

Mike Fink



Many people claim that there wasn't a river that Mike Fink didn't like. The favorite rivers of the King of the Keelboatmen were the Mississippi, the Missouri, and the Ohio. Some folks say that nothing could stop Mike from getting his cargo down the vast Mississippi River to the port of New Orleans. Others say they saw him fighting man-eating alligators and snakes as long as telephone lines.

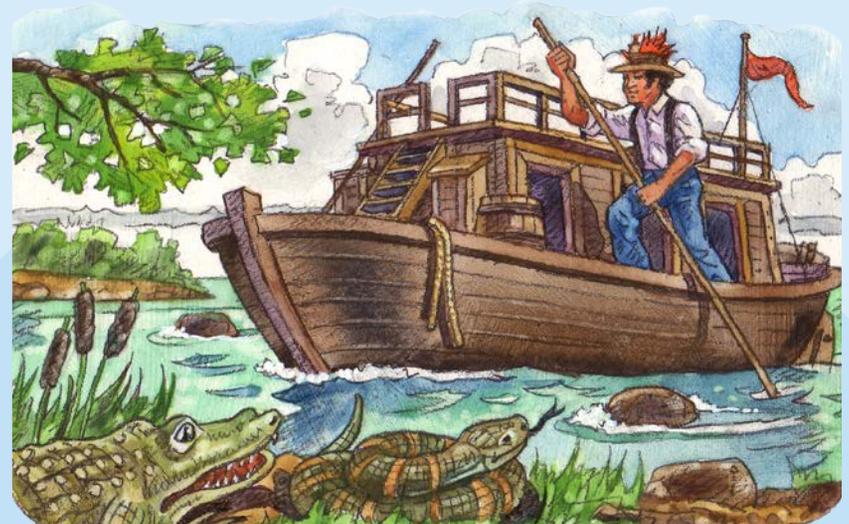
"Where is he?" asked Mike's grandmother when she looked in his crib.

"I believe he just up and left!" said his grandfather.

Mike Fink ran away from home when he was just two days old! He hated to be indoors. His family brought him back. They knew it was only for a short time.

Mike and his mother headed west on a wagon train when he was a boy. It was here that he got his first glimpse of the keelboats, or flat boats that carried cargo down the rivers. Going downstream was as easy as taking a nap on a summer day. But it took very strong men to get the boats upstream. They would heave long poles into the river. Then they would push against the strong river currents.

Mike decided he wanted to do the back-breaking river work. In order to do this, Mike had to wrestle Jack Carpenter. Jack was the strongest keelboatman at the time. It didn't take long for Jack to throw Mike clear across the Great Plains to the Rockies.



“I can just practice my wrestling with these grizzlies. I can overcome this problem. I must get strong enough to work on a boat!” said Mike.

Mike wrestled the biggest bears he could find. He was ready for Jack Carpenter. After about two weeks of wrestling each other up and down river banks, Mike was declared the winner.

Whenever Mike’s boat met other keelboats, the men would hold contests with each other. Wearing a red feather in your hat indicated that you were the strongest man. Mike’s hat looked like a red-feathered cardinal. He won every event.

One day, Mike Fink heard loud whistles. He saw long plumes of grey smoke on the horizon. Gigantic riverboats were passing by him.

More and more steamboats were crowding the docks. Mike’s men could not unload their cargo. Mike finally challenged a steamboat owner

named Hilton P. Blathersby to move out of the way. Mike’s small keelboat sunk when Blathersby’s steamboat rolled over it.

Blathersby saw Mike’s red-feathered hat floating on the water, so he rowed over to get it. He got a huge surprise when the hat moved and Mike leapt out of the water. Mike started wrestling Blathersby just for the honor of it all. Mike threw Blathersby so far that even the grizzlies in the Rocky Mountains don’t remember seeing him fly by.

Mike Fink was the King of the Keelboatmen. However if you asked people who knew him, they will tell you that Mike Fink was King of the River!



DID YOU KNOW?

Traveling upstream by **keelboat** was slow. They only averaged about 15 miles per day.

