



## “Stories From America’s Backyard”



Presented By

**Fantasy Theatre Factory**

“Stories From America’s Backyard” was designed and created by Fantasy Theatre Factory to highlight stories that were passed on verbally from one generation of Americans to the next. These stories were chosen for their regional appeal as well as their stylistic differences: Yarn spinning, tall tales, Indian legends, Appalachian humor, and stories from particular regions are represented in this program. Fantasy Theatre adds its own special touch to each of these stories with added humor, costumes, sets and music.

## What are Tall Tales and Legends?



Tall tales spread as a popular literary form in the United States, especially on the frontier, in the middle of the nineteenth century. Although they were passed around by word of mouth before and after being written down, they often were written as "mock oral tales" in newspapers and almanacs, also appearing in popular songs and plays. Tall tales often combined realistic local or regional details with wildly preposterous, imaginative and comical fantasies. Some tall tales are also called legends, since they are extraordinary stories associated with real people, places, or historical events.



Tall tales also overlap with other traditions of folklore and mythology when the tales contain *pourquoi tale* plot elements - stories about the origins of things. Tall tale heroes bring about creations of vast proportions, such as stirring up enough dust to make the Smoky Mountains smoky or creating a new constellation of stars. Some of the best known Cherokee tales from Appalachia and beyond, told in humorous and serious variants, with animal or human protagonists, explain the origins of the Milky Way, fire, corn, strawberries, and the opossum's bare tail.



Tall tales are a real and valuable part of American history and culture. Much of their content is not realistic, but they represent truths about human characteristics or experiences, even if they do so in exaggerated or fantastical forms. Tall tales in which humans depict their heroes as larger than a bear or a mountain, as strong enough to chop firewood for every house in West Virginia during a freezing winter, reflect some very basic fears and desires about humans' relationships with nature and with each other.

\*Adapted From “A Background on Tall Tales” by Tina Hanlon



## Pre - Show Activities



### Activity: "The Changing Play"

- Have the class sit as though they were a grown up audience watching a play.
  - Have them change their reactions as the imaginary play changes from comedy, drama, Horror, Musical etc.
  - Ask the class to pretend to be a bad audience that is distracting and impolite. Then ask them to behave correctly.
  - Discuss the difference and create a plan together for appropriate theater behavior.

**TH.D.1.1.3** (PreK-2) The student understands appropriate audience responses to dramatic presentations.



“Did you know that there are liars' contests held by adults in Appalachia? Many tall tales depict incredible things happening to ordinary people. These tales are often about growing gigantic vegetables or performing highly exaggerated feats of hunting or fishing.” Use the following activities to create your own tall tales and legends!

*Quoted from: <http://www.ferrum.edu/applit>*

### Activity: How To Tell A Whopper

- Use the Bibliography to find a *tall tale* to read to the class.
  - Ask students to identify what elements combine to make it a tall tale.
    1. *A larger than life or superhuman, main character with a specific job.*
    2. *A problem that is solved in a funny way.*
    3. *Exaggerated details that describe things as greater than they really are.*
    4. *Characters who use everyday language.*
  - Ask students to finish telling one of the following stories:
    - “*I don't have my Homework Because...*”
    - “*I was walking home from school when suddenly...*”
    - “*I have the most amazing pet...*”
  - Encourage them to include as many incredible elements as they can.
  - Try to make each story taller by adding more outrageous details.
- During the play students can look for more settings and situations to create new tall tales of their own.
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**LA.E.2.1.1** - (PreK-2) The student uses personal perspective in responding to a work of literature as relating characters and simple events in a story or biography to people or events in his or her own life.  
**LA.E.1.1.2** - (PreK -2 and 3-5) The student knows the basic characteristics of fables, stories, and legends  
**LA.E.2.2.3** - (3-5) The student responds to a work of literature by explaining how the motives of characters or the causes of events compare with those in his or her own life.

## **AFTER THE SHOW**

### **Activity: What is a Tall Tale?**

- Review the elements of tall tales (see “How to Tell A Whopper“)
- Ask students to identify tall tale characteristics from the play  
“*Stories From America’s Backyard.*”

**LA.E.1.1.2** - (PreK-2) The student understands the common features of a variety of literary forms. Identifies the story elements of setting plot character problem and solution /resolution

**LA.E.1.1.2** - (PreK -2 and 3-5) The student knows the basic characteristics of fables, stories, and legends.

**LA.B.2.2.1** - (3-5) Writes comments and observations that reflect comprehension of content and experiences from a variety of media.

**LA.C.2.2 & 3** - (3-5) The student uses viewing strategies effectively and determines main concep and supporting details in a non print media message.

### **Activity: Truly Tall Tales**

- Using a piece of long paper from a wider roll of blank paper. At the top of the paper, the students either draw pictures of themselves or attach a photograph, and at the bottom they can draw their feet or shoes.
  - On the blank paper in between, the students can write a tall tale about themselves.
  - These make an effective display, and the idea of stretching the truth in a tall tale is obvious!

*Resource: <http://www.ferrum.edu/applit>*

**LA.E.2.1.1** - (PreK-2) The student uses personal perspective in responding to a work of literature as relating characters and simple events in a story or biography to people or events in his or her own life.

