

## Folk Tales and Legends from the Early United States

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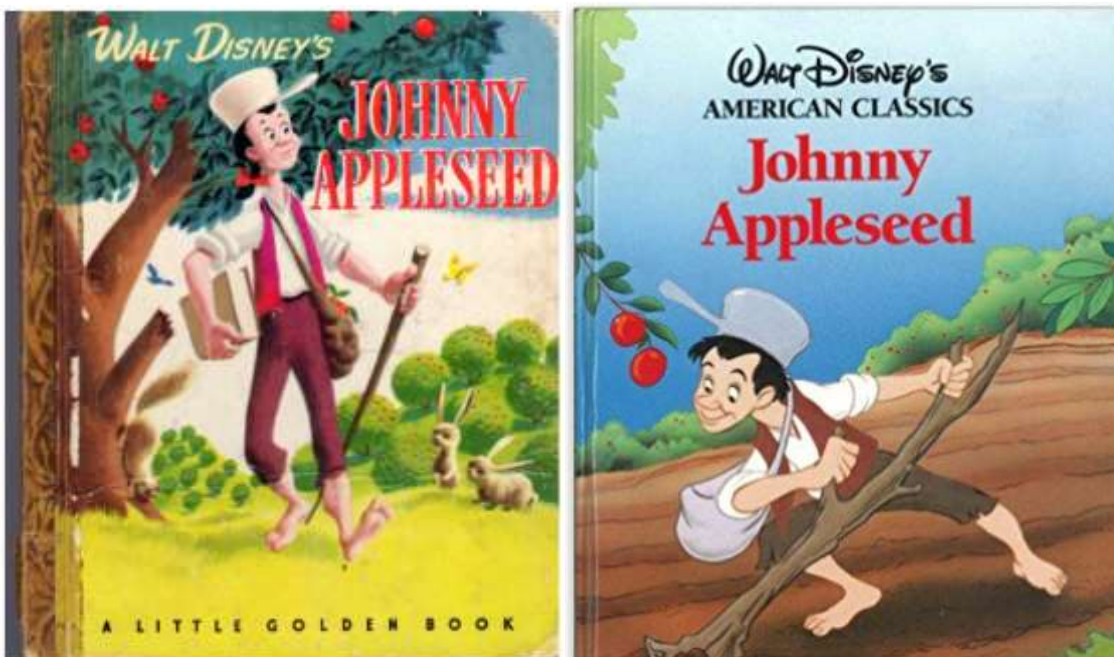
### Abstract

Alcune leggende folkloristiche provenienti dagli Stati Uniti possono stimolare motivanti attività CLIL con inglese/storia/geografia/italiano/informatica nella scuola primaria e secondaria di I e II grado utilizzando dei video brevi a disposizione liberamente in Internet. Quest'unità didattica, dettagliata ma flessibile, può essere adattata a progetti brevi o lunghi secondo gli obiettivi del docente.

Folk tales from the early United States can provide stimulating CLIL activities with English/history/geography/Italian/IT in primary and secondary schools through the use of short videos freely available on the Internet. This teaching unit can be carried out in 2 hours or expanded into a longer project depending on the teacher's objectives. Ample, concrete suggestions are provided.

## Folk Tales and Legends from the Early United States

### 3.1. JOHNNY APPLESEED



**Step 1:** introduction (Today we are going to watch a video of the story of Johnny Appleseed. Have you ever heard of him? What do you know about him?)

**Step 2:** videos: This is a video telling his story. It is told by a British story-teller.

(1948, 4.09 min.) – <https://youtu.be/ev4-8oPEnZY>

This is a famous song connected to the story of Johnny Appleseed from a Disney cartoon (1948).

Song: [https://youtu.be/3\\_OO4-XUIA8](https://youtu.be/3_OO4-XUIA8)

**Step 3:** discussion: So do you think that this is history, a legend, a tall tale or a folk tale? Why?

Answer: Fact file: **JOHNNY APPLESEED – A LEGEND**, oral history (also folktale)

- real name: John Chapman (1774-1845);
- he was a nurseryman and a missionary for The New Church (Swedenborgian);
- he planted nurseries and built fences around them to protect them from animals and left them in the care of a neighbour who sold the trees;
- he was a leader in environmentalism and conservationism and a friend of Native Americans;
- he was a vegetarian and never married;
- he died a rich man and left 490 ha of nurseries to his sister and had over 15,000 trees.