Paul Bunyan



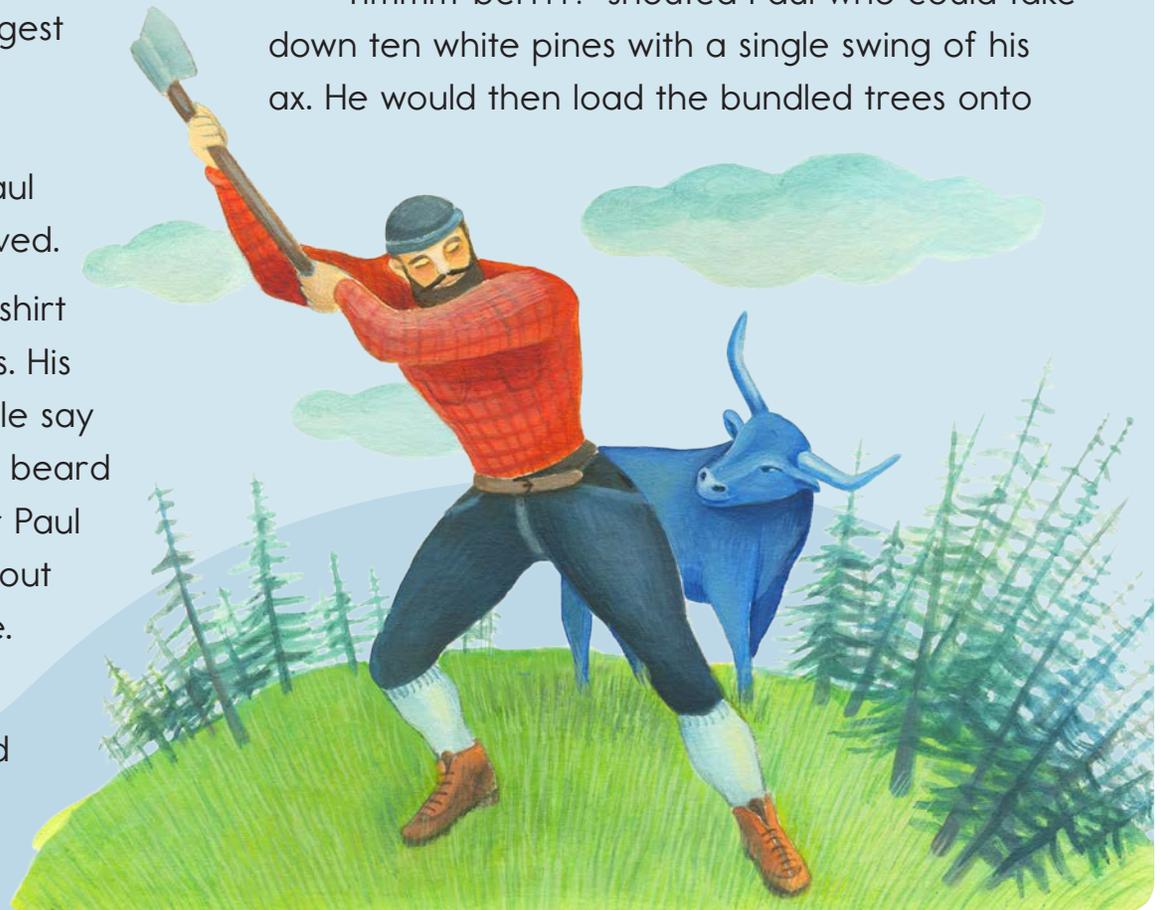
The news spread quickly. A gigantic baby boy had been born in the state of Maine. People said he weighed 50 pounds at birth and ate five dozen eggs every day. But the strangest thing about this baby was his beard! His mamma had to comb it with a pine tree every day. The name of this baby was Paul Bunyan—the greatest logger who ever lived.

Growing up, Paul was so big that his shirt buttons were made out of wagon wheels. His thick beard was like a forest. Some people say that a family of bears could sleep in that beard during the winter. When it came time for Paul to leave his home state of Maine, he set out with his pet, a huge blue-ox named Babe.

“Babe, it is time for us to explore the vast region called the North Woods,” said Paul. “We are going to invent logging!”

At that time, America was filled with forests. For miles and miles all you could see were trees as thick as a green carpet. Paul and Babe set out to clear timber along the northern border of the United States. The pioneers who were moving there needed wood to build houses, churches, and barns. Paul and Babe settled near the Big Onion River in Minnesota.

