

# Mark Binder's Tall Tales Teacher's Guide

Teacher's Guide

by Beth Hellman

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If you have any questions, comments or suggestions

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*Note: Because of the nature of storytelling, as well as time constraints, Mark's program occasionally differs from the guide. New stories are added all the time, and some stories are appropriate for different age groups. We try to keep current, but apologize in advance for any confusion. Please let us know how we can improve this guide!*

For the latest version of this guide, please visit

<http://www.markbinder.com/guides/>

## **Tall Tales**

What is a Tall Tale?

Mark Binder's Tall Tales don't always hold fast to the dictionary (or wikipedia) definition of a Tall Tale. Those sources suggest that tall tales explain natural phenomena or are about larger-than-life characters.

In Mark's stories, a tall tale is almost always about a person or an event that is bigger than normal. His tall tales include people and adventures that are stretched out of size and proportion. Sometimes the hero himself is large (as in Paul Bunyan) or the events are patently impossible (George Washington throwing a dollar across the Potomac River). Sometimes things just get out of control (like the giant slug in "It Ate My Sister").

All Tall Tales are fictional. Sometimes they seem real. In many of his "original" Tall Tales, he begins with a rather normal setting, but gradually creep over the edge of believability. In these "Whoppers" the point at which the crossover happens is slippery and almost invisible, although in retrospect quite obvious.

## **Questions for Teachers and Students**

What elements do all tall tales have in common?

What are some elements that different tales share?

Discuss the geographic elements in tall tales.

How are "props" or magical items used in Tall Tales?

## Traditional Tall Tales

Traditional Tall Tales are often well known and included in many books and many versions. They include:

- How Paul Bunyan became the World's Greatest Lumberjack
- George Washington and the Cherry Tree
- John Henry
- Casey at the Bat
- The Ballad of East and West
- Jack and the Beanstalk
- Wise Woman
- Abu Hassan/Abu Ali

## Original but Traditional-Style Tall Tales

These are stories that Mark tells that sound as if they are old-fashioned tall tales, but were actually written or composed.

- The Short Tale of Erika P. Spunk
- The Tale of Bad Breath Bill
- The Challah that Ate Chelm
- Roger Williams vs. The Big Blue Bugs
- Og-Caveman Stories

## Question for Teachers and Students

What are some similarities and differences between the stories that Mark Binder wrote and the stories that are passed down from traditional sources?

## Contemporary "Realistic" Tall Tales

Some of Mark's best-loved stories are the stories he tells about the amazing and outrageous events that happened to him and to his family. Few (if any) of these are true.

- It Ate My Sister
- Watermelons for Freedom
- Grandpa's Fish (sometimes called Grandpa's Turkey)
- The Great Rhode Island Clam Shake
- The Haunted Playground
- The Blupp Maker
- The Bully and the Shrimp

## Questions for Teachers and Students

How do the "realistic" Tall Tales differ from the traditional or traditional-style Tall Tales?

What do they have in common?

### Story Exercises

1. Take a character from history and invent a Tall Tale about her/him.
2. Create a character in a historical setting and invent a Tall Tale about him/her.
3. Create a tall-tale story about yourself or a friend or relative. What details do you need to make this seem "real"?
4. Are there parts of your culture that could use a "Tall Tale" treatment? How would you write a tall tale about skateboarders? Cheerleaders? Quiet readers? One of your ancestors?

### Biography

Mark Binder is an author, a storyteller, and a nice guy. More than 200 of his stories for young and old have been published in magazines, anthologized in books, and used on standardized tests. His "Bedtime Story Book" collection is a multigenerational masterpiece now in its seventh edition. His novel, "The Brothers Schlemiel" was serialized weekly in print for two years, and is due to be released in hardback in 2008. Mark is an award-winning recording artist and storyteller. He is the founder of the American Story Theater, and teaches a college course in "Telling Lies."

Mark Binder's work is available at [www.lightpublications.com](http://www.lightpublications.com), <http://www.amazon.com/>, <http://www.cdbaby.com/> and at the iTunes music store.

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