

LEVELED BOOK • 0

Johnny Appleseed Heads West



Retold by Vera Ogden Bakker • Illustrated by Tad Butler

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Johnny Appleseed had the strongest legs and feet any man ever had. He was like a flying jackrabbit. He never wore shoes, but he could jump over the widest river in one giant leap.



Johnny was born around the time of the American Revolution and grew up in Massachusetts. He loved sitting under trees and eating apples. One day, he heard people talk of moving out West to live, and he knew they would need apples when they got there. Johnny gathered apple seeds and headed out West ahead of the settlers.

Johnny was a scrawny man. His arms and legs were as thin as tree branches but as strong as iron bars. Johnny wore an old cloth sack for a shirt, with holes cut out for his head and arms. He always carried his shovel and a bag of apple seeds that never seemed to run out. He was quite a sight—he even wore a cooking pot on his head!



In those days the West was wild country. There were no buildings or roads—only forests, wild animals, and native people.

Johnny loved nature more than just about anybody. He loved to walk from sunup to sundown and whistled wherever he went. Birds often followed Johnny to hear him make his music. Johnny understood everything the birds said and talked right back to them with his whistles.





Johnny's legs carried him lightning fast from one clearing to the next. Whenever Johnny came to a clearing, he'd stop, dig a hole, and put an apple seed in it. Then he'd push the pile of dirt back into the hole with his big bare feet.

After planting seeds all day, Johnny would sleep under the stars. Apple trees as tall as Johnny would grow faster than weeds in the clearings. Johnny would smile as big as a pumpkin before racing on to a new place.

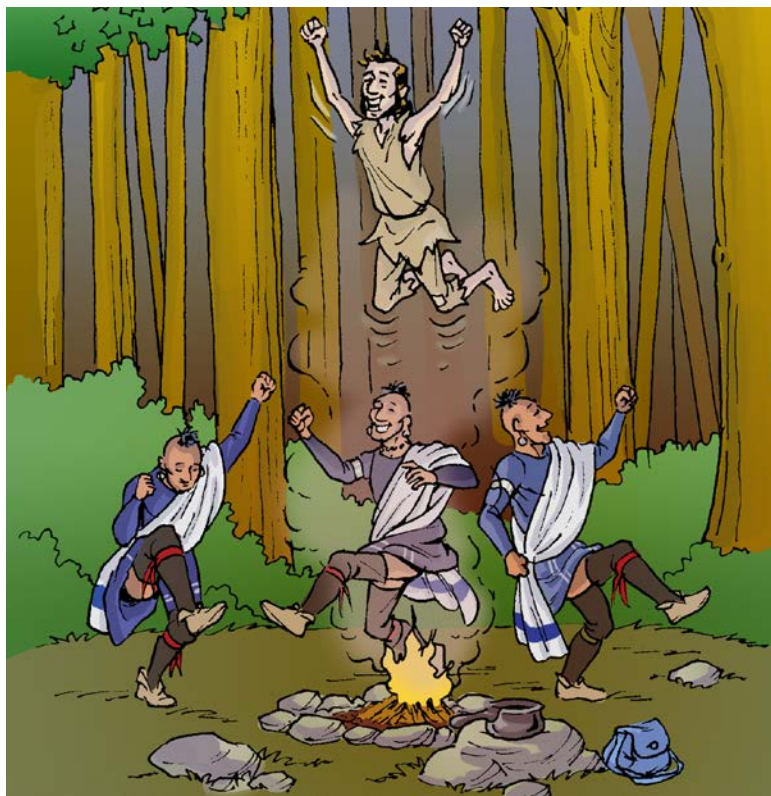


Every morning, Johnny took the pot off his head, turned it right side up, and placed it under a tree. When Johnny came back in the evening, the pot was always full of delicious fruits or vegetables.

Sometimes it was sweet potatoes, and at other times corn, nuts, or berries. Johnny was always happy to find these foods in his pot because he never ate meat of any kind. He loved all the animals and didn't want to see them harmed in any way.

Some Shawnee natives watched Johnny from behind rocks and trees as he traveled through their lands. He was different from any white man they had ever seen, and he made strange sounds with his mouth. The braves were also impressed by the love and respect Johnny showed even thorny plants and dangerous animals.





