



Title: Swamp Angel

Author: Anne Isaacs

Illustrator: Paul O. Zelinsky

Themes: Tall Tale genre

Items Needed for Center: [Swamp picture](#)

See video of this book read aloud here: [Swamp Angel](#)

Volunteers should note that much of the “pioneer” language and double-meanings in this tall tale will be lost upon the students but they will still enjoy the story and its illustrations.

★ 3rd Grade Common Core Reading Standard ★

Explain how specific aspects of a text’s illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story (e.g. create mood, emphasize aspects of a character or setting).

I. INTRODUCTION (PREP QUESTIONS)

Introduce Swamp Angel as an example of a **folktale**, specifically the genre of a **tall tale**:

Tall tales were first told in America by the settlers who made their home in the American wilderness. In those days people did not have televisions, computers, or even electricity so they told stories for entertainment. Characteristics of a tall tale:

- Main character is bigger than life and has superhuman abilities
- The story is full of ridiculous exaggeration
- Main character usually has a problem to solve
- Lots of action
- Plot is funny and impossible
- The main character solves the problem at the end, defeating bad
- Tall tales often tried to explain things in nature

Have students decide which tall tale characteristics are already evident by looking at the cover (pioneer clothing, gigantic character, etc.).

II. INTEGRATIVE STRATEGIES

During Reading

- Title page: have students determine exaggeration clues by looking at illustration of main character (holding large sunflowers which are dwarfed by comparison).
- P. 1: Read; have students determine examples of gross exaggeration (newborn taller than her mother; newborn couldn’t climb a tree without help).
- Pp. 2-3: Read; have students determine exaggeration and sly humor (ax in crib; she was two-years-old when she built her first log cabin). Have students use illustration to determine exaggerated size comparisons and feat (putting out fire by scooping water up in apron).

Point out the **alliteration** (when two or more words begin with the **same sound**) in the second paragraph (*buckskin bravery...bogs and backwoods*).

Ask students what a **compound word** is (two little words stuck together to make a bigger word). Remind students that they can understand the meaning of a **compound word** by thinking about what each of the little words means alone.

Point out each compound word in the following way: say **entire** compound word; then hold up your **right fist** while you say the **first little word of the compound**; then hold up your **left fist** widely separated from the other fist while saying the **second little word of the compound**; finally, bring your fists together while repeating the actual compound word. This is a visual scaffold to help students understand the composition of compound words.

Have students explain their meanings (*buckskin, backwoods*).

- Pp. 4-5: Read; have students define **mired** using context clues. Discuss the exaggerated feat (lifting wagon trains). Point out the example of **figurative language** on p. 4 and ask students what it is called (**simile**: a comparison using **like** or **as**: “...she lifted those wagons like they were twigs in a puddle”) and ask students what two things are being compared (*wagons / twigs*) Ask students how the **simile** helps the reader visualize the exaggeration.

Discuss the simile on p. 5 and ask students what two things are being compared (*stories/ sunflowers*).

Point out that at this story part the main character, Angelica Longrider, becomes known as Swamp Angel.

- Pp. 6-7: Read; discuss vocabulary that was unique to the backwoods (varmint, grub, etc.). Discuss the purpose of a *root cellar* on p. 6 (a room or large hole in the ground where vegetables (such as potatoes and carrots).

On p. 7, discuss the meaning of pelt and ask students to determine how pelts were used (hats, vests, etc.). Emphasize that the entire animal would have been used in additional ways (food, making candles, etc.).

- Pp. 8-9: Read; discuss that the traditional role of women at this time in history was to take care of the home and children. Have students discuss how the illustration supports the “tall tale” exaggeration.

Point out the compound words (*daredevils, dewdrops, coonskin*) using the aforementioned fist procedure. Have students explain their meanings.

- Pp. 10-11: Read; have students explain in their own words what happened in the last paragraph.
- Pp. 12-13: Read; have students discuss the meaning of, “*I’m much obliged for that pelt you’re carryin’*”.
- Pp. 14-15: Read; discuss the impossible feat (throwing a bear into the sky). Using the aforementioned procedure for **compound words**, have students define *nightfall*.
- Pp. 16-17: Read; discuss the impossible feat (grabbing a tornado). Point out the simile and ask students what two things are being compared (*twister/lasso*). Point out the **alliteration** in the last sentence (*bristled bandit* and *brought him crashing back* to earth).
- Pp. 18-19: Read; discuss the double meaning of *locked in a bear hug*.
- Pp. 20-21: Read: discuss the exaggeration (Swamp Angel was pinned underwater so drank the entire lake to keep from drowning).
- Pp. 22-23: Read; discuss the exaggeration.

- Pp. 24-25: Read; discuss the examples of exaggeration (she hiked ten miles back and they started fighting again; combined snoring caused boulders to roll, forests of trees to fall).

Discuss the **simile** comparison (Angel's *snoring/locomotive* in a thunderstorm) and how it helps the reader to visualize.

Using aforementioned procedure, have students define the **compound** words (*rockslide, thunderstorm*).

- Pp. 26-27: Read; discuss the exaggeration (beehive the size of a hill; rivers of honey).

Note: although *rivers of honey* is a **metaphor** and another example of **figurative language**, with the text difficulty, ignore.

- Pp. 28-29: Read; point out the **simile** and ask students what two things are being compared (*bear was dead as a stump*).

Ask students how Swamp Angel feels about her win over the bear? (respectful, enjoyed the challenge of the competition, etc.).

- Pp. 30-31: Read; discuss the exaggeration (one bear could feed all the people in Tennessee). Using aforementioned procedure for compound words, have students define *everyone, waistcoat, leftovers, storehouses, snowfall*.

- Pp. 32-33: Read; discuss the final example of the exaggeration (one bear pelt is bigger than the entire state of Tennessee).

III. INTEGRATIVE STRATEGIES

Post Reading

- Ask students to share their opinions of the genre **tall tale**. What did they enjoy, and why?

IV. SMALL GROUPS

- Why did the author decide to make Swamp Angel a girl rather than a boy? Does it change the exaggeration? Why or why not?
- Show students the swamp picture and discuss its characteristics.
- Let students revisit the illustrations, discussing out how they help support the tall tale **exaggeration**.