

SWAMP ANGEL

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by Anne Isaacs, illustrated by Paul O. Zelinsky (Dutton)

Themes: Art, Folktales, Humor,

Multicultural History

Grade Level: K—5

Running Time: 14 minutes

SUMMARY

This is an original story told in the American frontier tradition of tall tales. The Swamp Angel of the title is Angelica Longrider, who was born scarcely taller than her mother and didn't build her first log cabin until she was a full two years old. In the tallest tale of all, Swamp Angel tracks down and fights Thundering Tarnation, a huge bear with a bottomless appetite. Swamp Angel's victory comes only after she lassos the bear with a tornado and fights him all night in her sleep. Richly illustrated in the primitive style of early American painting, the story presents a heroine to match Paul Bunyan and other giants of folklore.

OBJECTIVES

- Children will watch and hear a "tall tale" set in Tennessee during frontier times.
- Children will distinguish between the "tall tale" and a true story, and identify parts of the tall tale that are like real life.
- Children will identify and describe visual details about how settlers lived on the frontier.

BEFORE VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Start by discussing the title of the program, defining both the words. Encourage students to guess who or what a "swamp angel" might be and to pay attention during the story to see if their guesses were correct. Ask students to identify elements of the cover art that are clues to where and when the story takes place and what kind of story it is.

AFTER VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Ask students to recall details from the story about where the story took place (Tennessee) and when (starting on August 1, 1815). Then have them share memories of the pictures: how the people dressed, the kinds of houses they lived in, how they traveled and how they celebrated. Discuss which parts of the story were like real life and which parts were not. Help students understand that exaggerated humor is one clue to a "tall tale." Compare the story to other tall tales, such as the story of Paul Bunyan.

Use the pictures in the program as an introduction to American art. Introduce children to library books, museum catalogs and Internet sites that show primitive American art, and ask them to identify the objects, clothing, animals and other things they see in the pictures. Arrange for museum visits if possible.

Encourage children to write and illustrate their own tall tales or to illustrate stories from American folktales. To spark their imaginations,

suggest that they start by dreaming up further adventures for Swamp Angel. Display the results on posters or in large scrapbooks that can be shared with others. Children can also write their stories as poetry or perform them with music and dance.

Connect the story to American history and geography with the help of a historical atlas or an illustrated book about the frontier. Use maps to show the patterns of European settlement in Tennessee; use a timeline to establish the dates. Introduce historical figures from the early 1800s, several of whom have now become semi-legendary, such as Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett and Johnny Appleseed. Arrange for children to visit frontier forts and historic sites, both in person and on the Internet.

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