

Class Notes

Tall Tales

Story Outline

Introduction

Main events

Conclusion - What happened
in the end

Exaggerated elements:

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Highlight the following info in the text: **Introduction** - **Main events** - **What happened in the end** - **Exaggerated Elements**

Today we tell a traditional American story called a "tall tale." A tall tale is a story about a person who is larger than life. The descriptions in the story are exaggerated – much greater than in real life. Long ago, the people who settled in undeveloped areas in America first told tall tales. After a hard day's work, people gathered to tell each other funny stories.

Pecos Bill was a larger than life hero of the American West. No one knows who first told stories about Pecos Bill. Cowboys may have invented the stories. Others say Edward O'Reilly invented the character in stories he wrote for the Century Magazine in the early 1900s. The stories were collected in a book called "The Saga of Pecos Bill," published in 1923.

Another writer, James Cloyd Bowman, wrote an award-winning children's book called "Pecos Bill: The Greatest Cowboy of All Time." The book won the Newbery Honor in 1938.

Pecos Bill was not a historical person. But he does represent the spirit of early settlers in the American West. His unusual childhood and extraordinary actions tell about people who believed there were no limits to what they could do. Now, here is Barbara Klein with our story.

Pecos Bill had one of the strangest childhoods a boy ever had. It all started after his father decided that there was no longer enough room in east Texas for his family.

"Pack up, Ma!" he cried. "Neighbors movin' in 50 miles away! It's getting too crowded!"

So they loaded up a wagon with all their things. Now some say they had 15 children while others say 18. However many there were, the children were louder than thunder. And as they set off across the wild country of west Texas, their mother and father could hardly hear a thing.

Covered Wagon of the Old West

Now, as they came to the Pecos River, the wagon hit a big rock. The force threw little Bill out of the wagon and he landed on the sandy ground. Mother did not know Bill was gone until she gathered the children for the midday meal. Mother set off with some of the children to look for Bill, but they could find no sign of him.

Well, some people say Bill was just a baby when his family lost him. Others say he was four years old. But all agree that a group of animals called coyotes found Bill and raised him. Bill did all the things those animals did, like chase lizards and howl at the moon. He became as good a coyote as any.

Coyote

Now, Bill spent 17 years living like a coyote until one day a cowboy rode by on his horse. Some say the cowboy was one of Bill's brothers. Whoever he was, he took one look at Bill and asked, "What are you?"

Bill was not used to human language. At first, he could not say anything. The cowboy repeated his question. This time, Bill said, "**varmint.**"

That is a word used for any kind of wild animal.

"No you aren't," said the cowboy.

"Yes, I am," said Bill. "I have fleas."

"Lots of people have fleas," said the cowboy. "You don't have a tail."

"Yes, I do," said Bill.

"Show it to me then," the cowboy said.

Bill looked at his backside and realized that he did not have a tail like the other coyotes. "Well, what am I then?" asked Bill.

"You're a cowboy! So start acting like one!" the cowboy cried out. Well that was all Bill needed to hear. He said goodbye to his coyote friends and left to join the world of humans.

Now, Pecos Bill was a good cowboy. Still, he hungered for adventure. One day he heard about a rough group of men. There is some **debate** over what the group was called. But one storyteller calls it the "Hell's Gate Gang."

So Bill set out across the rough country to find this gang of men. Well, Bill's horse soon was injured so Bill had to carry it for a hundred miles. Then Bill met a rattlesnake 50 feet long. The snake made a hissing noise and was not about to let Bill pass. But after a tense minute, Bill beat the snake until it surrendered. He felt sorry for the varmint, though, and wrapped it around his arm.

After Bill walked another hundred miles, he came across an angry mountain lion. There was a huge battle, but Bill took control of the big cat and put his saddle on it. He rode that mountain lion all the way to the camp of the Hell's Gate Gang.

Now, when Bill saw the gang he shouted out, "Who's the boss around here?"

A huge cowboy, 9 feet tall, took one look at Bill and said in a shaky voice, "I was the boss.

But you are the boss from here on in."

With his gang, Pecos Bill was able to create the biggest ranch in the Southwest. Bill and his men had so many cattle that they needed all of New Mexico to hold them. Arizona was the pasture where the cattle ate grass.

Pecos Bill invented the art of being a cowboy. He invented the skill of throwing a special rope called a **lasso** over a cow's head to catch wandering cattle.

Cowboy throwing lasso

Some say he used a rattlesnake for a lasso. Others say he made a lasso so big that it circled the whole Earth.

Bill invented the method of using a hot branding iron to permanently put the mark of a ranch on a cow's skin. That helped stop people from stealing cattle. Some say he invented cowboy songs to help calm the cattle and make the cowboy's life easier. But he is also said to have invented **tarantulas** and **scorpions** as jokes. Cowboys have had trouble with those poisonous creatures ever since.

Now, Pecos Bill could ride anything that ever was. So, as some tell the story, there came a storm bigger than any other. It all happened during the worst drought the West had ever seen. It was so dry that horses and cows started to dry up and blow away in the wind. So when Bill saw the windstorm, he got an idea. The huge tornado kicked across the land like a wild bronco. But Bill jumped on it without a thought.

He rode that tornado across Texas, New Mexico and Arizona, all the time squeezing the rain out of it to save the land from drought. When the storm was over, Bill fell off the tornado. He landed in California. He left a hole so deep that to this day it is known as Death Valley.

Now, Bill had a horse named Widow Maker. He got that name because any man who rode that horse would be thrown off and killed, and his wife would become a widow. No one could ride that horse but Bill.

And Widow Maker, in the end, caused the biggest problem for Pecos Bill. You see, one day Bill saw a woman. Not just any woman, but a wild, red-haired woman, riding a giant catfish down the Rio Grande River.

Her name was Slue-foot Sue. And Bill fell in love with her at first sight. Well, Bill would not rest until he had asked for her hand in marriage. And Slue-foot Sue accepted.

On their wedding day, Pecos Bill dressed in his best buckskin suit. And Sue wore a

beautiful white dress with a huge steel-spring bustle in the back. It was the kind of big dress that many women wore in those days – the bigger the better.

Now, after the marriage ceremony Slue-foot Sue got a really bad idea. She decided that she wanted to ride Widow Maker. Bill begged her not to try. But she had her **mind made up**.

Well, the second she jumped on the horse's back he began to kick and buck like nothing anyone had ever seen. He sent Sue flying so high that she sailed clear over the new moon.

She fell back to Earth, but the steel-spring bustle just bounced her back up as high as before.

Now, there are many different stories about what happened next. One story says Bill saw that Sue was in trouble. She would keep bouncing forever if nothing was done. So he took his rope out – though some say it was a huge rattlesnake – and lassoed Sue to catch her and bring her down to Earth. Only, she just bounced him back up with her.

Earth's Moon

Somehow the two came to rest on the moon. And that's where they stayed. Some people say they raised a family up there. Their children were as loud and wild as Bill and Sue were in their younger days. People say the sound of thunder that sometimes carries over the dry land around the Pecos River is nothing more than Pecos Bill's family laughing up a storm.

This tall tale of Pecos Bill was adapted for Learning English and produced by Mario Ritter. Your storyteller was Barbara Klein. The video was produced by Adam Brock.