“Timmm-berrrr!” shouted Paul who could take down ten white pines with a single swing of his ax. He would then load the bundled trees onto



Babe's back. After that, he sent his timber down the Onion River to the sawmill.

"Look, Babe, this river is as crooked as a tree branch. Let's straighten it out!" said Paul. So Babe grabbed one end of the river and shook it up and down until it was a straight line.

This made Paul think about hiring more loggers to help him cut down trees. He posted advertisements all over the North Woods. Of course, all of the loggers were required to be ten feet tall. Over 1,000 men applied and Paul hired them all.

One of the first things Paul and Babe did for the new men was dig some large holes that they filled with water. This provided drinking water for everyone. Today we call those holes the Great Lakes.

One winter was especially cold for the loggers. They refer to it as the Hard Winter in the North Woods. It was so cold that the loggers' feet were frostbitten. Paul scratched his beard as he tried to think of how to overcome this problem.

"Have the men grow their beards down to the ground. Then they can knit their beards into socks for their feet. That will keep them warm," Paul told his foreman.

Today Paul and Babe have retired from the logging business. But Paul's cough still sounds like thunder. If Babe jumps up and down, an earthquake may shake the ground. Yet everyone agrees that there will never be anyone as strong or as mighty as the great Paul Bunyan.

**DID YOU
KNOW?**

The five **Great Lakes**—Erie, Huron, Michigan, Ontario, and Superior—contain 20% of the world's fresh water.





One beautiful day in Cape Cod, New England, a huge tidal wave suddenly came crashing down on the shore. The people in the village rushed out to see what was making the loud bellows that sounded like a herd of homesick cattle. They could not believe their eyes. Crawling on the beach was a giant baby who was eighteen feet tall!

His eyes were blue-green like the sea and his voice was as loud as a foghorn. The villagers carried him to town in a big farm wagon and fed him barrels of milk. It took ten people to pat him on his back in order to burp him.

His first burp nearly blew off the roof of the meeting house.

“What should we name him?” asked everyone.

A young boy said, “Alfred Bulltop Stormalong! We can call him Stormy for short!”

He was a happy baby. His parents used a whaleboat as a crib for Stormy. His father anchored the boat in the bay and let the waves rock Stormy to sleep. However, if the baby rolled over, he could cause a tsunami! He was fed whale milk and clam chowder because it was easily found in New England.

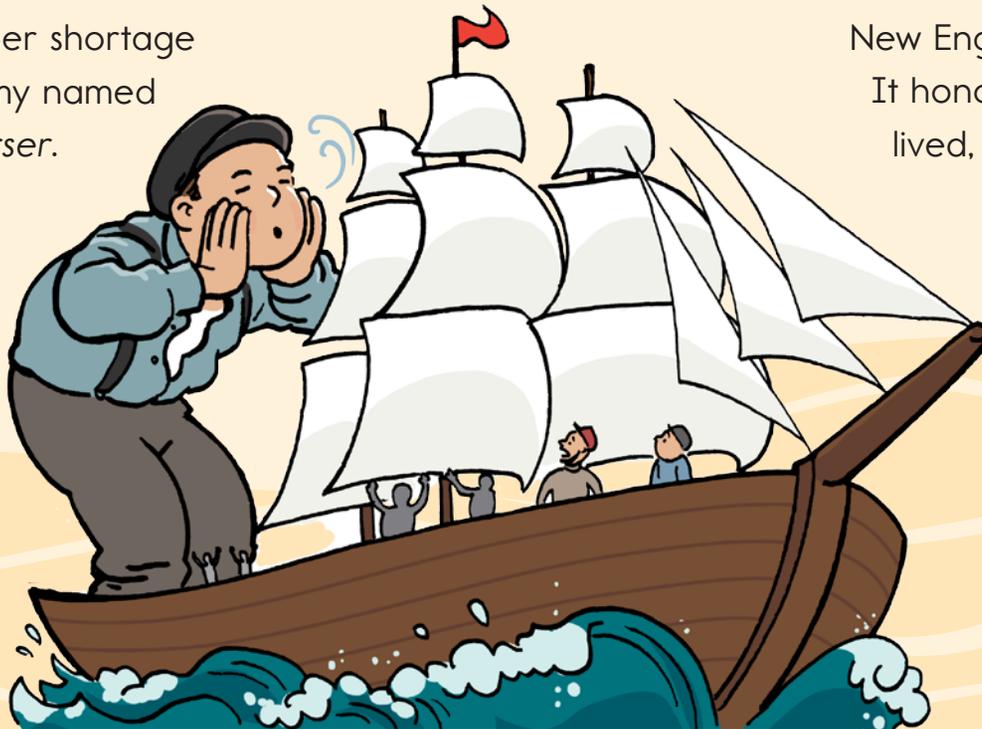
As Stormy grew up he became an excellent student. He knew every nearby bay, point, gulf, and island. At the age of twelve, he became part of the crew of the clipper ship called *The Lady of the Sea*. At the height of 36 feet, Stormy became the biggest cabin boy in the world!

