# THE Tale OF Pecos Bill

retold by Gillian Reed

Pecos Bill was the best cowboy and toughest man there ever was. He had bounced out of his family's wagon when he was a baby and landed in the Pecos River. He was raised by coyotes, but he didn't talk about that very much.

One day, Bill showed up on the Texas range, wearing a blue bandanna and big Stetson hat. "Hey, partner," Pecos Bill roared at a gold prospector, "I'm lookin' for some real cowhands. Got me a ranch in New Mexico — well, to tell the truth, New Mexico is my ranch. I need some tough guys to work for me. I'm looking for the kind of man who can eat a pot of beans in one gulp and pick his teeth with barbed wire."

Pecos Bill's description of a tough guy is **hyperbole**. It's a humorous exaggeration that the reader is not meant to believe.
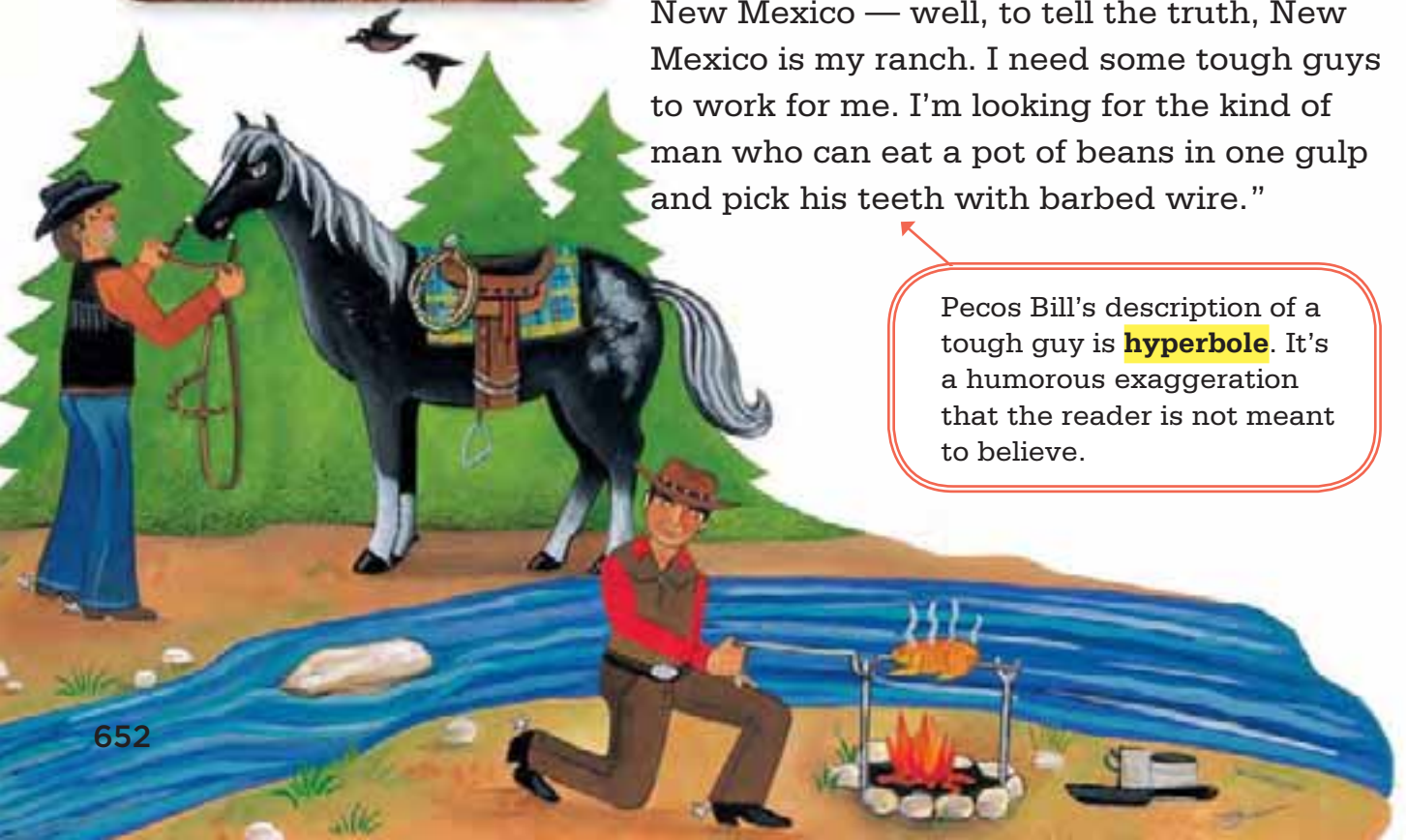
The prospector said some tough cowhands were camped out 200 miles down the river. Bill and his horse set off in that direction, and before long, a mountain lion leaped from a boulder straight down on Pecos Bill.