**Step 4:** reflection/discussion (What surprised you about this story and the facts?)

**Step 5:** CLIL with history and/or geography. Explore the times and places of Johnny Appleseed according to your age group and educational objectives.



**Step 6:** possible assessment (individual, group, self-evaluation)

### 3.2. PAUL BUNYAN

**Step 1:** introduction (Now we are going to watch a video of the story of Paul Bunyan. Have you ever heard of him? What do you know about him?)

**Step 2:** videos: This is a video telling his story (Disney, 1958, not subtitled, 3.26 min.).

<https://youtu.be/C-zKKoHvXn0>

**Step 3:** discussion: So do you think that this is history, a legend, a tall tale or a folk tale? Why?

Answer: Fact file: **PAUL BUNYAN – A TALL TALE (oral tradition)**

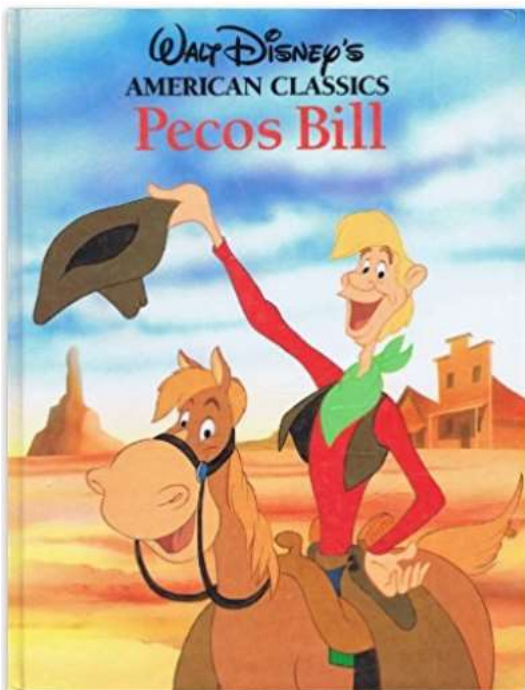
- he was a giant lumberjack (logger) who performed superhuman tasks;
- he was accompanied by Babe, the giant Blue Ox, who weighed 5000 pounds;
- he possessed immense strength;
- he was said to have logged all the timber from North Dakota, dug out Lake Superior and created the Mississippi River.

**Step 4:** reflection/discussion (What surprised you about this story and the facts?)

**Step 5:** CLIL with history and/or geography. Explore the times and places of Paul Bunyan according to your age group and educational objectives. You could also carry out a mathematical conversion activity (how much is 5000 pounds in kilos?).

**Step 6:** possible assessment (individual, group, self-evaluation)

### 3.3. PECOS BILL



**Step 1:** introduction (Now we are going to watch a video of the story of Pecos Bill. Have you ever heard of him? What do you know about him?)

**Step 2:** videos: This is a video telling his story through a ballad sung by Roy Rogers and the Sons of the Pioneers (Disney, 1948, not subtitled, 3.27 min.): <https://youtu.be/jHC8o9GNI8k>

**Step 3:** discussion: So do you think that this is history, a legend, a tall tale or a folk tale? Why?

Answer: Fact file: **PECOS BILL - A TALL TALE (oral tradition)**

- he was Paul Bunyan's baby brother, born in the 1830s, the youngest of 18 children;

