

TALL TALES: USING NOTATION TO IDENTIFY LITERARY CHARACTERISTICS

What is a Tall Tale?

A tall tale is a uniquely American type of folklore. Throughout history people have told and written stories about their heroes, but a tall tale is a special kind of hero story because the heroes' attributes are always exaggerated and their accomplishments are always outrageous. Tall Tales can be identified by the following characteristics:

- Details will be exaggerated to ridiculous proportions to describe something as larger, or more overwhelming, than it really is. **X**
- The story, although clearly unbelievable, will be told as a matter of fact. **F**
- The narrator and characters will often use the dialect and slang of the region in which the story takes place. **S**
- Tall Tales are similar to myths in that they often explain the origin of something in nature but in a humorous way. **N**

Paul Bunyan

One winter, Paul Bunyan came to log along the Little Gimlet in Oregon. Ask any old timer who was logging that winter, and they'll tell you I ain't lying when I say his kitchen covered about 10 miles of territory. Every word I'm about to share is the god-honest truth!

That stove, now, she were a grand one. An acre long, taller than a scrub pine, and when she was warm, she melted the snow for about 20 miles around. The men logging in the vicinity never had to put on their jackets 'til about noon on a day when Paul Bunyan wanted flapjacks.

It was quite a site to see, that cook of Paul Bunyan's makin' flapjacks. Cookie would send four of the boys up with a side of hog tied to each of their snowshoes, and they'd skate around up there keeping the griddle greased while Cookie and seven other men flipped flapjacks for Paul Bunyan. The table we had set up for the camp was about 10 miles long. We rigged elevators to the table to bring the vittles to each end, and some of the younger lads in the camp rode bicycles down the path at the center, carrying cakes and such wherever they were called for.

We had one mishap that winter. Babe the Blue Ox accidentally knocked a bag of dried peas off the countertop when he swished his tail. Well, them peas

flew so far and so fast out of the kitchen that they knocked over a dozen loggers coming home for lunch, clipped the tops off of several pine trees, and landed in the hot spring. We had pea soup to eat for the rest of the season, which was okay by me, but them boys whose Mamas insisted they bathe more than once a year were pretty sore at losing their swimmin' hole.

One summer Paul and Babe were chopping at some trees down in Arizona and the heat was more than ole Babe could stand. In fact, I hear that it was so hot all the trees were drying up and turning to stone. Folks today call that area of Arizona the Petrified Forest. Well, Paul Bunyan, being the kind, old chap that he is, dug Babe a giant watering hole. Paul worked up such a sweat that it dripped from his brow and filled up the hole. His river of sweat can still be seen running through that hole today. You folks call it the Grand Canyon!