During Stormy’s first voyage, *The Lady of the Sea* became stuck in the doldrums. She just sat in the water. She lay quiet in a fog thick as a grey curtain.

Stormy knew the captain was worried, so he walked to the back of the ship. He took a deep breath and blew. The sails started to flutter. Stormy took another deep breath and popped three buttons off of his shirt. The ship picked up speed and sailed away.

“Hooray for Stormalong!” shouted the captain and the crew.

When Stormy grew too big for *The Lady of the Sea*, New England sailors set about to build the biggest clipper ship in the world for Stormy. After it was built, there was a lumber shortage in America. Stormy named his ship *The Courser*.



On its voyage out of Boston Harbor, the crew had to put padding on the tops of the gigantic masts so they wouldn't punch holes in the sky. It even took four weeks to get the entire crew on deck for inspection!

Stormy became the greatest sailor to ever sail the seas. Some say he had salt water in his blood.

When Stormy died, thousands of sailors attended his burial. To this day, many sailors think the initials A.B.S. stands for “Able-Bodied Seaman.” The old sailors from the New England region know better. It honors the best sailor who ever lived, Alfred Bulltop Stormalong.

DID YOU KNOW?

In the early 1800s, **shipbuilding** was one of the main ways people earned their living in New England.

Sally Ann Thunder Ann Whirlwind

The vast backwoods of Tennessee and Kentucky were inhospitable places to call home. Both pioneer men and women worked hard clearing land and building cabins in this region. The heroine of this story was a rugged frontier woman. There was no challenge that Sally Ann Thunder Ann Whirlwind could not overcome!

“Help, help! My head is stuck!” cried Davy Crockett.

Sally Ann could not believe her eyes. The famous hero Davy Crockett had gone and got his head stuck in a tree. She ran to him like a streak of lightning.

“Don’t you worry! I will free your coconut. Just you wait and see!” said Sally Ann.

Davy looked in amazement as Sally Ann whipped several long rattlesnakes out of her bag and tied them together to make a long

rope. She looped the rope over a gigantic tree branch and pulled so hard that Davy thought the tree would split in two.

“I can blow out the moonlight and carry a steamboat on my back. I can even jump over my own shadow!” bragged Sally Ann.

As Davy’s head came out of the tree, he didn’t know if he was just dizzy or crazy in love with this woman.

“What’s your name, ma’am?” he asked.



“Sally Ann Thunder Ann Whirlwind,” she said. “But you can call my Sally Ann.”

Davy started asking everyone he knew about Sally Ann, and it was no exaggeration that anyone who met her knew they were in the presence of a whirlwind.

The preacher said, “Oh, I know Sally Ann. She likes to wear a hornet’s nest for her Sunday bonnet. She likes to whistle out one side of her mouth while she eats with the other side and grins in the middle!”

The schoolmarm told Davy about the time Sally Ann was churning butter and the Great King Bear came into her cabin.

“The bear got her in a corner and Sally Ann invited the bear to dance. While they were dipping and dancing, she tied a string to the bear’s foot so he ended up churning her butter each time he moved!” said the schoolmarm.

Sally Ann’s best friend, Lucy, told Davy, “She is funny as an upside down monkey. Why she can laugh the bark off the side of a pine tree!”

Cupid’s arrow was aiming right at Davy Crockett’s heart whenever he thought about his Sally Ann. He put on his best raccoon hat and went to call on her. He began to yell out her name as he got close to her cabin.