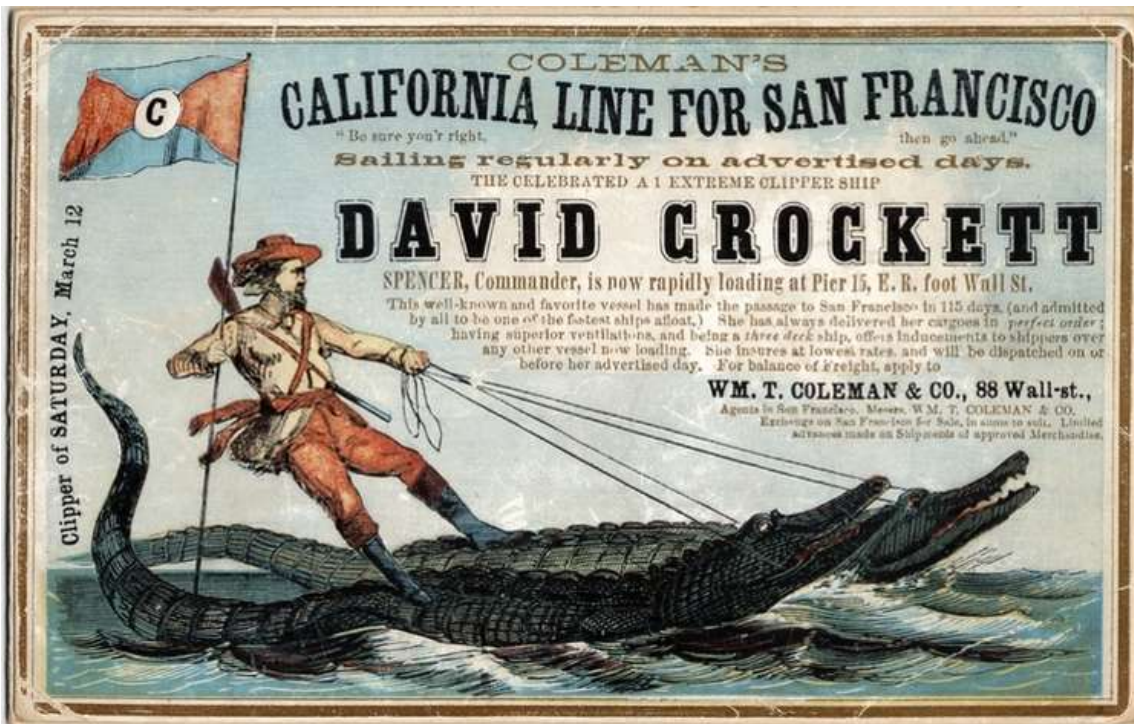
- when he was a baby, he fell out of his parents' covered wagon as they were crossing the Pecos River (Texas) and he was raised by coyotes;
- he could ride a tornado, rope an entire herd of cattle at one time, and he used a rattlesnake as a whip;
- his favourite horse was called the Widow-Maker, whose favourite food was dynamite.

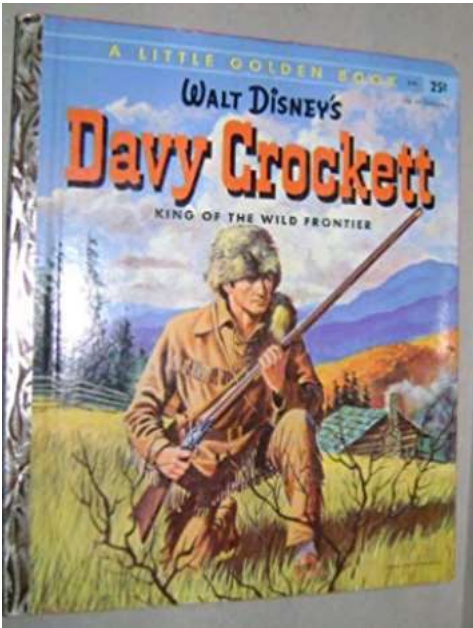
**Step 4:** reflection/discussion (What surprised you about this story and the facts?). Point out his smoking and violence which would not be acceptable in a cartoon for children today.

**Step 5:** CLIL with history and/or geography. Explore the times and places of Pecos Bill according to your age group and educational objectives.

**Step 6:** possible assessment (individual, group, self-evaluation)

### 3.4. DAVY CROCKETT





**Step 1:** introduction (Now we are going to watch a video of the story of Davy Crockett. Have you ever heard of him? What do you know about him?)

**Step 2:** videos: This is a video telling his story through a ballad (1955 – Disney movie and TV series theme song, with subtitles, 1.25 min.) : <https://youtu.be/UzAwQUwaUYy>

**Step 3:** discussion: So do you think that this is history, a legend, a tall tale or a folk tale? Why?

Answer: Fact file: **DAVY CROCKETT – A LEGEND OF A HISTORIC PERSON**

- David "Davy" Crockett (1786 - 1836);
- folk hero, frontiersman, soldier, and politician, commonly referred to as the "King of the Wild Frontier";
- He represented Tennessee in the U.S. House of Representatives and served in the Texas Revolution.
- In 1836, he took part in the Texas Revolution and was killed at the Battle of the Alamo;
- He became one of the best-known American folk heroes thanks to 20th century television and movies;
- **Remember the Alamo!** A battle cry in the Texans' struggle for independence from Mexico, later used by Americans in the Mexican War. It recalled the desperate fight of the Texan defenders in the Alamo, a besieged fort, where they all died.