Bill's horse didn't wait around to see what happened next. If he had, all he would have seen was a blur of flying fur. He would have heard nothing but hideous snarls and groans. When the fur settled, the big cat was apologizing to Bill.

"How can I make it up to you?" it asked.

"You can't, but I'm putting this saddle on you," said Bill. "You scared off my horse, and I hate walkin'."

So Pecos Bill rode the cat to the tough guys' campsite. Those tough men took one look at Bill on that mountain lion and made him their new boss. Then the whole crew headed out for New Mexico.

Back on the ranch, Pecos Bill caught a wild black horse for himself and named it Widow-Maker. That crazy horse had the power of twelve horses and wouldn't let anyone but Bill ride him.

Pecos Bill also got himself a spouse. He first spied Slue-Foot Sue on the Rio Grande. She was riding a catfish the size of a boat and whooping at the top of her lungs.

The day she married Bill, Slue-Foot Sue wore a dress with one of those old-time bustles. The bustle was a steel-spring contraption that made the back of her dress stick out a mile.

After the wedding, Sue wanted to ride Widow-Maker. Now, Pecos Bill loved Slue-Foot Sue, so he attempted to talk her out of this notion.

"Widow-Maker won't let anybody ride him but me. He'd throw you in a second."

But Sue insisted, and Bill finally let Sue give it a try. Sue got on Widow-Maker, who bucked and jumped and bucked again. Then he threw Slue-Foot Sue, and she sped into the sky like she'd been shot from a cannon. When Sue finished going up, she plummeted down. And when she hit the ground, she bounced on her steel-spring bustle and flew up again, even higher than before. She even hit her head on the moon.

For days, Pecos Bill watched his bouncing bride. Up and down she went. Every time Sue landed, she bounced up higher, until she came down to Earth only once every few weeks.

It took a long time for Pecos Bill to find another bride as accomplished as Slue-Foot Sue. And he never again allowed a wife of his to ride Widow-Maker.

Connect and Compare

1. Find two examples of hyperbole in the descriptions of Slue-Foot Sue and her adventures. **Hyperbole**

2. Which descriptions of Pecos Bill's actions and of his life let you know that this a tall tale? **Apply**

3. Compare Widow-Maker to the mustangs described in *Wild Horses*. How are they similar? How are they different? **Reading/Writing Across Texts**

LOG ON Find out more about tall tales at **www.macmillanmh.com**

Writer's Craft

Tone

Scientific observations include specific details that tell exactly what the writer saw, heard, and felt. Choose words that keep the **tone** as serious and accurate as possible.

I observed a hawk in flight. Then I wrote this accurate observation.

I included words that give *specific* details.

Red-Tailed Hawk

by Jack F.

Yesterday I watched a hawk in the park. It was brown. Its white chest was speckled with brown, too. It flew in big circles, holding its wings straight out. It was hunting. Then it landed on the trunk of an old pine tree.

Through binoculars, I could see the hawk's red tail feathers. Its claws were light gray, and they looked as sharp as fishhooks. That makes it easy for the bird to catch its prey. Its beak was sharp and curved, too.

After a while, it flew away, flapping its powerful wings.

Your Turn

Pretend that you are a scientist. You must observe an animal and write about what you see. The animal could be a wild animal that you observe from a distance, such as a rabbit or a bird. It could be an insect. It could even be your pet. Take notes while you observe. Then write down what you saw and heard—maybe even smelled! Use the Writer's Checklist to check your writing.

Writer's Checklist

✓ **Ideas and Content:** Did I include the most important details in my observation?

✓ **Organization:** Did I list details in the order in which I observed them?

✓ **Voice:** Does my observation's tone rely more on accurate facts than on opinions?

✓ **Word Choice:** Did I include specific details?

✓ **Sentence Fluency:** Did I vary the length of my sentences?

✓ **Conventions:** Did I use comparative and superlative forms correctly?