

*Grammar & Composition - Tall Tales*

Waldorf Curriculum

Grade 4

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*Grammar & Composition - Tall Tales*  
Program of Study

Part One:

Elements of a Tall Tale

Part Two:

Spelling & Grammar

Part Three:

Handwriting & Composition

## Booklist: Tall Tales

"Pet Goldfish"	included
"The Popcorn Blizzard"	included
<u>McBroom's Wonderful One-Acre Farm</u>	Sid Fleischman
<u>Iva Dunnit and the Big Wind</u>	Carol Purdy
<u>Three Strong Women: A Tall Tale from Japan</u>	Claus Stamm

Find a list of Internet tall tale resources in the Appendix. Feel free to choose the stories which you enjoy the most.

## Grammar & Composition

<u>Amelia Bedelia</u> (and series)	Peggy Parish
<u>Teaching English</u>	Roy Wilkinson
<u>An English Manual for the Elementary School</u>	Dorothy Harrer
<u>Writers Inc: A Student Handbook for Writing and Learning</u>	Patrick Sebranek
<u>The Man Who Lost His Head</u>	Claire Huchet Bishop
<u>The Day Jimmy's Boa Ate the Wash</u>	Trinka Hakes Noble
<u>Stringbean's Trip to the Shining Sea</u>	Vera B. Williams
<u>The Twelve Days of Christmas: Correspondence</u>	John Julius Norwich

## Other Resources

### Spelling

Ella Minnow Pea

Mark Dunn

Alphabet dice game

[http://www.hearthsong.com/hearthsong/product.do?section\\_id=0&bc=1005&pgc=1250&cmvalue=HS|0|Normal%20Search%20Result|P1](http://www.hearthsong.com/hearthsong/product.do?section_id=0&bc=1005&pgc=1250&cmvalue=HS|0|Normal%20Search%20Result|P1)

### Handwriting

Form Drawing for Better Handwriting books 1 & 2

[http://www.waldorfbooks.com/edu/thr/form\\_drawing\\_handwriting.htm](http://www.waldorfbooks.com/edu/thr/form_drawing_handwriting.htm)

These are basic handwriting exercises, transitioning from running forms to cursive letters. They are done in worksheet form which may be photocopied and given over and over, useful for independent practice.

## Setting Up Your Plan Book

I think it works best to use a three ring binder as a plan book – have a daily plan page and a daily journaling page face to face (so punch the holes in the daily plan page on the right hand side of the paper). This way, you can alter the template you use if you find it isn't working for you without having to throw out the whole book. You also can look back at exactly what you did that day to help you recall the day's events, as you're journaling. Then flip the page and use the journaling you just did to help you sketch out the next day.

You will need two three ring binders, paper (either computer paper and a hole punch or a pack of lined paper), four dividers, a pack of file folders, and a filing cabinet or crate.

One binder is for the unit you are currently teaching (A). The other binder is for the upcoming unit (B). You can print out a cover page and slide it down in the clear plastic cover to identify each with the name of the unit. In binder A, set up the four dividers. On top is your notes for the unit. If you purchased one of our units, it goes there. If you wrote down your own notes, they go there. After the first divider (labeled Week One) put your plan book pages for the first week. The Weekly Plan goes on top – after that, the pages for each day. After the second divider (labeled Week Two) put your plan book pages for the second week. And so on.

In binder B, simply keep a stack of paper on which to write your notes and brainstorm. I like to keep it by my bedside as I often think of teaching ideas while drifting off to sleep. When the first unit ends, move all the papers from binder A into a file folder, labeled with the name of the unit and the dates and the child you taught it to, and file it away. Move the notes you made from the binder B into the binder A. Now use binder B to prepare for the next unit.

Alternatively, keep binder A intact and place it on the shelf (if you'll be using this unit again) and place four new weekly tabs behind your planning notes for the next unit in binder B. Then you'll need to purchase a new binder to help you organize your brainstorm notes for the following unit.

Use the cover page at the beginning of this unit for your binder cover page. I have also included a sample weekly overview planning page and a set of journaling pages.

