



Pecos Bill

by Steve Kellogg

Teacher's Guide

Written By Kathleen Greenholdt



CLASSROOM FAVORITES

A Perma-Bound Production

Synopsis

Pecos Bill tells the extended tall tale of the mythic frontiersman. It recounts his life and exploits in the days of the pioneers, with appropriate exaggeration and hyperbole, beginning with the move his family makes from New England to Texas (known for its vastness and openness), which his family bypasses because they don't want to move into "another crowded neighborhood." Following is a synopsis of the various tales included in this book:

While crossing a river, Bill threw out a fishing line, and was dragged into the water by a giant trout. Fortunately, a coyote family found him and pulled him to safety.

Bill grew up among the coyotes and lived in the wild until a drifter named Chuck found him napping between some rocks, naked as a jaybird. Chuck showed Bill that he was a human, not a coyote, and convinced him to take up cattle ranching.

Pecos Bill set off to reform a gang of outlaws by making them cattle ranchers, but his journey was interrupted by a giant rattlesnake. Bill wrestled with the snake until he squeezed all of the poison out of the creature, making him harmless. Bill also wrestled with another monster and won that battle, too.

When he met up with the outlaws, they were humbled by Bill's power. He invented cattle roping by lassoing a longhorn with the skinny snake. The outlaws then helped Bill round up every steer in Texas.

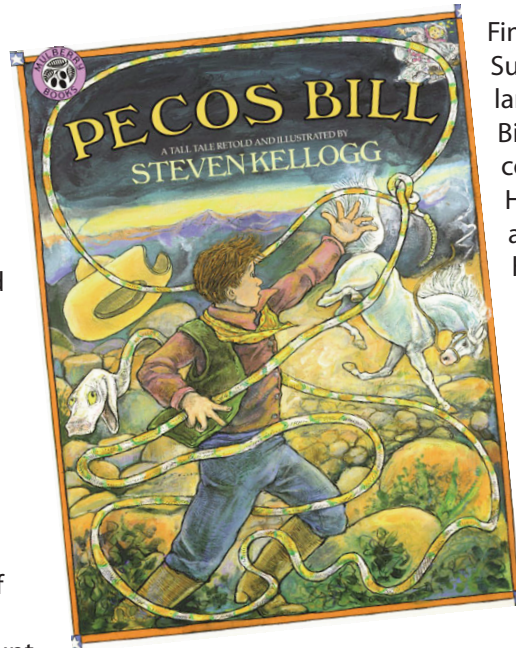
But, Bill needed a horse, and he chased after an elusive white stallion named Lightning, who was known for making women widows. Bill followed that horse all over the world, finally winning him over by singing in the language of coyotes.

Bill also invented cattle with short legs on one side of

their bodies, so that they could climb up and down a steep peak, known as Perpetual Motion Ranch.

Then, Bill fell in love with Slewfoot Sue, a woman who rode a catfish. But, when they were to marry, she tried to sit on Lightning, and he became violent. The horse bucked her up into the sky so high that she floated around the moon. When she came back down to earth, she landed on her dress bustle and bounced back up into the sky.

Finally, Bill lassoed a tornado and he and Sue hung on to the storm until they landed in California. Strangely enough, Bill and Sue hit the earth on top of the covered wagon owned by Bill's parents. His family was still in search of a home, and Bill invited them to live with him at his Texas ranch.



Timeline

Babyhood

Pecos Bill and his family move from England to Texas. His family moves on to avoid being in a "crowded neighborhood."

Later

Bill is separated from his family and raised by a family of coyotes.

As an adult

Chuck, a drifter, finds Bill and convinces him he is human and he should try cattle farming. A series of exploits follows.

Finally

Bill falls in love with Slewfoot Sue, and through several impossible escapades ends up falling from the sky on top of

his family's covered wagon, which is now traveling through California. He convinces everyone to move back with him to Texas.