Sally Ann’s heart began to go *thumpity-thump* when she heard Davy. She, too, put on her best hat, an eagle’s nest, and raced out to greet him.

“Sally Ann, my heart is about to burst! Will you marry me?” asked Davy.

“Why, it would be my honor, Davy,” smiled Sally Ann.

Sally Ann won Davy’s heart. She also made him smile when she had to wrestle the panther that was just getting ready to pounce on her husband to be!



DID YOU KNOW?

Early **pioneers** lived in one-room cabins made out of round logs. Families used the fireplace to cook food and to give them light.



Febold Feboldson

“Please stay here! Live here with me!” shouted Febold to the wagon trains as they crossed his land.

“No thank you! We are off to California to look for gold!” said the wagon master.

Febold Feboldson had arrived from his homeland of Sweden. He had lived on the Great Plains for a year by himself. This vast region of land stretched from the Rocky Mountains to the Mississippi River. It is not an exaggeration to say that he was afraid he was going to die here from loneliness.

Now Febold was a crafty farmer. It took him about five seconds to come up with three hundred ideas about how to make the settlers settle down with him. One idea made him squeal like a happy pig.

Febold ordered one thousand goldfish from Peru. When they arrived, he dumped them into the only lake on the entire prairie! Febold hid in the tall grasses and waited for the next wagon train.

“Look there is gold in that lake!” shrieked a pioneer woman.

Everyone jumped off their wagons and started panning for gold in the shimmering water. Febold was grinning from ear to ear, but then the inhospitable weather of the Great Plains set in. It got so hot that all of the people jumped in the lake just to cool off.



“This is a terrible place to live,” said the wagon master.

“Wait, please stay. I have an idea to make it rain,” begged Febold.

Febold came up with about four hundred ideas in five seconds, but one idea made him dance around like a cat playing a fiddle. He built a gigantic bonfire right next to the lake. The fire got so hot that the water in the lake evaporated and formed big rain clouds. Soon buckets and buckets of water rained down on everyone.

Then there was another problem. The land was so hot and dry that the rain turned to steam before it hit the ground. Again, the pioneers wanted to leave.

Febold thought and thought and came up with a way to overcome this new challenge.

“It is always noisy when it rains. Frogs make noise, so I need lots and lots of frogs!” said Febold.

The pioneers rolled their eyes as they watched Febold run into his field and gather up thousands of frogs, but the frogs didn’t make

a sound because they were so hot.

Febold grabbed the largest frog and whispered, “It’s raining.

It’s raining.” He continued doing this until all of the frogs were hypnotized. Soon the frogs were croaking away and wouldn’t you know it? The rains came pouring over the prairie.

The wagon master shook Febold’s hand and said, “We will stay here in Nebraska and build our homes next to yours!”

“Welcome home, neighbor!” said Febold.

Febold smiled to himself. He knew that the hot sun and the winter blizzards of the Great Plains were too much for some people. This place suited Febold Feboldson just fine!

DID YOU KNOW?

Large swarms of **grasshoppers** flying over the Great Plains could eat all of a farmer’s crops in one day.