# WEEKLY PLAN

## HEAD

This week we will be working on:

**Day One -**

**Day Two -**

**Day Three -**

**Day Four -**

**Day Five –**

## HEART

This week we will be working on:

## HANDS

This week we will be working on:

*Grammar & Composition - Tall Tales*  
Journal Page

Week One:



*Grammar & Composition - Tall Tales*  
Journal Page

Week Two:

*Grammar & Composition - Tall Tales*  
Journal Page

Week Three:

*Grammar & Composition - Tall Tales*  
Journal Page

Week Four:

# *Grammar & Composition - Tall Tales*

## Unit Introduction

During the first part of the unit you will be studying a series of tall tales in order to determine their common elements. Traditionally with the Waldorf method, new material is processed over three days. This schedule is:

**presentation – sleep**

**retelling – artistic expression – sleep**

**going deeper or elaborating**

The purpose of this process is for your child to become fully engaged with the story on all levels. Having your child retell the story back to you is absolutely *essential* – the “retelling” on day two is for her to do, not you. Adding a story to the main lesson book takes place on the second and third days. The most important thing to remember here is that main lesson book work is your child’s absolute best work. Donna Simmons calls it the Good Book. There can be no spelling or grammar errors. The easiest way to do this is for your child to dictate or write a first draft of what she would like to put in her main lesson book; then you correct it and she copies the final version. After the written portion is added to the MLB, your child can add a corresponding illustration. Artistic expression can also take the form of acting out the story. This can be a lot of fun with different colored silk scarves to act as the “costumes.”

The second portion of the unit involves your child writing four pieces: her own narrative piece, a tall tale, a personal letter, and a business letter. For these exercises, you should keep all the stages of the writing process in a portfolio which becomes part of your child’s assessment for this unit. The stages in the writing process which you should keep record of are

1. Brainstorming (prewriting) – this includes notes, webbing, etc.
2. First draft
3. Revising
4. Second draft
5. Editing & proofreading
6. Final draft

The final version of your child’s own tall tale may also be added to the main lesson book and illustrated. The final versions of the letters should be mailed to their recipients.

# *Grammar & Composition - Tall Tales*

## Parent/Teacher Background

What is a tall tale? A tall tale is a unique story form that features

- (1) a larger-than-life, or superhuman, main character with a specific task,
- (2) a problem that is solved in a humorous or outrageous way,
- (3) exaggerated details that describe things larger than they really are, and
- (4) characters who use everyday language.

Many tall tales are based on actual people or on a composite of actual people. Exaggeration is the major element in tall tales.

## Websites for Teachers

**American Folktales Unit** from the *Internet School Library Media Center*

<http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/folkunit.htm>

Here are some 'springboard' ideas for kicking off a unit on folk and or tall tales.

### **Paul Bunyan**

[http://askeric.org/cgi-](http://askeric.org/cgi-bin/printlessons.cgi/Virtual/Lessons/Language_Arts/Story_Telling/STT0200.html)

[bin/printlessons.cgi/Virtual/Lessons/Language Arts/Story Telling/STT0200.html](http://askeric.org/cgi-bin/printlessons.cgi/Virtual/Lessons/Language_Arts/Story_Telling/STT0200.html)

This link contains a loong list of resources for stories about Paul Bunyan. It is interesting to see that he is credited with exploits in nearly every part of the country. One or more of your girls may be interested in finding Paul Bunyan stories from all around the US and creating a large map with pins in it, identifying the location of each tale.

**Welcome to the Wonderful World of Tall Tales** by E. Rubinfeld & C. Siwinski

<http://www.ga.k12.pa.us/academics/LS/4/la/4r/talltale/introres.htm>

Here is a unit plan for study of the literature genre of tall tales. Specific activities, as well as samples of student work, are included.

# *Grammar & Composition - Tall Tales*

## Elements of a Tall Tale

### Booklist:

McBroom's Wonderful One-Acre Farm

Sid Fleischman

Iva Durnit and the Big Wind

Carol Purdy

Three Strong Women: A Tall Tale from Japan

Claus Stamm

### Activities:

#### Set A

- Read or tell the story "Pet Goldfish" (next page).
- **Discussion** – identify the element of exaggeration, the main feature of the story which identifies it as a tall tale. Here are some basic discussion points – move slowly or quickly through the discussion depending on your particular child.

Lots of people have pet goldfish. However, the way Grandfather's goldfish behaved was most unusual. Do you believe it liked to have its back scratched? Have you ever heard of a goldfish coming to meet someone at the door? Grandfather's pet behaved more like a dog than a fish.

In many ways the goldfish was like a dog. As Grandfather told it, the goldfish 'could sit up and beg, roll over, and shake hands – I mean fins.' (Even Grandfather has to remind himself that it was a goldfish and had fins.)

We know a fish would never do the things Grandfather claimed his pet could do. Statements like those Grandfather made are called exaggerations. An exaggeration is a statement that goes beyond truth. Authors sometimes use exaggerations in stories to add humor. What exaggerations can you find in Grandfather's account of Sundays in the park?

A kind of story that always has exaggeration is the tall tale. A tall tale is a story so full of exaggeration that it is completely unbelievable.

