

Language Arts

Genre

A **Tall Tale** features a larger-than-life hero who solves a problem in a funny or outrageous way. It includes exaggerated details.



Literary Elements

Hyperbole is the use of exaggeration for emphasis.

Dialogue is a conversation between two or more characters. It is usually set off by quotation marks.

Old Stormalong Finds a Man-Sized Ship

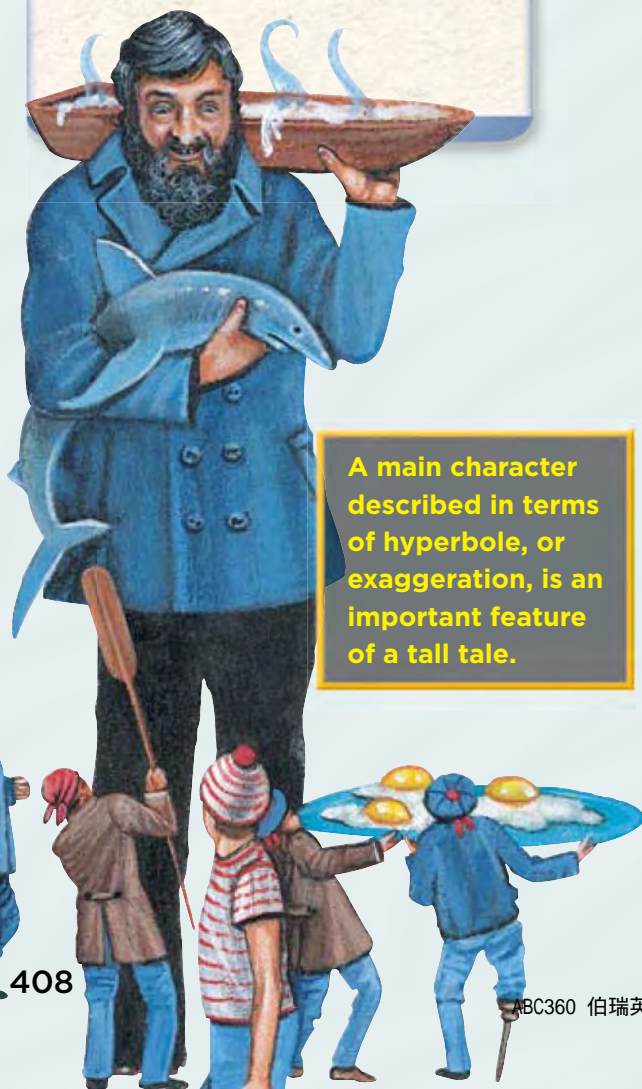
by Paul Robert Walker

Old Stormalong was the greatest sailor who ever sailed the seas. He stood four fathoms high, drank his soup from a Cape Cod dory, and ate a shark for dinner with ostrich eggs on the side. When he was finished, he stretched out on the deck and picked his teeth with an eighteen-foot oar.

Now, a fathom is the height of a good-sized man and a dory is a fair-sized rowboat. So Old Stormalong, well, he was a mighty big sailor. He had a hard time fitting on an ordinary ship, so he went from ship to ship, just trying to get comfortable. Finally he ended up as boatswain on the *Lady of the Sea*, the biggest ship in the Atlantic—at least that's what Stormy thought.

After a long voyage through the Caribbean, the *Lady* was heading for her home port of Boston. As she neared the Jersey coast, just off Barnegat Light, the weather turned bad, and the *Lady*—big as she was—tossed like a toy on the huge waves.

As Stormy peered through the growing tempest, he caught sight of something totally unexpected. A great new city was floating calm as could be on the stormy sea.



A main character described in terms of hyperbole, or exaggeration, is an important feature of a tall tale.

“It’s unnatural!” he exclaimed. “How could the landlubbers build a city on the sea?” But as the *Lady* drew closer, he realized it wasn’t a city at all. It was a ship! The biggest ship he’d ever seen—it made the *Lady of the Sea* look like a rowboat! Even from a distance he could read the name painted on the huge bow in letters twenty feet high: *Courser*.

Stormy leaned over the rail and gazed in admiration. “Now, that’s a ship,” he said with a sigh. “Aye, a man could stretch his legs on a ship like that.”

Without bothering to take his gear from below, Stormy jumped over the side and swam toward the *Courser*. The seas were rough, but his powerful strokes brought him alongside the huge ship in

a few minutes. He called for a rope and pulled himself aboard.

“And who might you be?” asked the captain.

“Alfred Bulltop Stormalong,” Stormy replied. “At your service, sir.”

“Well, sign the log,” said the captain. “We can use a big man like you.”

Stormy took a look around. The first thing he noticed was the horses—a whole stableful right on the deck!

“She’s a horseboat, is she?” asked Stormy.

The captain laughed and patted Stormy on the back of the knee.