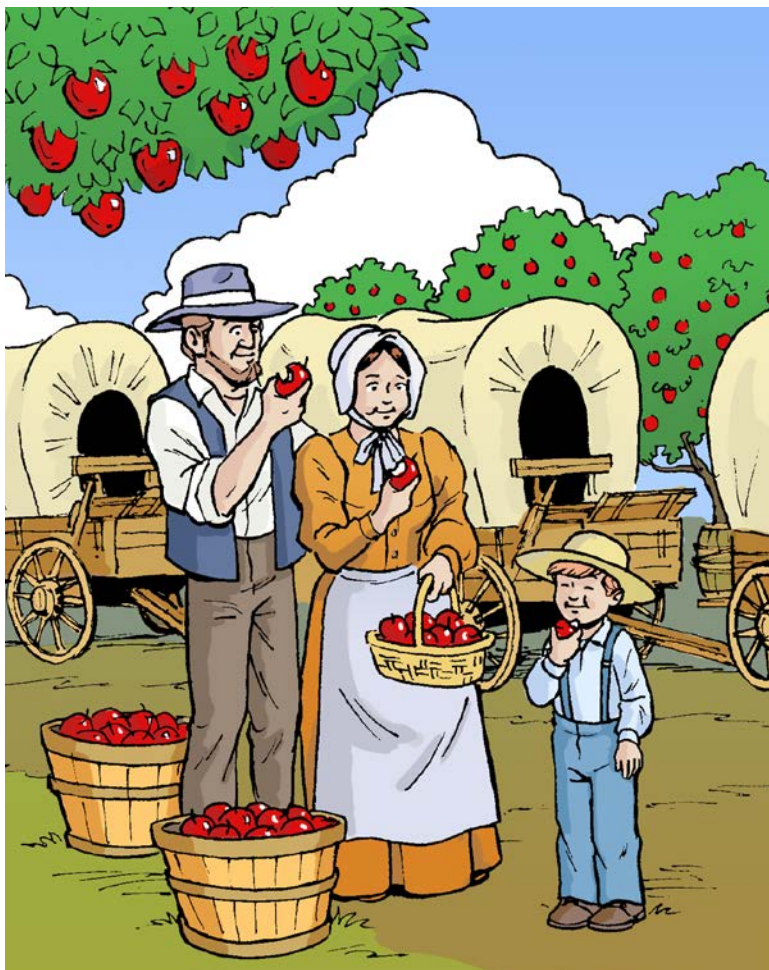
The Shawnee braves tasted some apples from Johnny's trees and wanted more. They made friends with Johnny. He sat around the fire with them while they ate applesauce and cornbread that he baked as a special treat. After dinner, they danced around the fire late into the night. Johnny could dance longer and higher than even the strongest braves.



One day while Johnny was planting seeds, he heard a terrible howl in the woods. Johnny followed the sound and found a wolf caught in a steel trap. Johnny spoke softly, gently patted the wolf's head, and opened the trap.

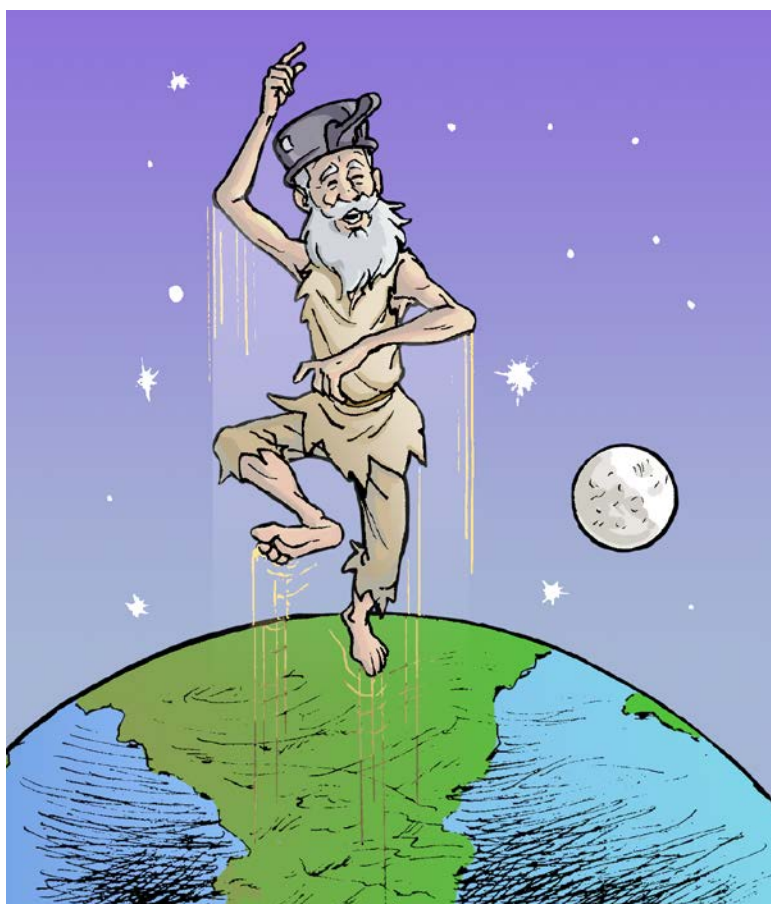
From then on, that wolf followed Johnny everywhere. Johnny named him Roamer. Roamer liked to dig the holes for the seeds, so Johnny planted apple trees twice as fast as before.