- I've also included some basic worksheet-type questions that you can assign as independent work for further assessment, if you want to make sure your child understands the concept of exaggeration.
- After reading the story and having your discussion, visit a pet store to observe some goldfish. Take along a pad of paper and take some notes about its activities. What is typical behavior for a *real* goldfish?

## Pet Goldfish

Grandfather told me that when he was young he went to work in New York City. He missed his family and home in the Catskill Mountains. So he bought a large goldfish in a fishbowl. After that he wasn't so lonely coming home at night to his room.

He said, "After a time the goldfish seemed glad to see me. It would come to the top of the bowl to have its back scratched. It would even nip my finger.

"Soon the goldfish became tame. It would jump out of the bowl when it heard the key turn in the lock. Then it would wriggle across the floor to meet me. I'd put it in the water. Pretty soon it would jump out again and tag along at my heels. Finally it spent more time out of the water than in. Just for fun I taught it to sit up and beg, roll over, and shake hands – I mean fins. I kept my goldfish for months.

"One Sunday morning I got the idea that the goldfish would like to go to the park. I made a harness from a shoelace. Then I fixed a leash to the harness. The two of us strolled around the park.

"For many Sundays we enjoyed these outings. The goldfish snapped at flies that came near. Several times when birds sang in the trees overhead, it made a hissing sound as though trying to sing.

"Many times I took off the harness and let my pet roll and romp in the grass like a frisky puppy. Then one day I got careless. I left the harness off as we were crossing the foot bridge. The goldfish slipped through a wide crack and fell into the water below. It drowned before I could fish it out.

"That was the turning point in my life. I was so heart-broken I lost interest in living in the city. A week later I was back in the Catskills to stay."

from Tall Tales of the Catskills  
by Frank L. Du Mond

Name:

Date:

### Independent Skills Review

Read each numbered group of sentences below. Answer *Yes* if the sentences contain an exaggeration. Answer *No* if they do not.

1. Margie looked at the broken window. Then she turned to me. "You've been told a million times not to play ball in the house," she said.
  
2. It was a hot summer day. As Cissie walked from the beach, the hot sidewalk seemed to burn her feet. She stopped and slipped her feet into her shoes.
  
3. "Once we had a terrible windstorm," said Uncle Ned. "I went to bed one night in my house in Kansas. The storm blew all night. Next morning my house and I were in Illinois."
  
4. Tallville had never seen a worse winter. It was so cold that when people spoke, their words turned to ice.
  
5. Pedro carried the bag of groceries into the kitchen. He put it on the table and groaned. "That bag weighs a ton," he said.



#### Set B

- Have your children retell the story "Pet Goldfish." Ask them: what is a tall tale?
- Each child should add the story, and a corresponding illustration, to her MLB.

#### Set C

- If you have a pet, observe its behaviors for a while, then take turns telling wild stories about things you supposedly saw your pet do, adding tons of exaggeration! Ask your children: what is one reason authors sometimes use exaggeration in stories?
- Read or tell the story "The Popcorn Blizzard" (next page). Make popcorn balls: [http://www.ehow.com/how\\_4010\\_make-popcorn-balls.html](http://www.ehow.com/how_4010_make-popcorn-balls.html).

#### Set D

- Have your children retell the story "The Popcorn Blizzard."
- Each child should add the story, and a corresponding illustration, to her MLB.

#### Set E

- Assign each person a different tall tale to read aloud to the group. It would be nice to read McBroom's Wonderful One-Acre Farm, which contains three tall tales about the same lovable family (a great group of characters!); each member of your family could read one. However, you can also look around the internet resources given in the Appendix for some other tales your family might enjoy.

#### Set F

- Although many people believe the tall tale is a uniquely American literary form, that is not entirely true. Three Strong Women is an example of a tall tale story from Japan. Perhaps you could assign Iva Dunit and the Big Wind to one child and Three Strong Women to the other and have them each read their story and then retell it to the other. Then the two girls could work together to compare and contrast the two tales. A Venn diagram would work really nicely for this. Draw your own diagram or use the one found here: <http://www.lburkhart.com/elem/clarist/venn.gif>

If your children are not familiar with Venn diagrams as organizational tools, this is a great introduction. They will find them useful later on when researching and planning future writing pieces. In this Venn diagram, each circle represents a story. Where the circles overlap, fill in characteristics which the two stories *share*. On the sides write the things which are *unique* about each story.

# The Popcorn Blizzard

When Paul Bunyan had cut down all the trees in North Dakota, he decided to go west. It was summertime, and the forest was sweet with the smell of green trees. The spreading branches cast their cool shadows on the ground.

"We must cross some wide plains," said Paul to his woodcutters. "It is so hot here that not even a blade of grass can grow."

With Paul and Babe the Blue Ox leading the way, everyone started across the plains on their long journey west. In a few days they had left the woods and were knee deep in sand. The sand stretched out before them for miles and miles. The sun became hotter and hotter!

