



John Henry

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With his two sledgehammers pulverizing boulders, John Henry races a steam drill tunneling through a mountain. It's a deadly contest of man-vs-machine written with such power that this African-American folk hero becomes as awesome as a force of nature, yet as familiar as an older brother. Pinkney's stunning art shows John Henry's energy bursting from nature. Full color.

John Henry Details

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Author : Julius Lester , Jerry Pinkney

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From Reader Review John Henry for online ebook

Tracy The Great says

this book is good but it isn't my favorite

Jennifer (JenIsNotaBookSnob) says

Really excellent, just fun use of language and a great story. Pinkney's illustrations are wonderful, really couldn't ask for a better treatment of John Henry. I love that there are some notes at the beginning about the origin of the story and the source materials used that way older readers can read more if they so choose. There are a couple clunky bits in the text, but, illustrations are so fantastic you don't really notice them.

Audrey Rodriguez says

Julius Lester's "John Henry" is a tall tale that tells the story of African American folk hero John Henry. The most prominent rhetorical device Lester employs in his tale is the use of hyperbole to over exaggerate the great accomplishments of the esteemed legend John Henry. In addition to his of hyperbole, Lester makes use of personification, repetition, alliteration, and onomatopoeia to enhance the story of John Henry.

I think this historical tall tale would be a great read in the classroom and could be used as an introduction to more complex rhetorical devices, as there is quite a lot going on in this story. Additionally, I think this could be used to supplement an American history lesson. Not only can "John Henry" be used to teach content, but it can also be used to challenge children to identify the moral of the tale and then make generalizations about society.

"John Henry" would be a perfect book for upper elementary students, as it can initiate dialogue about complex issues in a way that is appropriate and respectful.

Manybooks says

With regard to Julius Lester's 1994 John Henry, it is in particular illustrator Jerry Pinkney's 1995 Caldecott Honour winning accompanying illustrations which I have always found (and ever since first reading the book as a library copy a couple of years ago) very much personally and visually impressive (expressive). For although Pinkney's pictorial renderings are at times perhaps almost a trifle too overly busy for my eyes and attention span (and sometimes do seem to obtain even some modern anachronisms), their minute details are indeed both lushly rendered and also very much and successfully mirror Julius Lester's printed words (his retelling of the *John Henry* Tall Tale tradition), a richly nuanced narrative, chock full of delightfully evocative metaphors, similes, literary allusions (and as such, Julius Lester's text is most definitely very much as verbally dense and as full as Jerry Pinkney's pictorial renderings and vice versa, a truly and in many ways lovely and stunning marriage of text and images).

However, as much as I have appreciated Julius Lester's retelling, and as much as I have indeed even much loved his included author's note on American Tall Tales (as well as of course the presented information on the genesis of the *John Henry* tradition in particular) I also cannot say that I have found Lester's John Henry all that much to my personal and folkloric liking (to my tastes). For I just do not and cannot see Julius Lester's John Henry as being all that much of a potentially positive role model, as the sense of him actually doing something worthwhile and for the good of everyone is kind of majorly missing and lost at least in that last and ultimately fatal to and for him contest. For sorry, but John Henry's last bet, it sure seems to and for me to be just a wager for a its own sake, man against machine, and basically a rather majorly and sadly silly reason to kill oneself for in my opinion (and something that in other renditions of *John Henry* is actually not ever as prominently featured as being simply a contest for the sake of winning, as while there is still that battle between man and machine, with John Henry winning but at the cost of his life, unlike in Julius Lester's John Henry, with other versions of the tale I have read, there is also a distinct reason shown as to why John Henry would even decide on the contest, namely because the machine against which he decides to measure himself will be putting a lot of his railroading friends and acquaintances permanently out of work, but with Julius Lester, that particular and in my opinion very much important aspect of John Henry's desire to enter into said and his last contest never really comes through all that well, all that much, and you are left, or at least I am left with a rather uncomfortable feeling that John Henry basically just sacrifices himself for nothing more than a supremely silly wager and contest against a machine, that he really ends up dying in vain).

