

TALES OF LONG AGO

What are folk tales and why are they a part of our history?

Long before stories were written in books, they were told by word of mouth. Families in all countries told stories to explain how things happened or came to be. Many of these stories began as truth but over many years, details were added. Some details may have been true but many of them were added to make the story more interesting.

A **folk tale** is any story, song, rhyme or joke that has been told over and over for many generations. These folk tales, legends, and tall tales came to be a part of our culture. Today we learn about life long ago, we learn about justice and fair play, and we have wonderful stories to enjoy.

Here are some types of folk tales and examples you may know.

A **legend** is a story telling about real people and places. It is based on truth so many people believe it is true.

- **Pocahontas** saved the life of John Rolfe. She married John Rolfe.

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...She married

- **David Crockett** was a US Congressman. He came from Tennessee. He was in one of his stories. After Davy Crockett died at the Alamo in 1836 many new adventures were added to his life story.

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- **Mike Fink** was born around 1770 somewhere along the Mississippi River. He was known as "**king of the keelboat men**" and claimed he could outrun, out jump, outshoot and out brag any man on the river.

- **Annie Oakley** was born in Ohio in 1860. She was an expert with a rifle in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show.
- **Casey Jones** was a railroad engineer in the early 1900's. He died in a train crash in the early days of train travel so a ballad was written about him after he died.
- **John Henry** was a very strong black worker. Using only a hammer he had a race to see if he could tunnel through a mountain in West Virginia faster than a steam drill. He won the race but died with his hammer in his hand. This tale told of the struggle of old ways against the new ways.



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- **George Washington** was known to be a very good woodsman. When he was six, he chopped down his father's favorite cherry tree. When commented he said, "I cannot tell a lie...I did cut it with my hatchet."



- **Johnny Appleseed** was really John Chapman who was born in Massachusetts in 1775. He tended an apple orchard and gave bags of apple seeds to pioneers as they headed west. As the story goes, he left home to plant apple seeds and tend to apple trees in the West. One of his many good deeds was to heal the foot of a wolf who became his traveling companion.

A **tall tale** is a story that is exaggerated so much that it cannot be true at all.

- According to the tale of **Paul Bunyan and his blue ox, Babe**, Paul Bunyan was a very large baby. At 3 weeks old he rolled over in his sleep and knocked down four square miles of timber in the state of Maine. He grew up to be a lumberjack taller than a redwood tree, stronger than 50 grizzly bears and smarter than a library full of books. With Babe, he scooped out the holes that are now the Great Lakes, formed the Grand Canyon, and made the Mississippi River.



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- In the South, a baby he fell from a cowboy like a shooter and One day he was tornado un

Bill. As a grew up to be d the six-dynamite. med the house.



- The **Uncle Remus** stories are based on tales told by southern Negroes whose families brought similar stories to this country from Africa. Uncle Remus may have been a slave but there is no proof. In his stories, **Brer Rabbit** is a trickster who shows that the small and weak can outwit the large and powerful.

- In almost every culture, there is a story about making soup from a stone. It has been told so many times that the soup ingredients are different but the end result is the same. A clever man is able to trick a greedy woman, and a delicious soup is shared by many.

Try this!

If you do not recognize these stories or characters, ask your teacher to read some folk tales to you. Or go to the library and check out some for yourself.



PREVIEW

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