"I made some vanilla ice cream," said Hot Biscuit Slim one day as he served lunch. "But the ice cream became so hot under this boiling sun that I couldn't touch it!"

Tiny Tim, the water boy, was so hot and tired that Paul had to put him up on Babe's back. He rode there the rest of the trip. Every time Babe took a step forward, he moved ahead two miles, and Tiny Tim had to hold on with all his might. Even Ole the Big Swede, who was so strong he could carry a full-grown horse under each arm, began to tire.

There was not a tree in sight. Paul Bunyan's workers had never before been away from the forest. They missed the cool shade of the trees. Whenever Paul stopped to rest, thirty or forty workers would stand in his shadow to escape the boiling sun.

"I won't be able to last another day if it doesn't begin to cool off soon!" cried Brimstone Bill.

Even Paul Bunyan finally became tired. He took his heavy double-bitted ax from his shoulder and dragged it behind him as he walked. The huge ax cut a ragged ditch through the sand that can be seen to this day. It is now called the Grand Canyon, and the Colorado River runs through it.

It became so hot that everyone was worn out. They refused to go another step. Hot Biscuit Slim had complained that there was very little food left in camp. That night Paul took Babe the Blue Ox and went on alone into the mountains to the north. In the mountains Paul found a farmer with a barnful of corn.

"I will buy your corn," said Paul to the farmer. So he loaded all the corn on Babe's back and started for camp. By the time he arrived there, the sun was shining again. The day grew hotter as the sun arose overhead. Soon it became so hot that the corn started popping. It shot up into the air in huge clouds of white puffy popcorn.

It kept popping and popping. Soon the air was filled with wonderful white popcorn. It came down all over the camp and almost covered the kitchen. The ground became white with popcorn as far as the eye could see. It fell like a snowstorm until everything was covered two feet deep with fluffy popcorn.

"A snowstorm! A snowstorm!" cried Tiny Tim and all the other workers as they saw it falling. Never had they seen anything like it before. Some ran into the bunkhouse and put on their mittens. Others put on heavy overcoats and woolen caps. They clapped each other on the back and laughed and shouted for joy.

"Let's make snowshoes!" cried Ole the Big Swede. So they all made snowshoes and waded around in the white popcorn and threw popcorn snowballs at each other. Everybody forgot how hot it had been the day before. Even the horses thought it was real snow, and some of them almost froze to death before the workers could put woolen blankets on them and lead them to shelter.

Babe the Blue Ox knew it was only popcorn and winked at Paul.

Paul Bunyan chuckled to himself at the popcorn blizzard and decided to start west again while everyone was feeling so happy. He found the workers all huddled around the kitchen fire.

"Now is the time to move on west," said Paul, "before it begins to get hot again." So they packed up and started. The workers waded through the popcorn and blew on their hands to keep them warm. Some claimed their feet were frostbitten, and others rubbed their ears to keep them from freezing.

After traveling a few weeks more, everyone saw ahead the great forest they had set out to reach. The workers cheered Paul Bunyan, who had led them safely over the hot desert plains. Babe the Blue Ox laughed and winked at Paul whenever anyone spoke of the great blizzard.

from Paul Bunyon Swings His Axe  
by Dell J. McCormick

Name:

Date:

## Independent Skills Review

### **Compare and Contrast Two Tall Tale Characters**

Pick two tall tale characters and analyze how they were alike and different.

1. First start by identifying the story elements of the tall tales. What parts of their stories make them a tall tale? What exaggerations are made?
2. Another name for a hero is a legend. Do you think a tall tale is similar to a person who is a legend? Do you think either of your characters were American heroes? Why or why not?
3. Do you think authors of the tall tales did research? Why?
4. Do you think either character originated from a true story and then was exaggerated?

# *Grammar & Composition - Tall Tales*

## Spelling & Grammar

### Booklist:

<u>Amelia Bedelia</u> (and series)	Peggy Parish
<u>Teaching English</u>	Roy Wilkinson
<u>An English Manual for the Elementary School</u>	Dorothy Harrer
<u>Writers Inc</u>	Patrick Sebranek et al
<u>The Man Who Lost His Head</u>	Claire Huchet Bishop

### Activities:

#### Set A

- Check out several of the Amelia Bedelia books from the library and read through them with your children. They will no doubt be rolling on the floor with laughter, since they are old enough to catch the jokes (although these are early reader books they are excellent for introducing the concept of “homophones” – words which sound alike but are spelled differently, and to look at some of the idioms in our language).
- Follow up with some homophone worksheets, as desired.  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/words/spelling/recognising/homophones/worksheet.shtml>
- Another good site for extra homophone and homonym/antonym resources is <http://www.primaryresources.co.uk/english/englishA8.htm>

#### Set B

- Having established that spelling matters when it comes to establishing meaning, it is time to assign your children regular weekly spelling words. They shouldn't fight this too much since the Amelia Bedelia books get the point across (humorously) that spelling mistakes are a big problem! Usually parents choose spelling words from books that children are reading, either as part of the unit or independently. You can also ask your children if there are words they would like to spell and add several of those each week to the list. Homeschooling children are notorious for having poor spelling, unfortunately, so work hard with them on this. When main lesson book work is done, or your child is writing the final version of a composition piece, do not allow ANY spelling mistakes.

