

Tall Tales

"I was late doing my homework because my freezer wouldn't turn off. It just wouldn't stop pouring out ice. Soon the apartment was so cold that our pet parrot froze solid in flight. Then, when I tried to boil water on the stove, the bubbles froze in the pot."

According to Carolyn S. Brown in *The Tall Tale in American Folklore and Literature*, a **tall tale** is a fictional story which is told in the form of personal narrative or anecdotes, **exaggerated** details. When we think of tall tales, we usually think of the ones that were told in the United States by the settlers and pioneers, although people told tall tales in other places too.

Tall tales share some similarities with other folk tales. At first, tall tales spread by **word of mouth**, just like fables. Also, most of the heroes were common people, not kings, presidents, and rich people.

Later, they were written down, similar to fairy tales, and there are books of tall tales. Comparable to myths, people told tall tales to **connect to their community**, traditions and land. Tall tales were told so people would remember their heroes. Like the fairy tales, the main characters in tall tales were people that inspired their community to do great things. Many of these characters **were real people** who actually lived in the United States and were famous in their state, city, or town.

Some of the most famous tall tales had to do with well known American heroes of the frontier.

- Johnny Appleseed – A friendly folk-hero who traveled the West planting apple trees because he felt his guardian angel told him to §
- Pecos Bill – legendary cowboy who "tamed the wild west"
- Cordwood Pete – Younger brother to lumberjack Paul Bunyan
- Daniel Boone – Blazed a trail across Cumberland Gap to found the first English-speaking colonies west of the Appalachian Mountains §
- Paul Bunyan – huge lumberjack who eats 50 pancakes in one minute
- Davy Crockett – A pioneer and U.S. Congressman from Tennessee who later died at the Battle of the Alamo §
- Febold Feboldson – A Nebraska farmer who could fight a drought
- Mike Fink – The toughest boatman on the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, and a rival of Davy Crockett. Also known as the King of the Mississippi River Keelboatmen §
- John Henry – A mighty steel-driving African American§
- Calamity Jane – A tough Wild West woman §
- Casey Jones – A brave and gritty railroad engineer §
- Nat Love, also known as "Deadwood Dick", was born a slave in Tennessee in 1854. Tales of his adventures after emancipation, as a cowboy and as a Pullman porter, gained such fantastical elements as to be considered tall tales §
- Joe Magarac – A Pittsburgh steelworker made of steel
- Molly Pitcher – A heroine of the American Revolutionary War §

When tall tales were first created they were not very complimentary to minorities and women. But today, people who tell and write tall tales try to be much more respectful.

Name: _____ -

Date: _____

After reading the text, compare the other kinds of folklore to tall tales in the Venn Diagram Table below. It works the same way as a Venn Diagram, but instead of circles, we use a table.

Fairy Tales	The Same	Tall Tales

Fables	The Same	Tall Tales

Myths	The Same	Tall Tales