



# #10030 PECOS BILL

DISNEY EDUCATIONAL PRODUCTIONS, 1986

Grade Level: 2-5

18 mins.

1 Instructional Graphic Enclosed

## DESCRIPTION

Tells the story of Pecos Bill, Texas' most famous tall tale hero. Bill, it is said, was raised by a pack of coyotes, dug the Rio Grande River to the Gulf of Mexico, and generally was the roughest, toughest cowboy of them all. He and his horse, Widowmaker, had many adventures, from lassoing a storm to shooting out all the stars except one. Sung and narrated by Roy Rogers. A revised and restored Disney classic.

## ACADEMIC STANDARDS

### Subject Area: Language Arts–Reading

- Standard: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of literary texts
  - ◆ Benchmark: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand a variety of literary passages and texts (e.g., fiction, nonfiction, myths, poems, fantasies, biographies, autobiographies, science fiction, tall tales, supernatural tales) (See INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS 1 and 3.)
  - ◆ Benchmark: Knows the defining characteristics of a variety of literary forms and genres (e.g., fiction, nonfiction, myths, poems, fantasies, biographies, autobiographies, science fiction, tall tales, supernatural tales) (See INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS 2.)

### Subject Area: Grades K-4 History – The History of People of Many Cultures Around the World

- Standard: Understands the folklore and other cultural contributions from various regions of the United States and how they helped to form a national heritage
  - ◆ Benchmark: Understands how stories, legends, songs, ballads, games, and tall tales describe the environment, lifestyles, beliefs, and struggles of people in various regions of the country (See INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS 1.)

## INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS

1. To illustrate the story of Pecos Bill.
2. To explore elements of tall tales.
3. To promote the reading of children's literature.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

American tall tales are unique in the world of literature for the way in which humor and exaggeration are used to recount the exploits of legendary heroes. This exaggerated form of storytelling began in the 1800s as a way for early American settlers to bolster the pioneer spirit that was needed to face the dangers of the wilderness.

Tall tales include the traditional story elements of folktales: characters, setting, and plot. Some tall tale characters are real people whose exploits have been embellished by storytellers. Other characters are pure fiction. Most tall tales use the American frontier as the setting and most take place during the time period of American westward expansion.

All tall tales use humor, exaggeration, and acts of bravery as elements of the plot to explain how the main characters confronted the uncertainty of exploring the North American wilderness. Tall tales invited new retellings, with each narrator freely expanding favorite parts and incorporating his unique sense of humor.

## VOCABULARY

- |   |                               |
|---|-------------------------------|
| 1. bustle (old-fashioned clothing item) | 11. emblem                    |
| 2. buzzards                             | 12. fateful                   |
| 3. career                               | 13. fillin's (teeth fillings) |
| 4. chuck wagon                          | 14. grewed up (grew up)       |
| 5. courting (dating)                    | 15. howl                      |
| 6. cowboy                               | 16. l'amour                   |
| 7. coyote                               | 17. lit (landed)              |
| 8. critter                              | 18. natural                   |
| 9. desert                               | 19. prairie                   |
| 10. drought                             | 20. varmints                  |

## BEFORE SHOWING

1. Discuss life during the frontier times. Consider what daily life was like and the hazards that people faced.
2. Read at least one of the following book versions about Pecos Bill. Fill out the "Elements of a Tall Tale" chart. (See INSTRUCTIONAL GRAPHIC.) Discuss the elements.
  - a. *Tall Tales from Texas Cow Camps* by Mody Coggin Boatright.
  - b. *Pecos Bill* by Ariane Dewey.
  - c. *Pecos Bill* by Steven Kellogg.
  - d. *American Tall Tales* by Mary Pope Osborne.
  - e. *American Tall Tales* by Adrien Stoutenberg.
  - f. *Big Men, Big Country: A Collection of American Tall Tales* by Robert Paul Walker.
3. Locate the state of Texas on a U.S. map. Identify the Pecos River, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Rio Grande River.

## DURING SHOWING

1. View the video more than once, with one showing uninterrupted.
2. Pause in the scene with the circling buzzards over the horse when it says "The usual committee was there today. . ." Discuss the meaning of the circling buzzards.
3. Consider pausing to explain yodeling and the phrase "ypiip-i-ohh, yippy-i-aay".

## AFTER SHOWING

### Discussion Items and Questions

1. Where did the Pecos Bill tale happen? What kind of land was it?
2. Describe how Pecos Bill came to be in Texas.
3. Who did Pecos Bill grow up with?
4. How did Pecos Bill prove himself better than an antelope, a jackrabbit and a rattlesnake?
5. Who did Pecos Bill rescue? What career did he choose? Why was the horse named Widowmaker?
6. Why was Pecos Bill like a western Superman?
7. Explain how Pecos Bill solved the drought in Texas. What was the result?
8. What happened to cause there to be gold in the hills?
9. Why did Pecos Bill dig the Rio Grande River?
10. How did Pecos Bill get credit for creating the Lone Star emblem for Texas?
11. Describe what happened when Pecos Bill met Slue Foot Sue? How did his horse, Widowmaker, feel about Sue? How did he court her?
12. What happened when Sue tried to ride Widowmaker on their wedding day? Why? Why wasn't Pecos Bill able to get Sue with his rope? Where did she end up?
13. Explain what Pecos Bill did after Sue landed on the moon. Discuss how the tall tale explains why coyotes howl at the moon.

