



Karen Konnerth 

CALLIOPE KATE AND THE VOICE OF THE RIVER

Greetings Educators!

I am excited at the opportunity to visit you and your students!

I am an author/illustrator, as well as puppeteer and I have a story to share in either or both picture book format and live puppet theater. My tall tale was inspired by the raucous cacophony of the steamboat Natchez steam calliope, blasting daily across the river to my studio in New Orleans. Very loud, and always out of tune, it needed someone bigger than life to play it: Calliope Kate! In the

American folk tradition of Paul Bunyan and Sal Fink, this wild new tall tale character is born on her family's flatboat on the Mississippi River as they adventure downriver. Finally reaching New Orleans, Kate's Ma fails to tame her to lady-like piano playing, with Kate instead using the earsplitting din of a steamboat calliope to save the city from a hurricane. The puppet cast also includes a giant catfish, a dancing piano, of course, the blasting calliope, and more!

THE PUPPETS

I have worked as a full time puppeteer for several decades, writing and building shows in many different techniques. These puppets I carved of wood, to make Czech style marionettes, following a workshop in Prague in 2019.

THE PERFORMANCE

The 45 minute presentation includes the 30 minute show as well as demonstration of the puppets, Q & A, and a brief, interactive discussion of the story building process, designed to encourage students to write their own tall tales.

THE BOOK

The book version of the story (published by Pelican Publishing, 2022) features photographs of the puppets and staging used in the show to illustrate the story, and also includes an information page, as well as music to a song commonly played by the calliope. Book order forms will be made available for the students to take home in advance, with the author providing the books on event days. Book price: \$20.00 The book is also available anywhere books are sold.

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS: Sense of Place Through Tall Tales

The accompanying Teacher Packet includes related goals and objectives in Language Arts as well as Social Studies, as well as worksheets to lead students to write their own tall tale.

BIO

Based in New Orleans, LA, my extensive, international work as professional puppeteer became the foundation for my specialization in arts integrated teaching, as well as my visual storytelling through writing and illustration of books for children. I have distilled my countless classroom hours developing, implementing, and refining arts integrated projects teaching across the curriculum to present to educators at the National Art Education Association, The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and for the U.S. Embassy English Language Specialist Program in Central America, Asia, the Middle East, and South Africa. My decades of work as a full time, professional, usually solo puppeteer involved writing and choreographing all shows (some adapted from folktales and mythology, some purely original), building in a wide variety of puppetry styles and media, performing with all live elements, marketing and promotion.

I have two picture books released in 2022: CALLIOPE KATE AND THE VOICE OF THE RIVER (Pelican Publishing) and THE SNOWMAN WALTZ (Sleeping Bear Press).

STUDY GUIDE: SENSE OF PLACE THROUGH TALL TALES
CREATIVE WRITING PROJECT GUIDE

inspired by

CALLIOPE KATE AND THE VOICE OF THE RIVER: original tall tale by Karen Konnerth

This creative writing project is connected to Language Arts as well as Social Studies goals and objectives. The full project is written for use by grades three and four, and elements of it are appropriate for grades one and two as well. The activities are intended to be inspired by either reading the book (from Pelican Publishing 2022), or watching the puppet theater version, of CALLIOPE KATE AND THE VOICE OF THE RIVER - an original tall tale inspired by the cacophony of the steamboat calliope whose music is heard daily by the author in her New Orleans studio.

Project steps are as follows:

STEP # 1:

Social Studies: map skills, land forms, and geography.

Language Arts: Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

- Students are introduced to various tall tale characters to sketch and locate their place of origin on a United States map.
- ACTIVITY: Tall Tales Worksheet

STEP # 2: Social Studies: people, places, and environments

- Students make a list of plants, animals, land forms, weather, traditional food, music, trades in the region where they live..
- ACTIVITY: Sense of Place Worksheet

STEP # 3: Language Arts: Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text

- Students create their own tall tale character who is from the region where the student lives.
- ACTIVITY: Building A Character Worksheet

STEP # 4: Language Arts: organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally

- Students use a story template to build a story about their character.
- ACTIVITY: Tall Tale Story Template

The template serves to build a story structure. Students may go on to write a more detailed story, including descriptive language and dialogue. Students may also write additional episodes in their character's life.

Share stories with the class by:

- Reading aloud
- Compiling into class booklet
- Creating simple puppet performances of stories to share.

American Tall Tale Characters

Before TV and radio, people told stories to entertain themselves in logging camps, on shanty boats, around campfires, or on front porches. Stories about any one character could have endless variations. Some, such as John Henry, were based on a real person. These are just a few.

Notice that each one is connected to a real place by what they do. Also notice that, although they can do things ordinary people cannot, they are NOT super heroes. They do not fight bad guys. They are more likely to be helpful to people with their strengths.