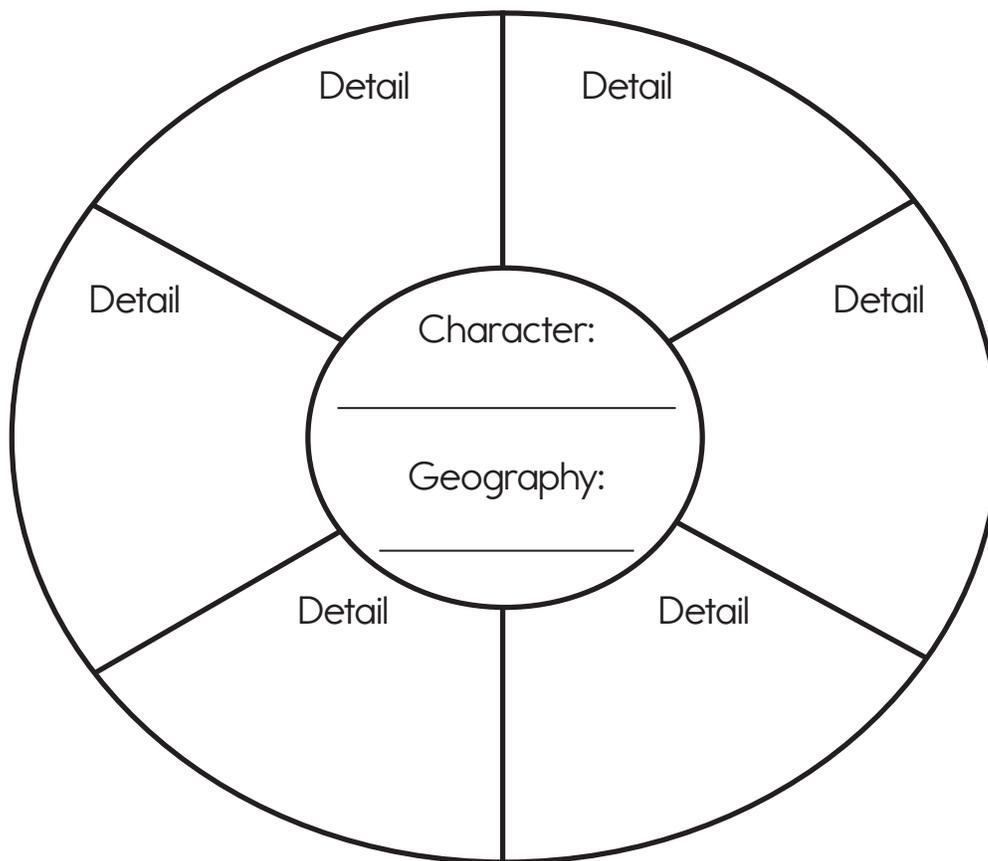
Name _____

 **Key Question**

How are North American tall tales and geography connected?

 **On Your Own**

1. Read the Key Question. Then read the story. Look for details in the story that help you answer the Key Question. Circle these words and sentences.
2. Now look back at the story. Write the words and sentences you circled or underlined in the Detail Wheel below.



3. Think about the Key Question. Write your answer to the Key Question using the details you found in the story you read.

 **My First Answer**

Name _____

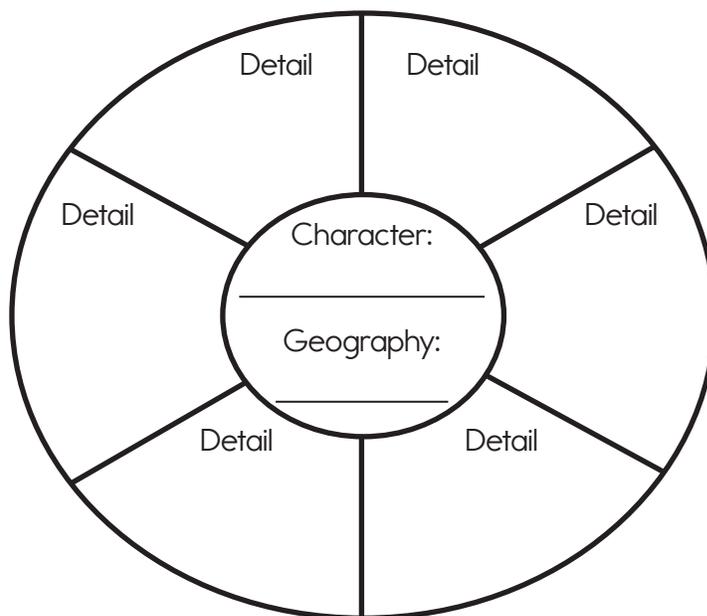
Key Question

How are North American tall tales and geography connected?

Share Your Ideas

1. Tell the team what happens in the story you read. Show your Detail Wheel.
2. Look at the Detail Wheels your team made. Compare the details in each of your stories. Answer these questions together.
 - *How are the main characters and geography different in each tall tale?*
 - *How do all of the characters deal with vast regions where they live?*

Next, write the details that answer the Key Question on the Detail Wheel below. Write only the details that connect to every story your team read.



Answer the Key Question

Review the details on your team's Detail Wheel. As a team, write an answer to the Key Question. Use the information from the stories to support your answer.

How are North American tall tales and geography connected?

Our Team's Answer