Biographical Sketch

Steven Kellogg was born in Norwalk, Connecticut on October 26, 1941. He attended the Rhode Island School of Design, where he earned a B.F.A. in 1963, and he completed graduate study at the American University in Washington, D.C. He currently lives in Sandy Hook, Connecticut with his wife Helen Hill, and he is the stepfather of six.

Mr. Kellogg has worked as an artist and a printmaking and painting teacher. His self-illustrated children's books have won several honors: Junior Literary Guild selection, *Horn Book* honor list, Reading Rainbow selection, and an A.L.A. Notable Book.

Critic's Comer

Pecos Bill was written in 1986. Although it is an old, familiar tale, the author retells the story with colloquial language and amusing anecdotes. The illustrations also enhance the humor of the book, as they are rendered with great detail. One must examine each illustration closely to find very funny actions on the part of the characters. This story offers great possibilities for shared reading.

Selected Other Works by Steven Kellogg

A-Hunting We Will Go

Is Your Mama a Llama?

The Mysterious Tadpole

How Much is a Million?

The Missing Mitten Mystery

The Baby Beebee Bird

Pecos Bill : A Tall Tale

Paul Bunyan

Pinkerton, Behave!

Island of the Skog

Johnny Appleseed

Yankee Doodle

Tu Mama Es Una Llama?/Is Your Mama a...

The Day Jimmy's Boa Ate the Wash...

A Rose for Pinkerton

Jack and the Beanstalk

Parents in the Pigpen, Pigs in the Tub

The Christmas Witch (Picture Puffins)

Best Friends (Pied Piper Paperback)

A, My Name Is Alice

Chicken Little

Jimmy's Boa Bounces Back

Big Bear Ball

Mike Fink : A Tall Tale

Day the Goose Got Loose

Give the Dog a Bone

Tallyho, Pinkerton! (Pinkerton)

If You Made a Million

A Penguin Pup for Pinkerton

Library Lil

The Three Little Pigs

Snuffles and Snouts

Abby

Frogs Jump : A Counting Book

Prehistoric Pinkerton

Ready! Set! Measure: Climb Aboard

Pollita Pequena/Chicken Little

Leo, Zack, and Emmie

Aster Aardvark's Alphabet Adventures

Won't Somebody Play With Me

Engelbert the Elephant

Barney Bipple's Magic Dandelions

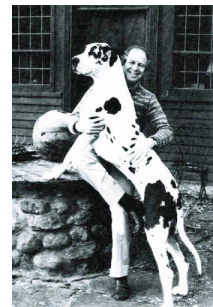
Millicent the Magnificent

The Most Delicious Camping Trip Ever

There Was an Old Woman

Grouchy Uncle Otto

Come Here, Cat



Granny and the Desperados
The Wicked Kings of Bloon

Bibliography

"Pecos Bill," <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pecos_Bill>
"Steven Kellogg website," <www.stevenkellogg.com/>
"Tall Tales Featuring Pecos Bill, Slewfoot Sue, and Lightning," <www.americanfolklore.net/pecosbill.html>

Objectives

1. To learn about "tall tales"
2. To explore life in the Old West
3. To understand the character and motivations of Pecos Bill

Comprehension Study

1. This story is called "tall tale." What does this mean?
(A tall tale is a story that features a legendary character who takes part in many far-fetched adventures. The character usually possesses super-human power and serves as a hero in the story. Also, he or she contributes something to the development of history, such as an invention.)
2. How are Pecos Bill's adventures far-fetched?
(As a baby, Bill is yanked off of the crowded wagon by a giant trout. Things in Texas may be large, but not this large. It also seems improbable that after growing up among coyotes, Bill is able to communicate effectively with humans. A poisonous rattlesnake does not lose its weight by having the venom strangled out of it. There are no monsters like the tarantula-puma-grizzly-gorilla. A snake is not a good item to use for a lasso. A ranch cannot have two diverse climates at the same time. It seems unlikely that all of the longhorns in Texas could be gathered in one place. It seems unlikely that all of the longhorns in Texas could be gathered in one place. There are no cattle with short legs on one side of their bodies and long legs on the other. Bill cannot really chase Lightning all over the world. There are no giant catfish upon which Sue may ride. Sue cannot bounce up to the stars on a bustle. It is improbable for Bill to land on his parents' covered wagon and for his family to have not found a home by the time Bill is a grown man.)
3. How does Bill win the trust of Lightning?
(Bill sings to the horse in the language of the coyotes