“Horseboat, my eye!” he said. “Those are for the men on watch. The deck’s so big, they have to ride around it.”

This is a dialogue between Old Stormalong (Stormy) and the captain. Notice the quotation marks that surround each statement.



Stormy smiled and took a deep breath of the tangy salt air. “Aye,” he said. “She’s the ship for me.”

And so she was. The *Courser* carried over six hundred men to keep her running trim. A man had to get out his compass to find his way from fore to aft. The sails were so big that they had to be made in the Sahara Desert—just to give the sailmakers room to spread them out. Bunkhouses and galleys were built up and down the masts, and the crow’s nest was lost in the clouds. If a young man climbed the rigging, he was an old man by the time he came down.

Until Stormy came aboard, it took thirty-two men just to turn the wheel. But Old Stormalong could handle it steady by himself. Oh, he was a sight to see! A strong, handsome, four-fathom man in a peacoat as big as an ordinary sail. His black beard speckled with spray; his huge hands wrapped around the steering pegs; his dark eyes fixed on the horizon. Stormy was the only man aboard who could actually see where the ship was going.

The *Courser* could ride through an average storm as if she were floating on a millpond. In fact, during all the years that Old Stormalong handled the wheel, only two storms ever blew her off course.



The first was a September gale in the North Atlantic.

The wind blew and blew—whipping the huge sails and spraying cold salt water across the decks until it was hard to tell whether a man was on the ship or in the sea. The fog was so thick that Stormy couldn’t see the end of his beard. But he held the great wheel for two weeks straight—day and night—without eating or sleeping.

Finally, the winds died down and the fog lifted. When the sun rose over the cold blue water, the navigator discovered that they had been blown into the North Sea, and they were heading south—straight for disaster. You see, the *Courser* was much too big to turn around and a mite too big to pass through the English Channel.

Old Stormalong held the wheel steady while the officers rode around the deck shouting orders and watching the sides of the ship. As the *Courser* approached the narrowest point of the Channel—between Calais and the cliffs of Dover—the captain ordered the sails reefed and the men into the lifeboats.

“Hold fast!” shouted Stormy. “I think we can make it, sir.”

“Are you sure?” asked the captain.

“It’ll be close,” said Stormy. “But if ye send all hands over and lay a coat of soap on the sides, we just might squeeze through. Better coat it extra heavy on the starboard—those Dover cliffs look mighty rough.”

The captain ordered the crew to coat the sides as thick and slippery as they

could. When the ship hit the bottleneck, she *just* squeezed through—it was so tight that the soap on the starboard side rubbed off against the cliffs. It’s still there today, and that’s why they’re called the White Cliffs of Dover.



Connect and Compare



1. Find an example of hyperbole. How does hyperbole add humor to the story? **Hyperbole**
2. In what ways is Stormy a typical tall-tale hero? Find examples in the text to support your answer. **Analyze**
3. What details would you add to *Exploring the Titanic* to make it a tall tale? **Reading/Writing Across Texts**



Writer's Craft

Facts and Opinions

In an informative essay about science, history, or another serious subject, use precise details and descriptive language. Include only **facts** and avoid words that show emotion or **opinions**.

I wrote about observing clams at the beach. I used facts, not opinions, in my scientific observation.

Write a Scientific Observation

Quahogs


by Rose R.



My family took a trip to the beach this afternoon. I walked along the shore and saw hundreds of baby quahogs cover the sand between the high- and low-tide marks of the Atlantic Ocean. They had very hard shells with different colors. I walked closer and tapped them with my finger. I used my hand to measure their size, and they were no bigger than my fingernail. The end of the summer is the breeding season for these clams.

I watched the quahogs burrow themselves in the sand. They look for food under the surface. I could see these tiny clams use their "feet" to dig into the sand, disappearing from sight. It looked like they were wiggling down underground. Then before the next wave came in, they reappeared. The holes they made in the sand helped me recognize where they were.

Quahogs take in nutrients by sucking in water and filtering out the food. The filtered water then comes out the other side of the shell. My dad explained that when the quahogs get bigger, clammers will dig in the sand to find the ones ready to be eaten.



My observation includes only precise, factual information.

Your Turn

Write two or three paragraphs describing something you've observed in nature. Be sure to include precise details in your description. Do not include your own opinions. Use the Writer's Checklist to review your paragraphs.



Writer's Checklist

- Ideas and Content:** Did I include important **facts** and observations? Did I avoid **opinions**?
- Organization:** Did I organize my description in a logical way?
- Voice:** Did I choose words that make the scientific observation sound formal and scientific?
- Word Choice:** Did I use precise vocabulary? Did I avoid words that express opinions, such as *beautiful*, *amazing*, and *incredible*?
- Sentence Fluency:** Did I use a variety of sentence beginnings?
- Conventions:** Did I use subject and object pronouns properly? Did I check my spelling?

