About the Book

Text Type: Fiction/Tall Tale   **Page Count:** 16   **Word Count:** 725

Book Summary

John Henry is one of the most famous American tall tales. Readers will be introduced to John Henry, who grew up as a slave and went on to be known as the fastest and strongest steel driver on the railroad. The story can serve as an engaging introduction to the classic "man vs. machine" conflict.

About the Lesson

Targeted Reading Strategy

• Make, revise, and confirm predictions

Objectives

• Use the reading strategy of making, revising, and confirming predictions to understand text
• Understand and identify problem and solution
• Identify and distinguish between the sounds of vowel diphthong /ou/
• Identify and form compound words
• Identify and use syllable patterns to divide two- and three-syllable words

Materials

Green text indicates resources available on the website

• Book—*The Legend of John Henry* (copy for each student)
• Chalkboard or dry erase board
• Prediction, problem and solution, compound words, syllable patterns worksheets
• Discussion cards

  ✎ Indicates an opportunity for students to mark in the book. (All activities may be demonstrated by projecting book on interactive whiteboard or completed with paper and pencil if books are reused.)

Vocabulary

*Bold vocabulary words also appear in a pre-made lesson for this title on Vocabulary a–z.com.

• **Content words:**
  Story critical: *drill bit (n.), fire (v.), hire (v.), railroad (n.), slave (n.), steel driver (n.)*
  Enrichment: *Civil War (n.), levers (n.), locomotive (n.)*

Before Reading

Build Background

• Ask students whether they have read or heard any American tall tales (for example, *Pecos Bill, Paul Bunyan,* or *Johnny Appleseed*). Discuss what students remember about the stories.
• Discuss with students what makes these stories unique (the genre of tall tale usually includes a main character who has superhuman strength or characteristics; the stories usually also include humorous exaggerations).
• Explain to students that the book they are going to read is about another famous tall tale character: John Henry.

Preview the Book
Introduce the Book
- Give students their copy of the book. Guide them to the front and back covers and read the title. Have students discuss what they see on the covers. Encourage them to offer ideas as to what type of book it is (genre, text type, fiction or nonfiction, and so on) and what it might be about.
- Show students the title page. Discuss the information on the page (title of book, author's name, illustrator's name).
- Preview the table of contents on page 3. Remind students that the table of contents provides an overview of the book. Ask students what they expect to read about in the book, based on what they see in the table of contents. (Accept all answers that students can justify.)

Introduce the Reading Strategy: Make, revise, and confirm predictions
- Explain to students that good readers often make predictions, or guesses, about what will happen in a book, based on the series of events and what the characters say, do, and think in the story. As they read the story, readers make, revise, or confirm predictions based on what they learn from reading. Before reading a book, readers can use the title and illustrations as the basis for making predictions.
- Model using the title, front cover illustration, and title page illustration to make a prediction. **Think-aloud:** *To make my first prediction, I think about the title of the story,* The Legend of John Henry. *I wonder who John Henry could be. When I look at the front cover illustration, I see men with shovels and one man who is bigger than the other men. The bigger man is holding a hammer. I wonder if this man is John Henry. On the title page, I see the man, and behind him is a steam engine—the kind that was attached to trains long ago. Maybe John Henry works with trains. I'll have to read the book to find out.*
- Introduce and explain the prediction worksheet. Create a similar chart on the board. Model writing a prediction in the *Make* column, such as *John Henry works on trains.*
- Invite students to make a prediction based on the cover illustrations and write it on their worksheet in the *Make* column. Share and discuss students' predictions as a group.
- As students read, encourage them to use other reading strategies in addition to the targeted strategy presented in this section.

Introduce the Comprehension Skill: Problem and solution
- Explain to students that every fictional story has certain parts, or elements. Write the words *Problem* and *Solution* on the board. Explain that in most stories, the main character is faced with a problem that needs to be solved, and the solution is how the character works through the problem and finds a way to deal with it.
- Create a chart on the board with the headings *Problem* and *Solution*. Write the sentence *I lost my dog* on the board under the *Problem* heading.
- Model identifying possible solutions for the problem. **Think-aloud:** *I know that when a problem arises, I can deal with it in different ways. If I lose my dog, I know that I have to think of a way to find him. One possible solution might be to put up signs in the neighborhood with my dog's picture and my phone number. Another possible solution to this problem is to walk around my neighborhood and call my dog's name. I could also place an ad in the local newspaper. I've identified three possible solutions to the problem.*
- Model filling in the chart on the board with the information for this problem.
- Write the following sentence on the board under the *Problem* heading: *I forgot my lunch.* Discuss possible actions that a person might take to solve this problem and list them on the board under *Solution*.
- Have students think of other possible problems to share. Discuss and list possible solutions.
- Remind students that good readers look for problems and solutions as they read.