who raised him. The horse understands this animal language, and Bill tells the horse that he admires Lightning's strength and that he will be devoted to the creature forever. Then, Bill tells Lightning that the horse may go free, but the stallion decides to stay with Bill)

4. Bill uses his brain to show that he is an inventor. What are his inventions?
(He invents a special type of longhorn that has short legs on one side of its body and long legs on the other. This invention, of course, is imaginary. Bill also invents cattle roping and creates the first rodeo, a sporting event that showcases the riding and roping skills of cowboys.
5. This story is set in the Old West. The tale and illustrations tell us what about life back then?
(Two occupations were cowboy and outlaw. Wild animals included longhorns, horses, tarantulas, prairie dogs, pumas, grizzly bears, catfish, trout, coyotes, bighorn sheep, rattlesnakes, and eagles. Clothing included cowboy hats, boots, vests, and bandanas for men, and bonnets and long dresses for women. [City women also wore bustles.] Transportation was by horse and covered wagon. Food was cooked over fires in big kettles, and the cowboys liked to drink coffee.)
6. Pecos Bill seems to find an adventure wherever he goes. Looking closely at the illustrations in the book, you will see that he has one adventure even before the story begins. What is it?
(Before the text starts, the illustrator develops a three-scene adventure involving Baby Pecos and grizzly bears. He is feeding the bear's honey, but his mother chases them away.)

Meaning Study

- ambush** - surprise attack (noun); to launch a surprise attack (verb)
bighorn sheep - a wild sheep with large, winding horns
breeches - pants
bustle - a padded device for increasing the size of the back of a woman's dress
careening - swaying violently
clan - family
descendants - the people who can be traced back to a particular ancestor
Hell's Gulch - a very deep opening between mountains
homesteader - a person who purchased land from the government

to settle the Old West

kinfolk - relatives

longhorn - a type of cattle with long horns

New England - the states along the East Coast; the originally settled states

ornery - mean and nasty

pack - the name given to some groups of wild meat-eating animals

Perpetual Motion Ranch - continual

Pinnacle Peak - the highest point

prairie dogs - small, burrowing rodents that live on the prairie

puma - cougar

ranges - large areas of land where cattle are raised

rodeo - a sporting event involving riding and roping

stallion - a male horse; able to breed

steer - a male ox or cow that is not used for breeding

tarantula - a giant, hairy spider

Student Involvement Activities

1. Ask students to create their own folk heroes from various periods of American history. A crayon drawing of each hero should be accompanied by a short adventure tale. Both the picture and writing passage should illustrate a far-fetched "invention" developed by the hero. These tall tale characters may be male or female.
2. As a beginning geography lesson, make a large wall map of the United States as it appeared during the time of Pecos Bill. With markers or crayons, let students show the movement of pioneers from the East Coast to the West. Referring to the story and to other books, have the students fill the map with wildlife, humans, forms of transportation and buildings, major rivers and lakes, mountains, deserts, and prairies.
3. As a math project, create felt or laminated longhorn cattle. Set up simple math problems using the cattle as integers, with a goal to create a herd of 30 cattle ($6 \times 5 = 30$, $3 \times 10 = 30$, $10 + 10 + 10 = 30$, etc.).
4. Visit a zoo to learn more about the animals in the story, such as the following: rattlesnake, puma, gorilla, grizzly bear, and coyote.
5. Many of the animals in the book are monster-like, magical, or very large in size. We know that these animals do not really exist in such a form. Still, in this modern age, there are great myths about strange monster-like animals around the world.