If you'd like to use an independently-designed program of weekly spelling words, I recommend visiting the Evan-Moore Educational Publishers site. They have a spelling book for each grade (grades 1 through 6) and you can purchase them

OR scroll to the bottom of each page and click on “flip through the entire book” to see the words assigned each week for each grade level without having to purchase anything. Here is the fourth grade book:  
<http://www.realread.com/pageview/browse.cgi?site=41906611&book=1557998426>. If your children respond well to worksheets and independent work you may want to purchase the series so that you have something to hand out and concrete ways to assess their progress.

#### Set C

- For some fun spelling practice, I really recommend that you purchase a set of alphabet dice and play games with them (game suggestions are included with the set). This is an especially nice fireside activity on a cold wintry day.
- Another fun way to work with spelling is lipograms. A lipogram is a piece of writing which consciously (and thoroughly) omits one letter. For an example, and some history, see this site: <http://phrontistery.info/lipogram.html>

One of my favorite books, and one which is progressively lipogrammatic, is Ella Minnow Pea. You can decide for yourself if it is suitable to share with your children but I recommend that you read it – you’ll really get a kick out of it. Perhaps as spelling practice you can pick a letter each day and post it on the fridge (maybe in a black box, or with a red line through it) and try to go as long as you can without using any words containing that letter.

#### Set D

- We have seen how spelling mistakes (homophones) can cause changes in meaning. This happens with punctuation, too. Look at this example, which is a good one to put up on the board:

Private! No swimming allowed.

Private? No! Swimming allowed.

Use pages 22-29 of Teaching English by Roy Wilkinson (grade 3 and 4) for some suggestions for active ways to teach punctuation. Also consider “Punctuation Verses” on page 28 of An English Manual for the Elementary School and “Four Kinds of Sentences and the Four Punctuation Sprites” from page 29 of that book. Some families use punctuation gnomes and you can easily make a set of these (there are four) with your children to reinforce the lessons.

Bella Luna Toys sells a set of handmade punctuation gnomes:  
<http://www.bellalunatoys.com/dolls/items/fairiesgnomes/gnowledgegnomes-punct.htm> with a period embroidered on a green gnome, a comma embroidered on a blue gnome, an exclamation point embroidered on a red gnome, and an exclamation point embroidered on a yellow gnome. You could knit or sew these.

<http://ccat.wordpress.com/2007/08/14/some-gnome-fever/>

- Introduce Writer's Inc at this time, as there is a helpful student section in the back (yellow pages) beginning on page 455 which will help to review the punctuation and parts of speech you are learning right now, and can be used as a proofreader's guide when you begin the composition section of the unit.
- You may not consider this, but leaving appropriate spaces between each letter (and word) is also a part of punctuation. Give your children the following riddle to illustrate this:

The following sign was posted next to a fence post where animals were hitched.

**TOTI  
EMUL  
ESTO**

Can your children read this sign? Even the most literate might have some difficulty with this, and it can be used in the story of the history of literacy. It illustrates how writing commonly appeared soon after the invention of the alphabet and before the introduction of that basic item of punctuation—the space between words. Once one sees it as “To tie mules to” one can appreciate the humor of how the simple meaning was so easily disguised.

- If time permits, and your children are intrigued, consider studying Morse Code and learning how the letters and words are distinguished from one another. This could even subtly become spelling practice, if your children learn Morse Code in earnest and try to tap words out to each other. Any spelling mistakes will result in confusion to the person transcribing the conversation.

FREE Morse Code Worksheet (pdf):

<http://terrax.org/teacher/lessons/morseplan/worksheet.pdf>

#### Set E

- Parts of speech... I don't know how much your children have already learned. If you need helpful suggestions about how parts of speech are taught in fourth grade (or turn back to previous sections in the book if you find your children are at an earlier level) I again recommend An English Manual for the Elementary School. You'll have to use your own judgment as to how much time to spend on this part of the unit.
- To reinforce work with adjectives, I suggest you read The Man Who Lost His Head by Claire Huchet Bishop and then have the children describe their own heads. This can be a lot of fun and you can even post signs around the neighborhood: Lost!