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Introduce the Vocabulary

- Model how to apply word-attack strategies. Have students find the word *levers* on page 10. Remind them that they can look at the letter the word begins with and then use what they know about syllables and vowels (one vowel sound per syllable) to sound out the rest of the word. Remind students to look for clues to the word's meaning in the sentence that contains the unfamiliar word, as well as in the sentences before and after. Point out that they may also look at the illustrations for clues to find meaning.

- Remind students of other strategies they can use to work out words they don't know. For example, they can use what they know about letter and sound correspondence to figure out the word. They can look for base words, prefixes and suffixes, and other word endings. They can use the context to work out meanings of unfamiliar words.

- Remind students that they should check whether unfamiliar words make sense by rereading the sentence in which a word appears.

Set the Purpose

- Have students read to find out more about John Henry and what made him a legend. Remind them to stop after every few pages to predict what might happen next, or to confirm or revise their predictions.

During Reading

Student Reading

- **Guide the reading:** Have students read to the end of page 4. Encourage those who finish early to go back and reread. Ask students to stop and think about the events that have happened so far in the story.

- Model making a prediction.
  Think-aloud: *Before reading, I predicted that John Henry worked with trains. My prediction was partially correct. John Henry worked to build railroad tracks for trains. After reading pages 3 and 4, I know now that John Henry was born a slave a long time ago. I will write this information in the* Actual *column on the chart, next to my original prediction. On page 4, I read that John Henry became free after the Civil War, but he needed a job. He went to work for the railroad company. I predict that next I will read about John Henry working on the railroad and perhaps about adventures he has. I will write this new prediction on my chart in the* Make *column.*

- Have students review the prediction they made before reading. Have them write a revised prediction next to the first prediction on their worksheet or place a check mark in the *Confirm* box if their prediction was correct. If they confirmed their prediction, have them make a new prediction and write it on their worksheet in the *Make* column.

- Model identifying the problem stated on pages 3 and 4.
  Think-aloud: *I learned on page 3 and 4 that John Henry was born a slave but was freed when the Civil War ended. Then he needed to find a job. I think this was a problem he had. As I kept reading, I learned that the railroads were hiring workers to build tracks across America, so John Henry went to work for the railroad. This was the solution to his problem.*

- Introduce and explain the problem-and-solution worksheet. Ask students to record the problem on their worksheet and the solution in the box next to it.

- **Check for understanding:** Have students read to the end of page 6. Remind them to use the illustrations, sentences, and what they already know to make predictions as they read. When they have finished reading, have them make, revise, and/or confirm their predictions on their worksheet. Discuss whether their predictions turned out to be true or whether they needed to be revised. Reassure students that predicting correctly is not the purpose of this reading strategy.

- Have students continue reading to the end of page 8.

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- **Check for understanding:** Have students return to their problem-and-solution worksheet. Ask them to record the problem on page 7 (the railroad tracks ran into Big Bend Mountain, and the railroad couldn't be built around it). Ask volunteers if there was a solution to this problem (John Henry told the men not to worry because he could smash through the mountain). After discussing, have students record this solution on their worksheet.
- Guide students to identify that another problem has developed on page 8. Ask them to record it on their worksheet (the boss wanted the tunnel finished faster, or he would fire the men).
- Have students read the remainder of the book. Encourage them to continue making predictions and looking for problems and solutions as they read.

  ✎ Have students make a question mark in their book beside any word they do not understand or cannot pronounce. Encourage them to use the strategies they have learned to read each word and figure out its meaning.

After Reading

- Ask students what words, if any, they marked in their book. Use this opportunity to model how they can read these words using decoding strategies and context clues.

Reflect on the Reading Strategy

- **Think-aloud:** *I predicted that John Henry would beat the machine and live happily ever after. I was shocked and sad that my prediction was wrong—he beat the machine, but his heart gave out and he died. I will write this in the* Actual *column of my chart.*
- **Independent practice:** Have students complete their prediction worksheet. Ask them to explain other predictions they made while reading. Invite students to discuss whether their predictions turned out to be true or whether they needed to be revised. If time allows, ask students to explain how making, revising, and confirming predictions helped them understand and enjoy the events of the story.

Reflect on the Comprehension Skill

- **Discussion:** Discuss with students what other problems and solutions they identified as they read. Review how identifying problems that characters face and solutions they develop helps good readers enjoy and remember the story.
- **Independent practice:** Have students complete the problem-and-solution worksheet. If time allows, discuss their responses.
- **Enduring understanding:** In this story, you read about a famous character in American folklore. Now that you have read about John Henry, why do you think people love this story?