StrangeAnthony says

i loooooooooove the detail in this story i dont want to spoil it but its just great

Rachael LaRochelle says

John Henry by Julius Lester

John Henry is an African folklore about a man named John Henry. John Henry was born on the porch of his mother's house and shortly after he was born he grew so tall and so strong, he grew straight through the roof of the house. All his neighbors love John Henry. When John Henry grew up and decided it was time for him to move on his father gave him two hammers that were handed down to him by his father. John Henry took his 2 hammers and went on his way. He soon ran some men working on the railroad that's had run into a problem. They could not continue building the railroad because there was a big mountain in the way. John Henry took his 2 hammers and broke his way through the mountain until there was nothing left of the mountain to sea. The man thanks John Henry John Henry moved on. He soon ran into some more railroad workers that had to run into the same problem. But this mountain was so big it was even taller than John Henry. John Henry told the men that he would drill through the mountain so that they could continue working on the railroad. The manager of the railroad laughed and said that no man was that strong. So they attached dynamite and tried to blow up the mountain. The mountain was so strong that it was still there when all the dust settled. So, the manager challenged John Henry and said that there was no way he could be stronger than the machine. It was decided whoever got to the middle first would be the winner. John Henry won and as he was walking out of the tunnel he raised his hands holding his 2 hammers high in the sky period. Shortly, John Henry closed his eyes and laid down. John Henry was dead. The people were very sad, but soon someone heard saying, "dying is not what's important, anybody can do that, what matters is how they lived their life. John Henry was taken to Washington DC and buried. Legend has it that in the middle of

the night John Henry was taken and buried in front lawn of White House.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book. I was really surprised that I never heard of it before. It has a very good and very clear message about integrity and the importance of living a good life.

Dolly says

We found a video treat at our library: we just watched *Scholastic Video Collection: The Scrambled States of America and More Stories to Celebrate Our Country DVD*, which features animated adaptations of children's storybooks with celebrity narrators.

This story was narrated by Samuel L. Jackson with music by Crystal Taliefero and we just loved the format.

It reminded us of the Tumblebooks animations that we occasionally watch online. As the book is narrated, we followed along with a slightly animated version of the illustrations. It was very entertaining and we really enjoyed watching all of the stories on the DVD.

This was an entertaining tall tale and I could never have given it the justice that Samuel L. Jackson did, reading the story with such emphasis and inflection that the tale came alive for us.

I loved the way that he'd make the words sing out, especially in tune with the hammering. It was an emotional tale, and tells of one man's ability to beat a machine, but was also metaphorically, more of an acknowledgement of the advancement of technology.

Even John Henry couldn't keep on going indefinitely. Overall, it was an educational and an engaging story. I liked the fact that it was a tall tale in the tradition of Paul Bunyan, but was likely based on a real man. We really enjoyed watching it together.

This book was selected as one of the books for the November 2016- Caldecott Honor discussion at the Picture-Book Club in the Children's Books Group here at Goodreads.

This book was also selected as one of the books for the July 2018 - Boston Globe-Horn Book Award Picture Book Winners 1991-1999 discussion at the Picture-Book Club in the Children's Books Group here at Goodreads.

Jenny says

I really liked both the text and the illustrations of this version of John Henry. This retelling seemed to have more rich detail than versions I have read in the past. Figurative language was woven throughout. For example, "This was no ordinary boulder. It was as hard as anger and so big around, it took half a week for a tall man to walk from one side to the other." Or "What he saw was a mountain as big as hurt feelings." I love the inclusion of so many details such as him wrapping the rainbow around himself or how Ferret-Faced Freddy came to be known Frederick the Friendly. The story is truly painted in minute detail through both words and illustrations.

And I like what was whispered at this funeral..."Dying ain't important. Everybody does that. What matters is

how well you do your living."

Mary says

Assigned 398 as traditional literature by LOC. A Caldecott Honor Book. Retells the story of an African-American folk hero. First illustration is a shooting star - when you turn to the 2 page spread for the title page, you see the shooting star coming to earth. Author's note has research being done by illustrator and also cites the ballad "John Henry". The illustrator's note cites numerous authorities, explains the differences between those sources and this book, and gives the sources for the ultimate choices made. Lester puts modern twists throughout the tale, with the sun not only washing it's face and brushing its teeth when it gets up, but also flossing! And the addition John Henry puts on the house has "one of them jacutzis". I love the way Lester makes the sounds come alive with his descriptions: "His voice sounded like bat wings on tombstones." Can't you just imagine the way that voice sounds?

I could go on and on about this book, with a boulder as hard as anger and the sun and the moon treated like real people, a mountain as big as hurt feelings. What expressive language! And the message "Dying ain't important. Everybody does that. What matters is how well you do your living." But instead I will just say - everyone should read this book.