One of these is Bigfoot, and another is the Loch Ness Monster. As an interesting aside to the story, teach your students about these mythical beasts through books and films.

6. Create an "Old West" day in your classroom. Ask students to dress as cowboys and outlaws, and show some old movies about life on the frontier (Be certain to point out the facts and myths seen in the movies.). You may wish to eat lunch at a picnic ground and cook your "grub" over an open fire (a good opportunity to teach students basic fire building skills). Ask an Old West expert or a rodeo competitor to visit your class to give students a first-hand look at western ways.

Selected Other Books by Steve Kellogg

Paul Bunyan: A Tall Tale (Reading Rainbow selection), 1984

Chicken Little, 1985

Johnny Appleseed, 1988

There Was An Old Woman, 1974

Pinkerton, Behave! (Horn Book honor list: Junior Literary Guild selection), 1979

A Rose For Pinkerton (Junior Literary Guild selection), 1981

Tallyho, Pinkerton (Junior Literary Guild selection), 1982

Prehistoric Pinkerton, 1987

Vocabulary Test

(15 points)

Place the letter of the correct word next to its definition.

- | | |
|---|---|
| _____ 1. type of cow | _____ 9. to make a surprise attack |
| _____ 2. to sway violently | _____ 10. male horse that can breed |
| _____ 3. deep opening between mountains | _____ 11. highest point |
| _____ 4. mean and nasty | _____ 12. small, burrowing rodent |
| _____ 5. giant, hairy spider | _____ 13. padded device that increases the size of the back
of a dress |
| _____ 6. cougar | _____ 14. male cow not used for breeding |
| _____ 7. continual | _____ 15. piece of land where cattle are raised |
| _____ 8. type of wild sheep | |

- | | | |
|----------------|--------------|--------------|
| A. puma | F. bustle | K. range |
| B. prairie dog | G. tarantula | L. steer |
| C. ornery | H. pinnacle | M. perpetual |
| D. ambush | I. longhorn | N. careen |
| E. stallion | J. gulch | O. bighorn |

Comprehension Test

(20 points)

Fill each blank with the correct word(s).

1. Pecos Bill's family moved out West from _____.
2. The mother of a family of _____ saved Bill from drowning.
3. Bill squeezed all of the _____ out of the giant rattlesnake.
4. The monster that wrestled with Bill was part grizzly, part tarantula, part puma, and part _____.
5. The gang of outlaws that Bill set out to turn into ranch hands lived at _____.
6. Bill used the skinny rattlesnake as a _____ for roping animals.
7. To catch Lightning, Bill had to travel all the way up north to the _____.
8. Bill invented cattle that had _____ legs on one side and _____ legs on the other.
9. _____ met Bill while she was riding on the back of a catfish.
10. Bill found his family in the state of _____.

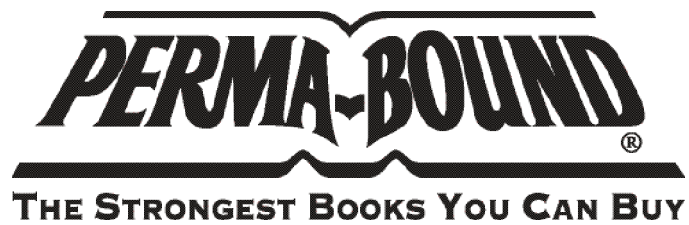
Answer Key

VOCABULARY (15 POINTS)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. I | 9. D |
| 2. N | 10. E |
| 3. J | 11. H |
| 4. C | 12. B |
| 5. G | 13. F |
| 6. A | 14. L |
| 7. M | 15. K |
| 8. O | |

COMPREHENSION TEST (20 POINTS)

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. New England | 6. lasso |
| 2. coyotes | 7. Arctic Circle |
| 3. poison | 8. short, long (either order) |
| 4. gorilla | 9. Slewfoot Sue |
| 5. Hell's Gulch | 10. California |
| 1 | |



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