### Applications and Activities

1. Analyze the video of the tale by adding to the "Elements of a Tall Tale" chart. (See BEFORE SHOWING 2 and INSTRUCTIONAL GRAPHIC.)
2. Compare and contrast a book and the film version of the tale. Consider using a Venn diagram. Discuss why similarities and differences might exist.
3. Investigate more about Pecos Bill. Analyze how the character was created and how he became a legend. Answer the following questions:
  - a. Who created Pecos Bill?
  - b. What was the purpose for creating this character?
  - c. How was the tale developed?
  - d. Why did Pecos Bill become an important tall tale character?
4. Tell and write original tall tales using information learned about the fictional Pecos Bill and real-life world of old-time cowboys.
  - a. Sit in a circle on the floor in groups of 12 or less. Pretend to be saddle-weary cowhands swapping stories around a campfire at the end of a long day.

## C a p t i o n e d M e d i a P r o g r a m

- b. Tell tall tales about amazing, brave, or outrageous cowhands you have "known." Use exaggeration to create drama. Incorporate body movements.
- c. Choose another classmate's tall tale (not your own) and write it down. Emphasize the most appealing elements of the story. Embellish on the original story.
- d. Illustrate if desired. Share the completed stories.
5. Read various other tall tales. Add to the "Elements of a Tall Tale" chart. Analyze the similarities and differences among the tales. (See INSTRUCTIONAL GRAPHIC.)
6. Locate tall tales, legends, and myths from various cultures. Read or act out stories. For assistance, see the Tales of Wonder Web site. (See RELATED RESOURCES.)
7. Review the meaning and use of unique words and phrases from the video. Examples include:
  - a. "shootin'-est"
  - b. "mean water"
  - c. "elbow room"
  - d. "plumb unusual," "plumb irritated"
  - e. "top hand"
  - f. "show 'em a trick or two"
  - g. "outloped," "outjumped," "outhissed"
  - h. "a career to suit him"
  - i. "a token of undying love"
  - j. "fit to be tied"
  - k. "clean out of sight"
8. Research famous cowboys and cowgirls of the Wild West. Present findings in creative ways, such as acting out significant events or doing a newscast for a fictitious TV station.
9. Explain similes and their use in writing. Review examples from the video:
  - a. "homeless as a poker chip"
  - b. "hungrier than a woodpecker with a headache"
  - c. "stuck together like warts on a toad, birds of a feather"
  - d. "happy as a hog in a turnip patch"
  - e. "dealin' from the bottom of the deck"
  - f. "poundin' sound inside his ears like the gallopin' hoofs of a thousand steers"
  - g. "took off like a Roman candle"
10. Invite a "cowboy" to visit the class to show various pieces of equipment and demonstrate roping techniques.

### SUMMARY

In this retelling of the famous Texas tale, Pecos Bill, raised by coyotes living near the Pecos River, learns to outjump the jackrabbit, outhiss the rattlesnake, and outlope the antelope. One day, Bill saves a young horse from certain death in the desert, and with this grateful and trusty horse named Widowmaker as his companion, Bill grows up to be the roughest, toughest cowboy in the Wild West.

Together, Pecos Bill and Widowmaker perform great deeds, including lassoing a storm to save Texas from a deadly drought, digging the Rio Grande, and earning Texas' lone star emblem after shooting away all the stars in the sky except one. One day Bill meets and falls in love with Slue Foot Sue. On their wedding day, Sue climbs atop Widowmaker, and the jealous horse bucks Sue so high in the sky that when she finally hits the ground her bustle bounces her up higher . . . and higher

## C a p t i o n e d M e d i a P r o g r a m

... and higher until she lands on the moon! A despondent Pecos Bill returns to the coyotes and wails each time a full moon reminds him of his lost love. The coyotes howl in sympathy with him—and continue to howl at the moon to this day.

### CMP RELATED RESOURCES

- *John Henry* #10028
- *The Legend of Johnny Appleseed* #10034
- *Paul Bunyan* #10029
- *The Saga of Windwagon Smith* #10036

### World Wide Web

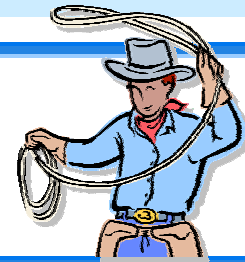


The following Web sites complement the contents of this guide; they were selected by professionals who have experience in teaching deaf and hard of hearing students. Every effort was made to select accurate, educationally relevant, and “kid safe” sites. However, teachers should preview them before use. The U.S. Department of Education, the National Association of the Deaf, and the Captioned Media Program do not endorse the sites and are not responsible for their content.

#### • PECOS BILL AND SLUE FOOT SUE

<http://t3.preservice.org/T0301046/billstory.htm>

This site has two versions of the Pecos Bill story and links to other Pecos Bill short stories.



#### • TALES OF WONDER

<http://www.darsie.net/talesofwonder>

This Web site has folk and fairy tales from many countries in the world, organized by country.

#### • TALL TALES

<http://www.hasd.org/ges/talltale/talltale.htm>

This site has general information about tall tales, and a summary of the Pecos Bill tale, along with some other famous tall tale characters. It also has a tall tale template that can be copied and pasted into a word processing program to assist students in writing an original tall tale.

#### • OLD WEST

<http://homepages.dsu.edu/jankej/oldwest/oldwest.htm>

This site contains information on the Old West, including material on stagecoaches, the Oregon Trail, and the history of the West, as well as maps, photographs, and diaries.

### INSTRUCTIONAL GRAPHIC

- ELEMENTS OF A TALL TALE

## Elements of a Tall Tale

Directions: List the elements of book versions in Column 1 and Column 2.  
List the elements of the video version in Column 3.

	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
	<b>Book Version</b>	<b>Book Version</b>	<b>Video Version</b>
Character			
Time Period			
Setting			
Plot			
Use of Exaggeration			
Hazards			
Phenomena Explained			

[Captioned Media Program](#)