Luann says

This is a very nice version of the John Henry story. I don't remember ever hearing about Ferret-Faced Freddy and the bet that John Henry made with him which then turned him into Frederick the Friendly. This also tells the story of John Henry clearing a boulder that dynamite couldn't break and racing a steam drill to create a tunnel through a mountain. One disadvantage of such a comprehensive story, though, is that it is too long for me to read aloud as part of a library lesson.

I loved the colorful way the story was written, with lots of comparisons using nature. For example: "...he was so fast, the wind was out of breath trying to keep up with him." Or, "His voice sounded like bat wings on tombstones" (speaking of Ferret-Faced Freddy).

The illustrations fit very well with the story, but for some reason they just aren't my favorite. I can see that they are very well done and I'm not disputing that they merit a Caldecott honor. They just aren't my favorite. Not sure why. I really liked Jerry Pinkney's illustrations in Noah's Ark.

The library book that I read came as part of a kit with an audio cassette narrated by Samuel L. Jackson. The audio was great! Samuel L. Jackson does a wonderful job with the narration, and I really enjoyed the background music and sound effects that went with it. The audio really added to my experience with the book.

Latasha says

I love this story! I listened to the audio version. Samuel L. Jackson narrated it! it was fabulous. from now on, when I have a difficult task to perform, I'm gonna say "oh john henry give me strength to do this!"

Julia says

An interesting introduction to the legend of John Henry although for whatever reason I had the song "Big John" stuck in my head before reading this, which isn't the same John.

John Henry is one of those little known folk heroes and I wish there was more on him than there tends to be. Unfortunately this tends to be one of those books that is distracting from the actual story or making more of a mess for those who are sincerely interested. And one of the reasons I gave such a low score to the book is the attempted modernization of some of the events.

The illustrations are a bit dark-colored and jammed so don't often contribute much to the story in my opinion although the few colors do pop out for the reader. At the same time the illustration used the concept of a unicorn along with the author's tale to showcase the important birth as a unicorn or white elephant normally appears in mythoi for many other notable origins and events.

The writing is easy to follow and has some beautiful descriptions in it, which I enjoyed. But overall I just feel the book was lacking.

midnightfaerie says

What a wonderful book! Enjoyed by all my children, young and older, a tall tale about John Henry. We learned about Tall Tales in Traditional Literature and in the story of John Henry in History class, so this was a great addition to those lessons. My kids loved it. The pictures were big and detailed and of course, the preschoolers loved the trains. A little on the long side, at least a level 4 reading level. But the writing! Oh the writing! Just beautiful!

"Next to the mountain, he didn't look much bigger than a wish that wasn't going to come true."

These and many other analogies of such an unusual flavor made this book a must have to our "home" school library. Highly recommended!

Joanne G. says

The United States has some wonderful folk heroes who are fading from memory. Julius Lester revives the story of African-American John Henry with an updated retelling.

John Henry is a mythical American (perhaps loosely based on a real person) more children should learn about, so I'm pleased to see a few of his stories being retold in this volume: his birth and prodigious growth, building a road, and hammering through a mountain. I was less enthused with the odd insertion of modern touches--a swimming pool and Jacuzzi added to the house--into a story dating to the late 1800s. Still, it's an enjoyable read with fun metaphors and similes, interesting stories, a likable character, and attractive artwork.

Note: John Henry is an admirable hero, and children may be distressed when he dies. Use your judgment with sensitive children. However, the book handles it well, and it could be a teaching moment with meaningful discussion with the right children.

Cindy says

This is a wonderful retelling of an adventurous story of one of America's legendary heroes. When John Henry was born, animals from all around came to see the child. He grew at an astonishing rate, and had a new wing and a swimming pool added to his parent's house in the blink of an eye. He was always very helpful to his parent's and those that were in need of help. John Henry decided one day that it was time for him to and make his own way in the work. He found a job building a road, using his graddaddy's sledge hammers. It was at this job that John Henry would finally meet his fate.

This is a wonderfully written tale of a young African American Icon. This story has been told over many times throughout the years. Julius Lester does a wonderful job of pulling in the dialect of the time, but also adding a contemporary twist to help today's readers relate to the story. Jerry Pinkney does a bit of storytelling of his own through his wondrous images. The watercolor paintings used to illustrate this wonderful tale do a fantastic job of telling the story all on their own. Pinkney does a fantastic job of depicting the character of John Henry and the world that he lives in.

I have read many versions of this tale, and found this one to be the most enjoyable to date. Lester and Pinkney make a wonderful team. Every book that they work on together ends up being a masterpiece. All libraries should contain all of their works.