Read about each character and find clues to decide what part of the country their stories come from. Draw them around the map and make a line to where they belong in the country.

NAME: Paul Bunyan
APPEARANCE: Giant size, bearded, plaid shirt
PERSONALITY: Hard working.
JOB: Lumberjack
LOCATION: Logging camp
TOOL: His ax
SIDEKICK: Babe the Blue Ox (giant blue ox)
STORIES: His footprints made the Great Lakes.
He used trees for toothpicks.
His crew greased his giant frying pan to make his pancakes with bacon slabs on their feet.

NAME: Pecos Bill
APPEARANCE: Cowboy
PERSONALITY: Wild, animal loving.
JOB: Cattle drives (herding cattle from one feeding ground to another)
LOCATION: Desert and prairie
TOOL: His lasso is a rattle snake named Shake
SIDEKICK: Horse named Widow-maker
STORIES: He fell out of his family's covered wagon as a baby and was raised by coyotes.
He dug the Rio Grande when his horse got stranded in the desert without water.
He once lassoed a tornado.

NAME: John Henry
APPEARANCE: Extremely strong Black man
PERSONALITY: Determined, proud of his strength.
JOB: Digging tunnels through rock for railroad lines.
LOCATION: Eastern mountains, when railroads were first built to connect cities
TOOL: His 30 pound hammer
SIDEKICK: His "Shaker": man who holds the chisel he strikes with the hammer.
STORIES: He was born with a hammer in his hand.
(often told in song) His hammer blows struck fire and could be heard for a mile.
If he got sick, his wife Polly Ann took his place, "driving steel like a man."
He won in a contest with a steam drill machine, but then died.

NAME: Sally Ann Thunder Ann Whirlwind
APPEARANCE: Wears a hornet's nest bonnet and skunk perfume, old fashioned dress
PERSONALITY: Daring, adventurous.
JOB: American frontier explorer
LOCATION: Prairies and desert
TOOL: Her fearless thinking
SIDEKICK: A panther
STORIES: She could talk, swim, and run at birth, all better than her brothers.
She tames a panther by dancing with it.
She makes a rope out of rattlesnakes to free a man whose head got stuck in a tree.

What Makes A Sense of Place?

What makes the place where you live like no other? What elements create a sense of “Place”? The people, plants, animals, land forms, climate and weather, traditional food, music, man-made environment, history, trades, the way you play, and more are what makes one place different from another. Think about the place where you live and list a few elements in each category.

- FEATURES OF THE LAND: (rivers, mountains, forests?)
-

- PLANTS, TREES, CROPS
-

- NATIVE ANIMALS
-

- PEOPLE (of different races, cultures)
-

- CLIMATE, WEATHER, NATURAL FORCES
-

- TRADITIONAL FOOD (food your family cooks)
-

- MUSIC (Live music you hear. Where do you hear it?)
-

- TRADITIONAL TRADES (JOBS) (work your family and neighbors do)
-

- PLAY (indoors, or outdoors, how do you play?)

Building a Character

Now you will create a tall tale character from the place where you live. Refer to your Sense of Place list to make up a character who is clearly from this place, and no other. Refer back to the tall tale characters you read about. Your character may be a giant, ordinary size, or very tiny. but they must be spectacular in their ability to do what ordinary people cannot. They can be funny, have a sidekick animal who helps them, or who they have tamed. They have a job similar to jobs people here have. BUT they succeed in their job with their amazing abilities. Remember, they are not super heroes. There are no bad guys. They are not magic.

NAME:

APPEARANCE:

PERSONALITY TRAITS:

JOB:

LOCATION (Where were they born? Where do they live?):

TOOL (or other thing important to them):

SIDEKICK (human or animal. If animal, did they have to be tamed?):

STORIES (Something amazing they did with their special abilities? A land form they created? Something unusual about the way they live, their home, what they eat, a tool they use? An amazing feat they accomplished?)

On the back of this page, draw your character.

Tall Tale Story Template

STORY TITLE _____

STORY AUTHOR _____

_____ was born _____.
MAIN CHARACTER WHERE?

His/her parents noticed right away that _____.
SOMETHING AMAZING

He/she ate _____ for breakfast.

When _____ grew up, he/she was very good at _____.
MAIN CHARACTER WHAT?

One day, he/she met a _____.
WILD ANIMAL

He/she tamed it by _____.
DOING WHAT?

Then, they always _____.
DID WHAT TOGETHER?

Once, when they were going to _____,
WHERE?

they saw _____.
WHO HAVING A PROBLEM?

Right away they _____.
DID WHAT TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM?

Everyone always remembered them because _____!
_____!