- Another way to work more with parts of speech is through the use of analogies. This is especially good for prepositions.

For example: Hand is to glove as foot is to sock.

Have your children write out the exact relationship between the first two words as a way of explaining how they solved the analogy. In this case: A hand goes inside a glove to stay warm and a foot goes inside a sock to stay warm. Instead of dwelling a lot on analogies, I recommend you introduce them briefly and then do one per day. Find an Analogy of the Day quiz here:

<http://www.factmonster.com/analogies>

- One final note on abbreviations. When teaching abbreviations, show your children this humorous example from Mark Twain. If "Co." is an abbreviation for "company," then, he playfully suggested, any word ending with a full-stop after an "o" should be similarly extended. So, combining humor and verse, he composed the following:

A man hired by John Smith and Co.  
Loudly declared he would tho.  
Man that he saw  
Dumping dirt near his store.  
The drivers, therefore, didn't do.

Based on this, have your children try to compose similar examples.



# *Grammar & Composition - Tall Tales*

## Handwriting & Composition

### Booklist:

Form Drawing for Better Handwriting volumes 1 & 2

The Day Jimmy's Boa Ate the Wash

Stringbean's Trip to the Shining Sea

The Twelve Days of Christmas: Correspondence

### Activities:

#### Set A

- Use writing your family's Christmas cards, or other family correspondence, as an opportunity to emphasize how important legible handwriting is. The Form Drawing for Better Handwriting series will give you exercises for each specific letter in cursive handwriting. Find other opportunities to write by hand as well, such as making a grocery list (which needs to be legible once you get to the store).

#### Set B

- I have several suggestions for composition pieces for this unit. You can pick and choose what you have time for or what appeals to your children. First, I suggest a tall tale, to tie in with the unit's theme. So that your children are not burdened with creating a tale out of thin air, have them first write a narrative piece describing an event that really happened to them. Do not tell them it will become a tall tale or they will get distracted and begin to add the exaggerations too soon. Keep it a real event.
- Use this short piece as an opportunity to introduce or reinforce the stages in the writing process. Writer's Inc will be a huge help to you here as you work with your children. I can't predict what you might find they struggle with, so it's easier for me to recommend a comprehensive volume such as this one and you should turn to it frequently for teaching ideas. For each type of writing piece, you will be given mini-lessons on the basics, answers to frequently asked questions, tips, and assessment rubrics. "Understanding the Writing Process" is the very first chapter. Make sure your children realize that they ARE NOT to try to write a perfect piece the first time and that you expect and will enforce the idea of several drafts. Based on each child's writing ability, you may spend a great deal of time with one on how to compose a good sentence – where the other is working on how to best arrange the paragraphs in an essay. Again, this book contains all the information you need to help you meet each child at her particular level.

- For a child who is ready to tackle a more sophisticated composition style, introduce the concept of foreshadowing. A good example of this is found in [The Day Jimmy's Boa Ate the Wash](#). Clues to what happened are casually given by the narrator, and the reader is kept guessing, eager to see what happens next. This is an excellent element in any narrative piece and would be fun to explore. Have your children brainstorm this by writing down each event in their piece on a sticky note and then practice rearranging them in different orders to demonstrate how the tale could unfold, as the reader learns more pieces of the puzzle. Picture book author Jan Brett uses the side panels in her illustrations as examples of foreshadowing, so you could check some of her work out of the library for more examples.
- Don't forget dictionary skills along with proofreading. Have each girl proofread her sister's final draft (before the finished piece is written) for spelling and grammar/punctuation mistakes. This is a good reinforcement of the earlier part of the unit and it's not a personal attack like "I think this sentence isn't interesting enough" could be. Spelling, grammar and punctuation are all black & white issues. Either it is right or it is wrong. Encourage your children to use [Writers Inc](#) as a resource in checking these errors and make sure they are very familiar with how to use a dictionary.
- In my classroom (and in my family) we are very fond of the Dictionary Game. This is especially helpful with more sophisticated parts of speech. In order to come up with a pretend definition, you really need to understand what the part of speech dictates! For example, an adverb describes a verb so your definition cannot be "a kind of ant." Here are my notes on how to play:

I recommend [The Official Scrabble Players Dictionary](#) because it has very unusual words in it (it can be harder than you think to find a word in a standard dictionary that no one in your party knows the definition of) PLUS it boosts your Scrabble know-how!

How to Play the Game:

Assemble your group. You can put a non-reader or non-writer with a reader or writer if younger kids want to play too.

