sentence Fluency:** Did I use different sentence types?
- Conventions:** Did I use commas in a series correctly? Did I check my spelling?