

The Tall Tale of Pecos Bill

Every cowhand worth his salt knows the tale of Pecos Bill. Bill was the toughest, mightiest cowboy ever to ride and rope a steer. He was born tough as a pine knot!



2

Bill was the youngest of 18 strong children of two Texas **pioneers**. Bill's father gave him a real bear to play with when he was just a babe. Bill wrestled that mighty bear until it begged for **mercy**!

On a trip across Texas, Bill fell out of his family's covered wagon and into the Pecos River. His family never saw him floating away. A pack of **coyotes** raised Bill in the wild until he was 18 years old.

One day, a cowhand came along and saw a young man curled up like a dog near the river. He was scratching an ear with his bare foot and howling at the moon as it rose.

3



Words that sound alike but have different spellings and meanings are called homophones. Look for the homophone in this paragraph that starts with “b.” It sounds the same as a word meaning “without any clothing.”

DESTINATION READING COURSE 3

UNIT 09: The Tall Tale of Pecos Bill

"Howdy, kid," said the cowhand.
"I ain't a kid."
"I'm a coyote," replied Bill.
"You ain't a coyote. You ain't got a tail!"

Pecos Bill turned all the way around and studied his rump. Sure enough, no tail!

"Whoa," he said. "I must be a **human**".

Bill decided to leave his coyote pack behind. He followed the cowpoke back to the ranch, determined to live like a man.

Along the way, a rattlesnake as long as the Rio Grande River sunk its fangs into Pecos Bill's leg. Bill just looked at the wound and snatched the snake. He squeezed and squeezed its body until every last drop of poison dripped out.

4



"Well shucks, Bill," whined the snake. "I didn't really mean to hurt you." With a grin, Bill coiled up the snake and slung it over his shoulder. That snake became Pecos Bill's **lasso** for years to come.

5



Words that are spelled the same but have different pronunciations and meanings are called homographs. Look for the homograph in this paragraph. It starts with "w" and is spelled the same as a word that means "'wrapped around."



Tall tales are made-up stories with lots of exaggeration. Informational texts provide information from real life. How would this information about the length of the snake be written differently in a social studies textbook?

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UNIT 09: The Tall Tale of Pecos Bill

Bill settled into life on the ranch. Every cowhand looked up to Bill. He was the best rider and roper anyone had ever seen!

One day, Pecos Bill came across a wild mustang **galloping** across a field. Pecos Bill ran alongside the horse, fixin' to jump on its back. But the horse snorted wildly and ran even faster. Suddenly, Pecos Bill jumped right in the horse's path.

The horse stopped in its tracks so fast, its hooves dug into the dirt. That mustang was stuck in the mud up to its withers. Then Bill freed the horse as he sang a sweet song. The horse smiled and rubbed its nose against Bill's cheek. Bill tamed that **live wire**, and the wild horse let only Bill ride him.

6



I reckon you've heard of Pecos Bill's best girl, Slue-Foot Sue. The couple met one day when Sue was riding down a river on the back of a catfish. That catfish was as big as a whale and twice as mean! When Bill saw Sue holding onto that fish with only one hand, he proposed to her right then and there.

7



When you come to something you don't understand—a word or an idea—reading ahead can often help you figure out it out. Here, if you don't know what a mustang is, read ahead. You'll find a clue in the next word and the next sentence.



Suppose you came across the phrase "live wire" and you didn't know what it meant. Reading ahead, looking for clues, would help you figure out its meaning.

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UNIT 09: The Tall Tale of Pecos Bill

On their wedding day, Pecos Bill did not wear any fancy suit. He dressed in his cowboy hat, boots, and chaps. Sue wore a beautiful white wedding gown with the biggest bustle anyone had ever seen. Back then, you see, women's dresses had steel-framed bustles underneath to make the skirt stand out in back.



The wedding was a rootin' tootin' party. Sue tried to spice things up by jumping on Bill's mustang. The horse went wild again and threw Sue so high that she hit the moon before landing again. Sue bounced on that springy bustle and shot back up into the sky. She kept bouncing for three more days, but Bill never deserted her. He followed along until she bounced into the desert, where she slowed down on the sand. Then, Bill wound up his snake lasso and roped in his new wife. And I reckon you know that Pecos Bill and Slue-Foot Sue did live happily ever after.



Think about all the things you know about Pecos Bill. Compare and contrast Bill with ordinary cowhands. How is he similar? How is he different?
