The image of the American frontier cowboy as a confident risk-taker able to survive the hardships of westward expansion is influenced by tall tales such as the legend of Pecos Bill. The tale began when Bill was a baby and fell out of a covered wagon as his family crossed the Pecos River in Texas. He was rescued and raised by coyotes. In this script, we meet Coyote, who named and raised Pecos Bill. Coyote and a cowgirl, Dixie, tell the tale of how Pecos Bill met and then married Sluefoot Sue, the only person who could match Pecos Bill’s riding and roping abilities.

Summary

Objectives

**FLUENCY**
Students will:
- Build fluency through echo-reading, choral-reading, and repeated reading
- Read with appropriate pacing
- Read exclamation points

**COMPREHENSION**
Students will:
- Analyze character
- Interpret figurative language
- Make inferences
- Summarize or paraphrase information
- Use text features to locate information

**WRITING**
Students will:
- Create a poster advertisement

**GENRE**
Students will:
- Identify and analyze features of tall tales

**VOCABULARY AND WORD STUDY**
Students will:
- Build vocabulary: feats, prairie, stampede
- Use vocabulary in context
- Understand similes and comparisons

**CHARACTER EDUCATION**
Students will learn about:
- Caring
- Respect

**Characters**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characters</th>
<th>Levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pecos (PAY-kohs) Bill</td>
<td>H/13–14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cactus Pete</td>
<td>J/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coyote</td>
<td>M/28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sluefoot (SLOO-fut) Sue</td>
<td>M/28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dixie</td>
<td>N/30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Build Background

• Ask students to share what they know about cowboys and the Western frontier. If available, show historical photographs of cowboys, their equipment, and the American West. Create a concept map titled “Cowboys: Long Ago” and record what students know on the map.

• Use a map of North America to locate the Pecos River, starting in New Mexico and continuing into Texas to the Rio Grande.

• Write the names Pecos Bill and Sluefoot Sue on the board. Invite students to share what they know about the characters, reinforcing that the legendary characters were created long ago to tell how the “Wild West” was tamed.

Introduce the Script

• Give each student a copy of the script. Read the title and the back cover blurb aloud. Explain that the students are going to read a tall tale about Pecos Bill and the cowgirl he loved, Sluefoot Sue. Ask students to tell what they know about tall tales and if they have read any other tall tales.

• Use the Learning About Genre sidebar to help teach characteristics of tall tales.

Learning About Genre: Tall Tales

• Exaggerated characters and actions
• Use casual speech and dialect
• Sometimes explain the reason for something in nature
• Usually humorous
• Usually feature a hero or heroine
• Often take place on the American frontier
• Use figurative language
• Illustrate how skilled or powerful the hero or heroine is

• Encourage students to make predictions about the exaggerated antics of the cowboy and cowgirl characters. Ask: What do you think Pecos Bill and Sluefoot Sue will be like? What do you think they will do?

Introduce Vocabulary

• Introduce the three glossary words and read the definitions with students.

• Reread the first word, feats. Say: Someone who can accomplish great feats is able to accomplish great things.
• Ask students to locate the sentence that includes *feats* on page 3. Read the sentence together. Discuss the part of speech that *feats* represents and ask students to think of another noun that could be used in its place.

• Introduce and teach the remaining two glossary words, *prairie* and *stampede*. Repeat the activity above, asking students to suggest nouns that could replace each word.

• Provide time after reading the script to discuss the meanings of slang words and dialect from the script. Create a chart to compare phrases from the script to their meanings in standard English. For example, refer to Dixie’s line on page 3, “Coyote did a right-fine job raising Bill,” and the following phrases, among others: “little fellow” (page 2), “I ever did see” (page 4), “spitfire of a horse” (page 6), “lickety-split” (page 10), and “get hitched” (page 11).

Background Information

The Legend of Pecos Bill

Pecos Bill is an American folklore hero who personified the Western values of stamina and fearlessness. He was invented by journalists and other writers, and was said to have been born in Texas in 1832 and raised by coyotes. He became the toughest cowboy around. The legend of Pecos Bill details his remarkable skills, which included using a rattlesnake as a whip, roping an entire herd of cattle at once, and riding a tornado.