**LA.E.1.1.2** - (PreK -2 and 3-5) The student knows the basic characteristics of fables, stories, and legends.

**LA.E.2.2.3** - (3-5) The student responds to a work of literature by explaining how the motives of characters or the causes of events compare with those in his or her own life.

## **Want More?**

*Fantasy Theatre offers over TEN different school programs for each school season. These programs are designed to cover a wide variety of themes from children’s literature to environmental issues. All programs are self contained and will travel to your school. All shows have elements of music, mime, acting, comedy and costumes. If you enjoyed “Stories from America’s backyard” our other exciting programs are for you! We will be happy to give you more information on them just visit [www.ftfshows.com](http://www.ftfshows.com) or call us at 305-284-8800.*

# Bibliography

- Jumping Frog of Calaveras County**, from The Complete Works of Mark Twain
- High Diving**, from Whoppers: Tall tales and other Lies Collected from American folklore by Alvin Schwartz
- Turtle's Race With Bear**, from Iroquois Stories by Joe Bruchac. The Crossing Press, (cassette tape) 2 Middle Grove Road, Green field Center, N.Y. 1988
- Goober Patch**, from The Complete Tales of Uncle Remus by Joel Candler Harris. Houghton, Mifflin, N.Y. 1955.
- That's Good, That's Bad**, an original story by Fantasy Theatre based on Appalachian style stories from Grandfather Tales by Richard Chase. Houghton, Mifflin, Boston. 1976.
- Paul Bunyan**, and adaptation by Fantasy Theatre adapted from Paul Bunyan by Esther Shepherd. Harcourt, Brace & Co. N.Y. 1925.

## Suggested Reading for More American Tall Tales, Folk Tales and Legends:

- Complete Tales of Uncle Remus by Joel Chandler Harris. Illustrations by Arthur Burdette Frost, New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1955.
- Death of the Iron Horse by Paul Goble: Bradbury Press NY; 1987
- Grandfather Tale. By Richard Chase. Illustrated by Berkeley Williams Jr. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1948
- Iroquois Stories by Joe Bruchac; Greenfield Center, N.Y. Godd Mind Records, 1988
- Jack Tales. By Richard Chase
- John Henry and His Hammer. By Harold Fenton. New York: Alfred A. Knorp, 1950.
- Pecos Bill. By James C. Bowman. Chicago: Albert Whitman & Co. 1937.
- Tall tales from Texas Cow Camps. Author Unknown. Dallas. Southwest Press. 1944
- Tall Tale America by Walter Blair: Cowar, McCann & Geoghehan, Inc. 1944
- Time For Fairy Tales. Compiled by May Hill Arbuthnot. Chicago: Scott Foresman, 1941.
- The Legends of Paul Bunyan by Roberta Strauss Feuerlicht: Collier-MacMillan, Limited, London. 1966.
- The Rainbow Book Of American Folk Tales and Legends. By Maria leach. Cleveland: Wolrd Publishing Co. 1958
- The whistling Skeleton by Grinnell, Bierhorst, Parker; Four Winds Press 1982.
- Whoppers: Tall Tales and Other lies Collected from American Folklore by Alvin Schwartz, Illustrated by Glen Rounds.

## Theater Vocabulary

<b>Play</b>	<i>A story written for the stage and the performance of that story.</i>
<b>Set</b>	<i>Where the play is performed.</i>
<b>Actors</b>	<i>The people who perform the play.</i>
<b>Script</b>	<i>The written story that is performed by the actors.</i>
<b>Cast</b>	<i>A collective term for the actors who perform the play.</i>
<b>Rehearsal</b>	<i>Practice of the play.</i>
<b>Prop</b>	<i>Any object an actor holds in their hand.</i>
<b>Performance</b>	<i>Acting out the script for an audience.</i>
<b>Audience</b>	<i>People who listen and watch the play.</i>
<b>Stage</b>	<i>Where the play is performed.</i>
<b>Off Stage</b>	<i>Any area that is not in view of the audience.</i>
<b>On Stage</b>	<i>Any area that is in view of the audience.</i>
<b>Upstage</b>	<i>On Stage direction indicating moving away from the audience.</i>
<b>Downstage</b>	<i>Moving towards the audience.</i>
<b>Stage Right/Left</b>	<i>The actor's right or left when facing the audience.</i>
<b>Performance</b>	<i>Acting out the play for the audience.</i>
<b>Applause</b>	<i>Audience clapping that says "thank you for a job well done."</i>
<b>Bow</b>	<i>Bending at the waist, an actor's thank you for applause.</i>
<b>Horror</b>	<i>A type of story intended to cause intense fear.</i>
<b>Story</b>	<i>An account of event or series of events. A Tale.</i>

## ABOUT FANTASY THEATRE FACTORY

Fantasy Theatre Factory is a professional *touring* theatre created in New York in 1977, by Ed Allen and Mimi Schultz, performing artists and teachers. We present theatre for family audiences. Our 14 touring shows appeal to pre-school, elementary, family, adult and senior audiences. Our shows cover themes of: Children's Literature, Reading, Ecology, Social Service, Black history, Dance, English, and Music. We perform in rural and inner city schools, theatre, parks, hospitals, community centers, practically everywhere. In this manner, Fantasy Theatre Factory presents more than 400 Florida programs reaching over 150,000 people each year. Our mission is to make more quality theater programs available to more people.