

# JOHN HENRY

## JOHN HENRY

Book by Julius Lester, illus. by Jerry Pinkney

Theme: Folk Tale

Grade Level: K - 4

Running Time: 18 minutes

## SUMMARY

John Henry, a seemingly normal child, grows and grows until the point where he can easily lift his own cradle as if it were a feather! John Henry grows so tall so fast that he has to leave home to find other challenges for his strength and determination.

During the course of his life, he removes a boulder more effectively than dynamite, and hammers his way through a mountain faster than any machine. It's not how long you live, but how you live, he used to tell people.

## OBJECTIVES

- Children will learn about the legend of John Henry
- Children will explore the meaning of strength and courage
- Children will learn about life in the 1800s.

## BEFORE VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Explore the idea of physical strength with children. **Ask:**

- Why would it be exciting to be the strongest person in the world?
- What things could you do that you can't do now?
- If you were the strongest person in the world, what could you do to make the world a better place?

If possible, find a recording of the music to "John Henry." Teach children the lyrics to the song and have them accompany themselves on rhythm band instruments. Have children think about the ways the music makes them feel. Explain to children that John Henry was a very physically strong character. Then see if children can describe the "strength" of the music.

Talk with children about folk tales they may be familiar with. Encourage them to describe the main characters of these tales and consider what parts of these characters personalities and physical attributes could actually have existed and which parts appear to be pure legend. As children talk, help them think of the things that separate fiction from fact. Offer some exaggerated, and some actual personality and physical characteristics and have children decide whether these characteristics would be fictitious or factual.

Share the book, *John Henry*, with children.

Then ask:

- What things about life in the 1800s look different from the way we live today? How would life have been more difficult?
- Could someone like John Henry really have existed? Why? Why not?
- What did the artist do to make John Henry look big and strong?
- Which of John Henry's achievements was his greatest achievement? Why?

## AFTER VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Have children draw pictures of their own imaginary folk heroes. When finished, have children describe their heroes as they share the pictures with their classmates.

Encourage children to try and explain why they see these figures as heroic and how these special abilities could be used to help others.

Talk about the road and railway systems that were being created in the 1800s. Have children imagine what life would be like without these transportation systems. Encourage children to consider how their lives would be different, particularly in terms of the schools they attend, the places they'd see, the ways they would receive goods and services.

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