The Story of Sluefoot Sue

When Pecos Bill first saw Sluefoot Sue, riding a catfish down the Rio Grande, she was shooting at the clouds and making pretty patterns in them. She had the strength of ten men. For Pecos Bill, it was love at first sight.

While most tales of Pecos Bill and Sluefoot Sue incorporate the story of her being bucked from Pecos Bill’s wild horse, Widow-maker (also known as Lightning), some say that Sluefoot Sue’s life ended when she was bucked off and the bustle she was wearing made her bounce so high that she hit her head on the moon and died. According to legend, Pecos Bill was so saddened by the loss of his true love that he howled at the moon. Later, when Pecos Bill died, the coyotes howled at the moon.

Model Fluent Reading

Ask students to listen and follow along with you as you read the script aloud to model fluency and expression.
Build Fluency: Echo-Read

- Read the script aloud, and ask students to echo-read, or repeat, the lines after you. Stop where necessary to explain unfamiliar words or expressions—for example: *slue* in Sluefoot Sue’s name, which means *turn or twist to the side*, and “mutt,” which usually refers to a mixed-breed dog (page 2), “slingshot” (page 8), and “polecat,” which probably refers to a skunk (page 11). Encourage students to ask about any words they are unsure of and then look up the words in the dictionary together.
- Point out the stage direction in parentheses on page 11 of the script. Explain that the stage direction “(angrily)” tells the reader that Sluefoot Sue should speak to Pecos Bill as if she is annoyed with him.
- Point out the exclamation points in Coyote’s and Dixie’s lines on page 2. Explain that exclamation points in these lines create emphasis or show strong emotion. For example, the expression “Hey!” shows Coyote’s surprise when Dixie refers to him as “a dirty, skinny mutt that eats trash.” Read the lines without any emphasis and then read them a second time, modeling each character’s emphasis or strong emotion. Ask students which version was more interesting. Ask students to echo-read the lines.
- Point out the dashes on pages 2 and 3. Explain that these dashes represent a break or a pause. Model how to read each line, pausing where the dash is.

Build Comprehension

Ensure students understand the ideas in the story, as well as character development, by involving them in discussion.

- *Which genre is the script Pecos Bill and Sluefoot Sue?* (use text features to locate information)
- *What features of the genre does this script include?* (analyze features of tall tales)
- *What are examples of Pecos Bill’s amazing feats?* (summarize or paraphrase information)
- *What type of character is Pecos Bill? Sluefoot Sue?* (analyze character)
- *How are Pecos Bill and Sluefoot Sue similar? Different?* (compare and contrast)
- *Why does Sluefoot Sue call Pecos Bill a “polecat” when he lassoes her back to the ground?* (make inferences)
- *What does the author mean when she writes, “The horse took off like a firecracker in a frying pan”?* (interpret figurative language)
- *Would the script have been different if none of the characters used slang or spoke in dialect?* How? (make judgments)

See page 8 for English-Language Learner and Striving Reader Support.
**Assign Roles**

- Use the reading levels provided on the front of this guide to help you assign roles that support or challenge each student appropriately.
- This script contains five parts. If you have more students than roles, you may assign stage roles, such as managers for props or sound.
- Encourage students to read the roles of Dixie and Sluefoot Sue with energy and expression. Invite students reading the roles of Pecos Bill and Sluefoot Sue to practice saying “Hoo-whee!” and “Yee-haw!”
- If it seems appropriate, students may wish to read the script with “Western” accents.

**Build Vocabulary**

Make sure students fully understand the glossary terms. The Vocabulary in Action suggestions on the inside back cover of the script provide further ideas for building students’ understanding.

**Fluency Assessment Rubric**

- The Reader’s Theater Overview contains an assessment rubric you can use to quickly assess each student. Use the rubric at different times during the lesson to assess different skills. For example, you may want to select students to assess their understanding of characterization during the comprehension discussion. Alternatively, you may wish to use their performance to assess how appropriately they develop their characters.
- Discuss the assessment rubric with students so that they know what you expect of them.