Choose one person to begin: the Leader. That person takes the dictionary of your choice and looks through it, calling out words until he/she finds a word that no one in your group knows the meaning of. It's not fun to cheat so if you secretly know the word's meaning, fess up! Once the Leader finds a word that no one knows, he/she reads it out loud, spells it, and tells the part of speech.

Pass out slips of paper and pencils to each person.

The Leader writes down the correct definition of the chosen word. Everyone else writes down a made up definition that they think *sounds* like a possible real definition of the word. The goal is to trick others into thinking your definition is

the correct one.

All slips of paper get passed to the Leader. When we played, we put the slips into a bowl in the center of the room and the Leader collected them when each person was done writing their definition.

The Leader opens all the slips without revealing the handwriting on them and reads them aloud. Usually twice, so people can think of which definition sounds most likely.

Each person states which of the definitions they believe is the correct one.

After everyone has voted on the definition of their choice, the correct definition is revealed and the points are tallied.

The Scorekeeper tallies the points. There are 3 ways to earn points.

- 1) If you guess the correct definition instead of one of the fakes, you get a point.
- 2) Every time you fool someone and that person chooses your definition instead of guessing the correct one, you get a point.
- 3) If NO ONE guesses the correct definition, the Leader gets one point for each person in the group, not counting him/herself.

Now pass the dictionary to the next person in the circle and that person becomes the Leader.

At the end of the game, tally the points. The winner has to make a sentence using all the words!!!

#### Set C

- Now assign your children the task of taking their non-fiction narrative piece and turning it into a tall tale. Review the elements of a tall tale and do some brainstorming about which sections of the true event could be exaggerated. Take this piece of writing through all stages of the writing process as well. For the final step, "Publishing", consider making a family website where the children post their homeschool work. Photos of main lesson book pages, completed handwork projects, and written pieces can all be added. This is a great way to show family and friends what you are working on and is a very realistic Publishing step. Here are other internet sites where student work can be published, if you aren't able to devote the time to a family website:  
<http://www.amphi.com/~pgreenle/EE1/studentpublish.html>

#### Set D

- Personal letters are another type of writing and this time of year provides the perfect time to practice them: thank you notes! The elements of a personal letter are pretty much set in stone. They are

1. Date in the upper right hand corner
2. The Greeting (Dear So and So)
3. The Body (The message you are writing to the recipient)
4. The Closing (Sincerely, Yours Truly)
5. Your Signature
6. Post Script (There is the occasional comment that was not mentioned in the Body of your letter, but made after the signature, called the P.S. or P.S.S. The P.S.S. was an additional post script).

For some examples of personal letters you may wish to read Stringbean's Trip to the Shining Sea (this story is told by a series of postcards from a long car trip) or The Twelve Days of Christmas: Correspondence (a very funny short book, consisting of a set of imaginary thank you notes written by the recipient of each of the gifts given in the twelve days of Christmas song) with your children.

If your children need a crash course in thank you note writing, which includes all of the elements of the personal letter listed above, here are some specific steps:

**STEP 1:**

Begin with a fresh sheet of note paper and a smooth pen. Choosing the perfect stationery is often the most fun part of writing a thank you note and things like stickers, colored pens, and so on can help entice a reluctant writer.

Note: Thank-you notes are traditionally handwritten in cursive.

**STEP 2:**

Thank the recipient for the gift, favor or entertainment given. This part is easy. Just say "Thank you for my \_\_\_\_\_." Yes, there are other parts of a thank you note but don't forget to just simply say thanks.

**STEP 3:**

Write about the appropriateness of the gift or favor: "The sweater you gave me is perfect for the cold weather we get it Ohio." Focus on positive things you can say about the item. If you don't like it, that's fine but still try to find a polite way to compliment the present – "What a unique Christmas ornament. I've never seen one like it." (This is a nice tie-in with the parts of speech you've been learning – perhaps you might require two adjectives which describe the gift.)

**STEP 4:**

Write about how you plan to use the gift: "I have a picture of my dog that will look great in the frame." If you received a gift of money, mention how you will spend it.

**Don't** write about your personal life ("I just got 100% on my spelling test"). That is a subject for a different letter – it is more polite to keep the focus of the note on the person who gave it to you. If it's someone who you rarely keep in touch with, that just means you should write more often!

STEP 5:

Sign your thank-you note. "With thanks, \_\_\_\_\_."

And you're done!

#### Set E

- The fourth suggested composition piece for this unit is a business letter. It is important when learning letter writing to know from the very beginning that there are two types of letters. The main difference between a business letter and a personal letter is that a business letter includes additional elements in the heading (including your return address) and has a more formal tone. It is assumed in a business letter that you do not know the recipient personally.