Johnny swiftly planted trees all over Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. When the settlers finally arrived in their covered wagons, they were surprised to find red apples hanging in every orchard. What a treat in the wilderness!

Some of the settlers held a square dance to celebrate, and Johnny got excited. He danced so high that he didn't come down until the next day. The Earth spun completely around before Johnny landed back on the ground at the end of his dance.



A young settler boy named Joey was curious about Johnny's cooking pot. Joey wondered how the pot became filled with food each day. One day, Joey hid and waited to see what would happen when Johnny left the pot under a tree. Joey waited and waited for what seemed like hours. Joey waited so long that he got tired and fell asleep. When he woke up, the pot was full of potatoes, strawberries, and walnuts. Joey didn't see anyone, but he found tracks from many kinds of animals around the pot.





In time, Johnny grew old and died. Roamer the Wolf carefully buried Johnny with his bag of apple seeds, shovel, and cooking pot. That night, Roamer sat next to Johnny's grave and howled long and sad at the golden moon. The birds came to pay their respects as well and sang their very best hymns. Hundreds of other animals gathered at the edge of the forest to say good-bye to their fallen friend. And still today, the sweetest apples in the whole country grow right in that very spot.

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Level O Leveled Book
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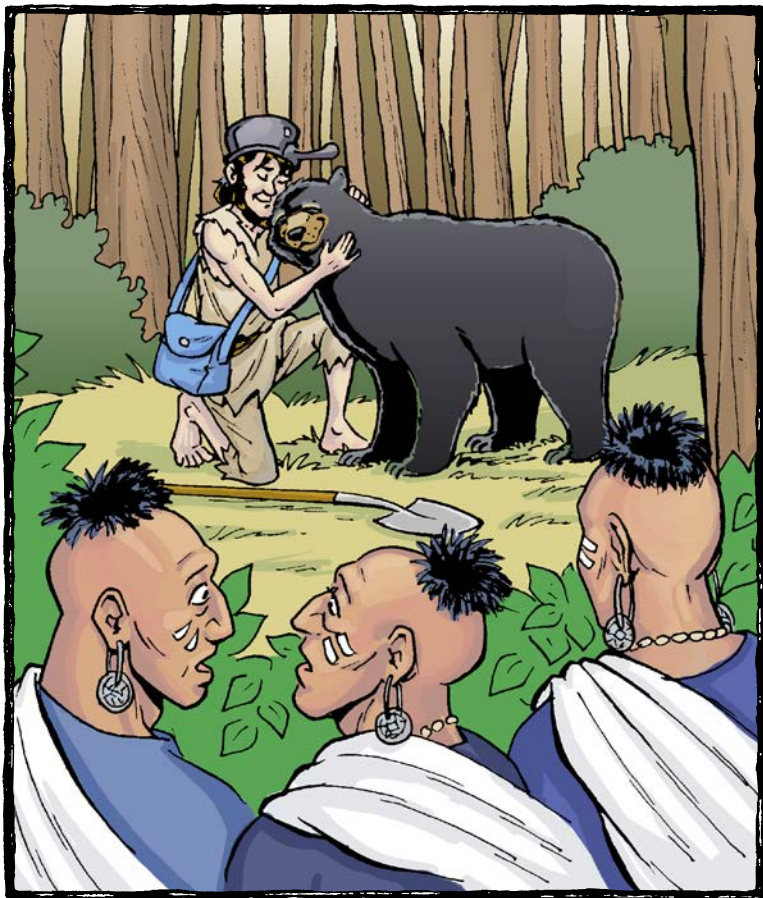
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