### Character | Tips for Voice and Expression
--- | ---
Coyote | energetic, friendly
Dixie | funny, energetic
Cactus Pete | surprised
Pecos Bill | confident, proud, polite, impressed
Sluefoot Sue | confident, challenging, believes in equal rights
Day Three

Build Fluency Skills: Read with Appropriate Pacing

- **Model:** Ask students to read with appropriate pacing, action, and mood so that their lines make sense. Ask students to evaluate how you read two different lines by showing thumbs-up if you read with appropriate pacing and thumbs-down if you do not. **Say:** When you read with appropriate pacing, the script is more interesting to listen to. Show the character’s mood by paying close attention to the punctuation marks.

- **Guide:** Locate Dixie’s second set of lines on page 2. Point out the exclamation point after “Splash!” Read the line and ask students to echo-read.

- **Apply:** Invite students to practice their parts with a partner. Encourage partners to coach each other as they practice reading. Students may make suggestions about how to change the pacing to make it more interesting to listen to. Monitor students’ use of pacing. Echo-read for students needing additional support.

Choral-Read for Fluency

Involve students in a choral-reading of the script to reinforce the fluency skill of reading with appropriate pacing. Remind them to use dramatic expression to bring each character’s mood or personality to life.

Repeated Reading: Rehearse the Script

- Discuss the expectations you have for student behavior during the rehearsal. Use the suggestions provided here and in the Reader’s Theater Overview.

- Use small-group time for students to rehearse their script. Monitor students as they rehearse, and tell them you will be listening to how they develop the characters through their reading.

- Offer suggestions for expression, voice, and characterization as you monitor students’ work. See the chart on page 5 for tips on voice and expression. Use specific comments, rather than general ones, directed at the character, not the student. For example: **Pecos Bill,** you need to sound very surprised at seeing such a skilled cowgirl!

- Use this time to observe particular students and assess for behavior. Remind students of the assessment rubric and let them know you will be assessing them as you monitor the rehearsal.

See page 8 for English-Language Learner and Striving Reader Support.

**Expectations for Rehearsing**

When working in a group, students should:
- follow along as the script is being read;
- remain quiet while others are reading their parts;
- wait and watch for their turn to read;
- ask for help when needed;
- read clearly, using expression and fluency.
Repeated Reading: Rehearse the Script

• Use small-group time for student rehearsal. Do not interrupt this second rehearsal, but simply observe students as they read.

• Use the assessment rubric to monitor students’ rehearsal behaviors and reading fluency.

Staging and Performance Suggestions

Decide on a stage area, how students will be positioned, and whether props or movements will be added. See staging tips in the Reader’s Theater Overview. Here are some other ideas:

PROPS/COSTUMES

• A gallery box set stage right for Coyote and Dixie (Coyote and Dixie narrate the legend as the performers act it out; ask these narrators to watch performers when not speaking)

• Rope for reins and lassos

• Cowboy hats for cowhand characters

• Stick horse for Widow-maker

• Fan to blow when Pecos Bill rides the tornado

MUSIC/SOUND EFFECTS

• Galloping sound effects with quick clap/pat patterns using hands or hollow coconuts

• A wire toy or a spring-effect bouncing sound (ask music teacher)

• Create rushing/whirring sound for tornado with voice(s)

Perform the Script

Invite students to present the script to an audience. The audience might be members of their class, students from other classes, school staff members, and/or parents.

Assess Students’ Fluency

• Use the assessment rubric to complete your assessment of students’ fluency.

• Take time to briefly conference with each student to provide feedback on his or her reading and behavior.
Build Background and Make Connections (Day One)

• Find a historical map of the United States in a book or on the Internet showing the states and their borders around 1880. Use photographs and the map to explain that people use the terms “the frontier” or “the Old West” to talk about this time and area in U.S. history. Explain that the United States was growing and people were moving west to live on the land to farm and ranch. Use historical photographs of cowboys to help students make connections with cowboys and the Old West.

• Create a time line beginning at 1880 and ending at 2020. Mark every twenty years on the time line. Label the current year on the time line “Today.”

