Suggested Internet Resources
Periodically, Internet Resources are updated on our web site at www.LibraryVideo.com

- library.thinkquest.org/J001156/writing.htm
  Very informative, student-friendly web site all about writing.
- www.ferrum.edu/aplit/study/tallact.htm
  Good resource with lots of links regarding how to write tall tales.

Suggested Print Resources

Creating a Tall Tale

Grades K–4

Tall tales are stories in which the characters and their actions and adventures are extremely exaggerated, and the audience is aware of the exaggeration and therefore in on the joke. Most American tall tales grew out of specific parts of the country and are connected to particular lines of work: lumberjacks in the Midwest, cowboys in Texas, and frontiersmen and women in the South and along the Mississippi River. The tall tale is not static; it is a living thing. The tall tale is very much a part of American folklore tradition, constantly evolving as it is retold with the teller's own particular spin. American tall tales have been around for several hundred years. They began in the oral tradition, as a form of entertainment, and have continued to evolve ever since.
Program Summary

In this program, students will meet Mrs. Knowsit, a tall tale elementary school teacher, created to demonstrate to students how to go about inventing their own characters and writing their own stories. Our narrator, storyteller Curly Joe, carefully explains the elements inherent in all good storytelling: characters, setting and plot (containing a problem and a solution) and then about the essential elements indicative of the tall tale: humor, exaggeration, a character who is associated with a particular type of job, and often a creative explanation for a natural feature of the country or a tradition among a group of people. By using examples of existing tall tale characters with whom students are already familiar, Curly Joe illustrates each aspect of the tall tale. After carefully scaffolding young students toward a deeper understanding of tall tales, Curly Joe introduces Mrs. Knowsit and demonstrates how changing the setting of the story informs the plot. By placing Mrs. Knowsit first in the Stone Age, and then out on the frontier in 19th-century America, he spins a yarn showing how her exaggerated abilities solve imaginary problems that might exist in those particular time periods. Finally, we end with Curly Joe challenging students to apply the knowledge they have learned by creating original tall tales of their own.

Pre-viewing Discussion

• Explain to students that one of the most effective ways in which to write or tell a tall tale is in the first person, as if they are relating an account of something they have witnessed for themselves. Have students discuss why first person narration is preferable over another point of view.
• As students watch the program, ask them to keep track of all of the elements of the tall tale mentioned by Curly Joe.
• Discuss with students the difference between tall tale and legendary characters. Have them brainstorm a list of real-life people who they think may make good tall tale characters.

Follow-up Discussion

• Have students discuss the similarities and differences between tall tales and other types of fantasy fiction: fables, fairy tales and science fiction/fantasy.
• Encourage students to think about what other exaggerated qualities Mrs. Knowsit could have. How might these qualities help solve problems in a story?
• Although tall tales are exaggerated, have students discuss what you can learn about the real lives of sailors, firefighters, lumberjacks, teachers and others by reading them.

Follow-up Activities

Note to educators: The following activities are designed to scaffold young learners toward producing an original tall tale.

• In order to help students get used to writing in the first person, have them select one of the Mrs. Knowsit tales to write from a personal point of view. The first line of the tale might be, “The most amazing teacher I ever had was Mrs. Knowsit.”
• Using Curly Joe as a model, have students select tall tales with which they are already familiar and tell them to the class.
• Have students brainstorm a list of natural features that exist in their particular region of the country and come up with tall tale explanations regarding how they got there. Students can create tall tale informational posters that illustrate the natural features and explain their origins.
• Have students create a list of people other than their teacher with whom they have contact (such as shopkeepers, police officers, letter carriers and students) along with tall tale qualities that fit with their particular professions.
• In the tale of Mrs. Knowsit, we learn about the invention of the school bell and how the tradition of raising one’s hand in class began. Have students brainstorm a list of other school traditions which could be given a tall tale explanation.
• Have students select a few tall tale/legendary characters with whom they are familiar and create a story or play in which these characters use their special abilities to solve a tall tale problem. Students could create illustrations to accompany their stories or perform them for their peers.
• Assign small groups of students a particular time period (such as colonial America, medieval Europe, ancient Greece or Rome or pre-colonial Africa) to research as a potential setting for a tall tale story which features a school teacher.
• In order to prepare students for writing, have them create a flowchart which details the writing process. Have each student state and define prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, proofreading and publishing.
• Using a story map, have students deconstruct one of the Mrs. Knowsit tall tales, so they are better able to understand the constituent elements that comprise fiction writing. Story maps can be downloaded at: www.eduplace.com/rdg/gen_act/pigs/story_mp.html
• Using the writing process, have students write another adventure for Mrs. Knowsit that is set in contemporary times. Encourage them to use their own experiences with teachers, classrooms and schools to come up with something that fits with this particular genre.
• Using the writing process, have students create original tall tales. All tall tales can be illustrated, published and shared with the school.