Here are some examples of a business letter:

[http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/pw/PDFs/p\\_basicbusletter.pdf](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/pw/PDFs/p_basicbusletter.pdf)

Try to find some authentic contexts in which to write a business letter, such as a letter of praise to a restaurant owner or toy manufacturer. As with all the other written pieces in this unit, go through the steps of the entire writing process and keep them in your writing portfolio. To "publish" the letter you may mail it to its recipient.

# Appendix

## Additional Resources for Tall Tales

### **Paul Bunyan: The Giant Lumberjack** from *Bang Printing*

<http://www.paulbunyantrail.com/talltale.html>

Here you find an illustrated story of Paul Bunyan and other characters. This legendary hero of lumberjacks throughout American possessed strength, speed, and skill that matched the vastness of North American.

#### *Related Websites:*

1) Tall Tales from *Paul Bunyan Scenic Byway*

<http://www.paulbunyan scenicbyway.org/tales/index.shtm>

### **Pecos Bill Cleans Up the West** from *PBS*

[http://pbskids.org/lions/printables/stories/story\\_pecos.html](http://pbskids.org/lions/printables/stories/story_pecos.html)

Here you can read the story of Pecos Bill.

#### *Related Websites:*

1) Pecos Bill

[http://www.millville.org/Workshops\\_f/Dich\\_FOLKLORE/WACKED/stompfeaturre25.html](http://www.millville.org/Workshops_f/Dich_FOLKLORE/WACKED/stompfeaturre25.html)

2) Pecos Bill (American Southwest) [http://www.drlamay.com/pecos\\_bill.htm](http://www.drlamay.com/pecos_bill.htm)

3) Pecos Bill from *Handbook of Texas*

<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/PP/lxp1.html>

### **Tall Tales, Arizona Style** (Grade 3) from *Kyrene de las Brisas Elementary*

<http://www.kyrene.k12.az.us/schools/brisas/sunda/talltale/talltale.htm>

### **Mike Fink** - the man called the king of the keelboaters.

#### *Related Websites:*

1) Death of Mike Fink by J.M. Field

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/sw/fink1.html>

2) Mike Fink <http://sniff.numachi.com/~rickheit/dtrad/lookup.cgi?ti=MIKEFINK>

3) Mike Fink (Short Tales) from the *Crockett Almanacs*

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/sw/fink4.html>

### **Old Stormalong** - Sailors have their own larger-than-life hero.

#### *Related Websites:*

1) Old Stormalong (Part 2)

<http://www.geocities.com/activatedstorytellers/Folktale.html>

2) Storm Along <http://www.contemplator.com/sea/stormalong.html>

# *Grammar & Composition - Tall Tales*

## Extra Idea

### **Perform A Tall Tales Play**

Visit "The Legend of Slappy Hooper: An American Tall Tale" by A. Shepard:

<http://www.aaronshep.com/stories/009.html>

First read the story, then click <http://www.aaronshep.com/rt/RTE02.html> to read the tall tale as a play (adapted for reader's theater by the author). You can put together a performance of this play or write and perform an original tall tale production of your own.

# *Grammar & Composition - Tall Tales*

## Assessment

There are several components to the assessment for this unit. These include the main lesson book (which contains an anthology of tall tales), independent worksheets, the writing portfolio, and spelling and grammar tests or quizzes. Observations of your child during activities such as alphabet dice games and informal assessments like the Analogy of the Day should also be recorded in your journaling pages. In this unit you are paying the most attention to the following skills and understandings:

- Does your child understand what elements make a story a tall tale and can she give several examples?
- Can your child use a Venn diagram to organize information?
- Can your child explain what a homophone is and give several examples?
- Can your child explain why standardized spelling is useful?
- Is your child making measurable progress on learning her spelling words?
- Is your child proficient at spelling games such as lipograms?
- Does your child know the different punctuation marks and their uses?
- Can your child name the different types of sentences?
- Can your child explain the reason for the spaces we leave between letters and words? What can she tell you about the history of written speech?
- Does your child know the names of various parts of speech and what role they play in a sentence? Can she give examples of each?
- Does your child understand what an analogy is and solve simple examples?
- Is your child working to improve her cursive handwriting and does she show measurable progress?
- Can your child list and explain the steps in the writing process?
- Does your child demonstrate an ability to brainstorm, draft, revise, and edit her own pieces of writing? Is she comfortable using a dictionary and other reference materials when proofreading?
- Can your child compose an age-appropriate narrative piece? A tall tale? A personal letter? A business letter?

The three aspects of assessment I want you to consider when evaluating each child are

1. Content/declarative knowledge: how well does the student know the **content**?
2. Quality of the **product**: how well did the student present the work in writing, speaking, etc.
3. Quality of the **application**: how well did the student execute the knowledge application process?