

# Tall Tales

How tall can a tale be? You may know about Paul Bunyan and Babe, his blue ox. One tale says that Paul Bunyan was sitting by a river, combing his beard with



a pine tree. Then the river threw 400 gallons of water into his beard. Bunyan got so mad that he decided to straighten the bends out of the river. He hitched his ox Babe to the river, and Babe yanked it into a straight line. That's a tall tale!

People in the United States began inventing tall tales in the early 1800s. In those days, pioneers had a hard time just staying alive. A dry period could ruin the crops. A blizzard could kill the farm animals. A wild animal could jump out from behind a tree.

Tall tales helped people laugh at their troubles. They also helped people make scary situations less frightening. If you were a pioneer, for example, you might walk out of your cabin and meet a hungry bear. Later, you might tell a tall tale about a man named Davy Crockett, who

wrestled a bear and won. The story could help you think that bears were a little less frightening.

There were also contests that tested how well people told tales. Each person tried to tell a better story than everyone else.

Tall tales helped people pass the time on long, dark nights, too. Sometimes the only light the pioneers had was from a campfire, and it was safer for people to stay together than to go out alone. Tall tales helped them pass the time and keep from feeling scared of the wilderness around them.

So, the next time you're scared of something, make up a tall tale about it. The sound of thunder might make you think of giants bowling. That could make you laugh instead of feeling scared, just like the pioneers did.