**Step 4:** reflection/discussion (What surprised you about this story and the facts?).

**Step 5:** CLIL with history and/or geography. Explore the times and places of Davy Crockett according to your age group and educational objectives. If you teach primary school, this ballad offers the opportunity to study North American animals. If you teach middle/high school, U.S. history and geography could be studied.

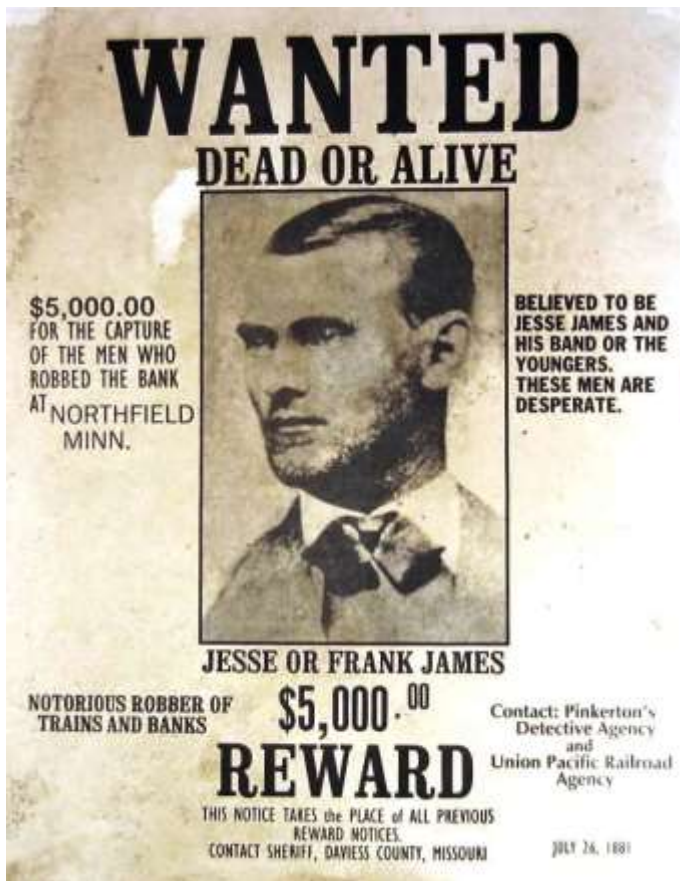
**Step 6:** possible assessment (individual, group, self-evaluation)

### 3.5. JESSE JAMES

**Step 1:** introduction – there is no video for this figure, only photos (Now we are going to look at some photos of Jesse James. Have you ever heard of him? What do you know about him?)

**Step 2:**





**Step 3:** discussion: So how would you define him? Is his story *history*, *a legend*, *a tall tale* or *a folk tale*? Why?

Answer: Fact file: **JESSE JAMES - A LEGEND OF A HISTORIC PERSON**

- Jesse Woodson James (1847 –1882) was a legendary figure of the Wild West;
- an American outlaw, bank and train robber, and leader of the James–Younger Gang;
- despite their criminal and often violent acts, James and his partners were adored;
- journalists, eager to entertain Easterners with tales of a wild West, exaggerated and romanticized the gang's heists, often casting James as a contemporary Robin Hood;
- after his death, Jesse was packed on ice and taken by train to Kearney, where he was displayed and viewed by hundreds of friends, admirers, and curiosity seekers.

**Step 4:** reflection/discussion (What surprised you about this story and the facts? Why do you think he was famous?).

**Step 5:** CLIL with history and/or geography. Explore the times and places of Jesse James according to your age group and educational objectives. If you teach middle/high school, U.S. history and geography could be studied. You could discuss why outlaws became heroes. Jesse James and his gang can be compared with Robin Hood and his Merry Men (England) or with Ned Kelly and the Kelly Gang (Australia), especially if you are dealing with issues of legality in your classes.

**Step 6:** possible assessment (individual, group, self-evaluation)

### 3.6. JOHN HENRY



**Step 1:** introduction (Now we are going to watch a video of the story of John Henry. Have you ever heard of him? What do you know about him?)