• Explain to students that they will read a tall tale. Explain that people have been telling tall tales for many years. Refer to the time line to show students the time in which the story of Pecos Bill is set. **Say:** Tall tales like Pecos Bill and Bluefoot Sue exaggerate ideas. Tall tales tell stories about the Old West. This tall tale is about a cowboy. This tall tale has a cowgirl. The cowboy is Pecos Bill. The cowgirl is Bluefoot Sue. The cowboy and cowgirl are not real.

• Write the characters’ names from the script on the board. Ask students to look at the illustrations in the script. Guide students to name the characters.

• Invite students to draw pictures of images from the Old West. Pictures may include cowboys on a prairie, simple wooden fences, covered wagons, or other connections with the photographs students viewed earlier. Encourage students to label their drawings.

Develop Vocabulary and Language (Day One)

• Give students four sheets of blank paper. Ask them to fold all four sheets in half to create an eight-page book. Ask students to title their books “Pecos Bill and Bluefoot Sue Vocabulary.”

• Introduce genre-related vocabulary such as *lickety-split*, *fret*, *polecat*, and *hitched*. Read the script aloud for students. After they listen to the script, encourage students to discuss the meanings of new or unusual vocabulary words. Write the words on the board. Use the context of the script and pantomime or simple illustrations to help students make connections.

• Ask students to write six or seven of the words you discussed in class in their blank vocabulary books. They should use one page per word. Then ask them to draw a picture to illustrate each word.

• Emphasize that the glossary word *feats* does not mean *many feet*. Explain that *feats* are great accomplishments. Encourage students to draw Pecos Bill or Bluefoot Sue performing one of the feats from the script.
e Learners and Striving Readers

- Help students understand the concept of exaggerated language used in tall tales. Connect the discussion to Cactus Pete’s lines on page 11: “Don’t you know that Bill saved your life? You wouldn’t have stopped bouncing for a hundred years!” Ask students if they think Sue really would have kept bouncing for 100 years. Say: So you see, Cactus Pete is exaggerating.

Build Comprehension (Day Two)

Engage students in discussion about the script, starting with simple literal questions and progressing to more difficult ones. As students discuss the questions, ask them to point to places in the script that best answer the questions. Suggested questions:

- Where can you locate the author’s name? (use text features to locate information)
- Who are the characters in the script? (recall details)
- What is the setting of the tall tale? (analyze story elements)
- Why does Coyote name Bill “Pecos Bill”? (recall details)
- Why does Sluefoot Sue bounce? (identify cause and effect)
- Why does Sluefoot Sue ask Pecos Bill to ride the tornado? (make inferences)
- What features make this script a tall tale? (analyze features of tall tales)
- How big is the wedding cake? (recall details)

Read and Perform (Days Two–Three)

- Provide extra practice reading the script as a group before students read their individual parts to ensure they are familiar and comfortable with the language and vocabulary.
- You may want to assign two students to a role so they can read the part together. This will help support their reading.
- Be sure to use the reading levels provided on the cover of this Teacher’s Guide to help you assign the roles.
Literacy Extensions

Word Study

USE VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

• Review the three glossary words with students: feats, prairie, and stampede. Discuss how the words were used in the script and invite students to use the words in their own sentences.

• Write the following sentence stems on the board: According to legend, Pecos Bill accomplished great feats because . . .; Pecos Bill rode the tornado out to the prairie because . . .; A stampede can be dangerous because . . . Read the sentence stems together as a group. Say: You will work with a partner to complete each sentence. It is important to show that you understand the meaning of each vocabulary word. For example, a sentence such as “Pecos Bill accomplished great feats because he was Pecos Bill” does not show the meaning of feats. You and your partner may want to discuss examples of his feats and include an example to complete the sentence.

• Pair students and provide each set of partners with a copy of the sentence stems or ask them to copy the sentence stems from the board. Ask students to discuss a meaningful completion of each sentence before writing. Invite students to share their sentences aloud when all students have finished.