Build Skills

Phonics: Vowel diphthong /ou/

- Write the following words on the board: *about, around, our.* Say each word aloud as you run your finger under it.
- Ask students to say aloud the vowel sound that all three words have in common. Point to the *ou* letter combination in each word and explain to students that sometimes letters combine to stand for one sound. In these words, the letters *ou* combine to make the sound they hear in *about, around,* and *our.*
- Write the *ou* letter combination on the board. Have students practice writing the letter combination on a separate piece of paper while saying the sound the combination represents.
- Explain to students that *ou* can often have other sounds, like the short /u/ sound in *tough* or *cousin,* or the short /o/ sound, as in *bought,* or the /oo/ sound as in *could* or *should.*
- **Check for understanding:** Make a four-column chart on the board, and ask students to help you "sort" by sound the words just discussed.

- **Independent practice**: Challenge students to find other words in the book that contain the /ou/ diphthong (for example, *pound* on page 5). Have volunteers come to the board and write the words in the appropriate column of the chart.

Grammar and Mechanics: Compound words

- Review or explain that when two short words are combined to form a new word, the new word is called a *compound word*.
- Write the word *doorbell* on the board. Ask students which two words they see in *doorbell (door* and *bell).* Explain that this word is called a *compound word*. A compound word has two parts that make up one word meaning.
- Have students turn to page 3 in the book. Read the following sentence: *He grew so fast that sometimes the pants he put on in the morning were too short by nightfall.* Have students find two compound words in the sentence *(sometimes* and *nightfall).* Explain that the definitions of the two separate words can often help students figure out the meaning of the bigger word (for example, *nightfall* means when night falls or begins).
- Have students follow along as you read the second paragraph on page 4. Ask them to locate the compound words *(airplanes* or *railroad)* and identify the two separate words that make up each compound word. Discuss the definition of each word, using the smaller words to figure out each word's meaning.
- **Check for understanding**: Have student pairs turn to page 10 and find two more compound words *(everyone* and *salesman).* Have them discuss with their partner what each word means, based on its two base words.
- **Independent practice**: Introduce, explain, and have students complete the compound words worksheet. Discuss their answers aloud after students finish.

Word Work: Syllable patterns

- Review or explain that it is important to know how to divide words into syllables, both for speaking and for reading.
- Review the following syllable rules and provide an example of each:
    1. Each syllable is a "beat" of a word.
    2. Every syllable has only one vowel sound.
    3. Words are divided between syllables.
    4. When two consonants come between two vowels, the word is divided between the consonants. Example: *wonder/won-der*
    5. A prefix or suffix usually makes a separate syllable. Example: *longest/long-est*
- Write the words *strongest, biggest,* and *became* on the board, and ask students to say each word. Have them tell the number of syllables in each word. Write the numbers students provide next to the words.
- Model and discuss with students where the syllable break comes in each word and why (*strong/est,* suffix; *big/gest,* vc/cv; *be/came,* one vowel per syllable).
- ✏ **Check for understanding**: Write the following words on the board: *booming, hammer.* Ask students to use the inside back cover of their book to write how each word should be divided into syllables. Discuss their responses.
- **Independent practice**: Introduce, explain, and have students complete the syllable patterns worksheet. If time allows, have them discuss their answers.

Build Fluency

Independent Reading

- Allow students to read their book independently. Additionally, partners can take turns reading parts of the book to each other.

Home Connection
• Give students their book to take home to read with parents, caregivers, siblings, or friends. Have students share the problems and solutions in the story with someone at home.

Extend the Reading

Tall Tale Writing Connection
Ask students to brainstorm and write an alternative ending for John Henry. Ask them to consider what might have happened if John Henry had survived? What problem and solution would likely have happened next for John Henry? How would his story end? Have students write one or two paragraphs to complete their new ending.

Social Studies Connection
Provide books and other print and Internet resources for students to research other tall tale characters to determine if they were real people. Ask students to read the classic tall tale stories and then compare each story with their research findings on the actual people. Allow students time to share their findings.

Skill Review
Discussion cards covering comprehension skills and strategies not explicitly taught with the book are provided as an extension activity. The following is a list of some ways these cards can be used with students:
• Use as discussion starters for literature circles.
• Have students choose one or more cards and write a response, either as an essay or as a journal entry.
• Distribute before reading the book and have students use one of the questions as a purpose for reading.
• Cut apart and use the cards as game cards with a board game.
• Conduct a class discussion as a review before the book quiz.

Assessment

Monitor students to determine if they can:
• consistently use the strategy of making, revising, and confirming predictions to comprehend the text during discussion and on a worksheet
• consistently identify problem-and-solution relationships in the text during discussion and on a worksheet.
• identify sounds for the diphthong /ou/ during discussion and in the text
• accurately identify, understand, and form compound words from the text and on a worksheet
• accurately identify and understand how to syllabicate words from the text in discussion and on a worksheet

Comprehension Checks
• Book Quiz
• Retelling Rubric

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