**Step 2:** videos: This is a video telling John Henry's story through a ballad sung by a famous singer called Harry Belafonte (4.47 min.): [https://youtu.be/Z4UihxOzF\\_w](https://youtu.be/Z4UihxOzF_w) (for younger children there is a shorter 2.48 minute, alternative video with subtitles: <https://youtu.be/OF-3t8Id6mA>)

**Step 3:** discussion: So how would you define him? Is his story *history*, *a legend*, *a tall tale* or *a folk tale*? Why?

Answer: Fact file: **JOHN HENRY – A LEGEND AND FOLK TALE**

- an African American folk hero, not identified with one real person but rather with a group of freed slave labourers during the building of the railways;
- according to legend, John Henry's skills as a steel-driver were measured in a race against a steam-powered hammer, a race that he won only to die in victory with his hammer in hand as his heart gave out from fatigue;
- the story of John Henry is told in this classic folk song, which exists in many versions, and has been the subject of numerous stories, films, plays, and books.

**Step 4:** reflection/discussion (What surprised you about this story and the facts? Why do you think he was famous?).

**Step 5:** CLIL with history and/or geography. Explore the times and places of John Henry according to your age group and educational objectives. If you teach middle/high school, U.S. history and geography could be studied, especially as regards slavery and racial discrimination, past and present, in the U.S.A. (and Italy).



**Step 6:** possible assessment (individual, group, self-evaluation)

### 3.7. CASEY JONES

**Step 1:** introduction (Now we are going to listen to a ballad about Casey Jones. Have you ever heard of him? What do you know about him?)

**Step 2:** videos: This is a video telling Casey Jones's story through a ballad sung by a famous singer called Johnny Cash (later developed in a Disney cartoon, video with subtitles, 3.09 min.): <https://youtu.be/mJCiPl-V6h8>

**Step 3:** discussion: So how would you define him? Is his story *history, a legend, a tall tale or a folk tale*? Why?

Answer: Fact file: **CASEY JONES – HISTORY – A TRUE STORY**

- **Jonathan Luther "Casey" Jones** (1863 –1900) from Jackson, Tennessee, was an American railroader who worked for the Illinois Central Railroad (IC);
- he was killed on April 30, 1900 when his train collided with a stalled freight train near Vaughan, Mississippi;
- his dramatic death while trying to stop his train and save the lives of his passengers made him a hero;
- shortly after his death, he was immortalized in a popular ballad sung by his friend Wallace Saunders, an African-American engine wiper for the IC.

**Step 4:** reflection/discussion (What surprised you about this story and the facts? Why do you think he is famous?).

**Step 5:** CLIL with history and/or geography. Explore the times and places of Casey Jones according to your age group and educational objectives. If you teach middle/high school, U.S. history and geography could be studied, especially concerning the importance of the railway, past and present, in the history of the U.S.A.

**Step 6:** possible assessment (individual, group, self-evaluation)

### 4. FINAL ACTIVITIES

Conduct a brainstorming activity with your class about what ALL these folk heroes have in common. Write their ideas on the blackboard/smart board and discuss positive and negative aspects.

Here are some characteristics that should come out from the discussion:

They were:

- all men;
- poor, of working class origins, not well-educated;
- independent;
- hard workers;
- generous;
- idealized as fighting for the common good, sacrificing themselves for a better America;
- of abnormal size and/or skills;

- fearless;
- pioneers conquering the ‘wild frontier’;
- wanderers, restless.

If you teach middle/high school, you could discuss these characteristics in light of the current social/economical/political situation in the U.S. and compare them with the Italian reality, noting similarities and differences. The lack of female heroes is another topic that could be developed and could be linked to past and present struggles for voting rights for women, equal rights for women, the presence of women in governments, etc.

At this point you may want to complete any assessment activities you have started. These could be individual, group or self-evaluations.

## 5. CONCLUSION

CLIL projects create stimulating learning frameworks that can be developed in many different directions depending on the age, and linguistic abilities of the students. Appealing topics such as these American folk tales and legends can increase interest and motivation both in studying history/geography and in using English to communicate in a natural, spontaneous way in the classroom. Watching entertaining videos increases students’ incentive to learn more and creates a relaxed atmosphere in which no one is excluded and ideas can be freely shared. Although creating verbal scaffolding materials for learning new vocabulary and inventing assessment activities are time-consuming for the teacher, they can be recycled in future projects and shared with colleagues. The positive outcomes resulting from your creations, will definitely be worth all your efforts. So *buon lavoro* and have fun!

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