SIMILES AND COMPARISONS

• Explain that writers sometimes use a simile to compare one thing to another. Say: Similes usually use the words like or as. Similes help readers create a picture in their minds. For example, ask students what they think of when they hear the simile, “The horse took off like a firecracker in a frying pan” (page 8).

• Invite students to locate the simile. Discuss what the author is trying to communicate. Ask students about the visual image that this simile produces.

• Encourage students to make up an original simile that creates a colorful image. For example: The horse took off like a supersonic jet. Or, The horse jumped like a giant jackrabbit.

• Continue the same process with the following similes from page 8: “Sue was as strong as ten grown men”; “She hung onto Widow-maker like a burr on a dog’s tail”; and “When Sue landed on her bustle, she bounced up into the sky like a frog from a slingshot!”

Reader Response

Ask students to reflect on their reader’s theater experience by writing or drawing in their journals. Students could:

• reflect on and illustrate a favorite simile from the script;
• reflect on the humor in the script;
• reflect on the character traits that they respect and explain why;
• reflect on their role in the performance and their use of appropriate pacing.
**Writing**

- Ask students to create a poster advertisement. Encourage students to create a “Wanted” poster as if Pecos Bill and Sluefoot Sue are looking for more cowboys and cowgirls to join their team. In the poster, students should try to persuade others to join this team. Encourage them to include interesting elements from the script that will make people want to join. Also, the poster should include descriptions of what students need from new team members, such as the ability to do great feats (make sure students describe them) and other skills and qualities.

**Read Across Texts**

- Review with students the features of tall tales and discuss what makes *Pecos Bill and Sluefoot Sue* a tall tale. Ask students if this story reminds them of any other tall tales they know.
- Visit the school or local library to check out another version of the tall tale of Pecos Bill and Sluefoot Sue.
- Read your alternate version aloud and discuss the similarities or differences between the script and the book. Work with students to create a Venn diagram to compare and contrast the two versions. Record similarities in the middle where the two circles overlap.

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**Venn Diagram**

**Pecos Bill and Sluefoot Sue**

- Pecos Bill lassoes Sluefoot Sue from the sky.
- Pecos Bill and Sluefoot Sue get married.
- Pecos Bill and Sluefoot Sue live happily ever after.

**Both**

- 
- 
- 

**Book:**

- 

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Caring

- Ask students to describe someone who is caring. Ask them how the person shows caring. What does the person do? **Say:** People who are caring treat others the way they want to be treated. A caring person is kind and considerate. Caring people think about how their actions will impact others. Caring people think about “we” instead of “me.”

- Ask students to brainstorm examples of characters in the script who demonstrate caring, for example, Coyote shows caring when he raises Pecos Bill. **Ask:** What is at least one action you can take today to demonstrate caring? Challenge students to meet the goal by the end of the day. Follow up on the next school day and provide time for each student to reflect on his or her action.

Respect

- Discuss how people who demonstrate respect are polite and accept individual differences. Respectful people do not insult others or use put-downs.

- Discuss how Sluefoot Sue’s character showed examples of “Respect Dos” and “Respect Don’ts.” For an example of a “Respect Do,” discuss how Sluefoot Sue was polite when she rode into town. On page 5, she said, “Howdy, boys!” and introduced herself to Cactus Pete and Pecos Bill.

- Point out the example of Sluefoot Sue’s “Respect Don’t” in her first line on page 11: “Pecos Bill, you polecat!” Discuss how calling Pecos Bill a polecat is a put-down. Ask students how Sluefoot Sue could have responded more respectfully.

- Ask students to name some “Respect Dos” and “Respect Don’ts” that they observe in their daily lives.

Demonstrate Caring

- Invite students to develop a class list of ways to show they care. Encourage students to include a range of actions, such as picking up a dropped pencil for a classmate, writing a note to someone, calling an old friend, or holding a canned food drive.

- Guide students to include actions that help a variety of people, such as children, older adults, single parents, or unemployed people.

- Challenge students to choose at least one way to demonstrate being caring each day. Provide time for students to share examples aloud or reflect in writing how they demonstrate caring.

- Create a “Caring Counts!” display. Ask students to draw a picture of something that demonstrates being caring and to write a caption at the bottom.