

The Day Pecos Bill Rode Old Twister

An American Tall Tale

You've probably heard about Pecos Bill, the Texas wrangler who was as tall as a two-story house and as strong as an ox. When it was time to round up the cattle and drive 'em to Abilene, Bill would just point his nose toward the sky and let out a coyote howl that echoed all across Texas. Now, the cattle thought there were a hundred or so coyotes comin' after them, and they were so spooked that they stampeded as fast as they could in the other direction. 'Course Bill had cowpunchers stationed all along the trail to keep the cattle runnin' in the right direction. When the cattle slowed down, Bill just let loose with another howl, and the cattle kept runnin' until they'd all reached Abilene in record time.



You might think it was strange that Bill could howl like that. Well, you see, because coyotes raised him, he came by it naturally. Some folks say Bill thought he was a coyote until he was fourteen years old. Seems he got lost from his folks when they were movin' west. But that's a story for another day.

Bein' pretty much like a coyote, Bill would stop to sniff around every now and then. He could smell almost anything in the air a hundred miles away. One mornin' he said, "Better head for the cellar. There's a twister comin'!" Then Bill put his ear to the ground and announced, "It just passed by El Paso. It's an hour away." That was enough time to get some of the cattle into the tunnel Bill had dug using his pet snake, Rattler, as a drill. As soon as everything was in order, all the cowhands headed for the cellar.

"You comin' in, Bill?" yelled Cowpoke Carl.

"I'm gonna ride this one out!" Bill shouted back, so Carl shut the wood cover to the cellar and bolted it in place.

As for the rest of the story, this here is how Bill told it when he showed up a week or two later. And there's no doubt he was tellin' the truth. Bill was as truthful as a Sunday school teacher.

It seems Bill and his horse, Bulldozer, waited until Old Twister came roarin' across the ranch like an angry panther chasin' its dinner. When the twister caught sight of Bill, it set out after him. Bill led Old Twister away from the barn and the bunkhouse as far as he could. Bulldozer managed to dance to the side each time Twister came close to Bill. That big wind was racin' at such a speed that it could only twirl straight ahead like a ballerina spinnin' across the stage. It couldn't keep up with Bulldozer's fancy sidesteppin'. Old Twister got uglier by the minute. It wasn't used to playin' a losin' game of tag, and it was clear to Bill that Twister wouldn't slow down until it tore up the whole ranch and him along with it.

"I've tamed bears, snakes, and wolves," Bill said to Bulldozer. "I guess it's time I took the fight out of Old Twister, too. My rope's ready, and I'm goin' for the ride of my life. Bulldozer, you head out as far away from this bag a' wind as you can. Leave the rest to me."

Bill threw his rope into the air and sent it whirling faster than a bolt of lightning'. The lasso dropped over the top of Old Twister and headed for the middle of that windy monster. Bill tightened the rope and gripped the end. Hangin' on like a flea on a dog, he jumped onto the side of the twister and climbed toward the top. Old Twister hopped and danced and nearly turned itself wrong side out tryin' to shake Bill off. It was



some fight, but Bill never gave up. He just climbed higher, pokin' his spurs right into the twister's sides.

When Bill reached the top of the twister, he was a little the worse for wear. His hair stood straight up like the points on a picket fence, and his leather shirt was so fringed it looked like blades of brown prairie grass. Nonetheless, he was as calm as a hibernatin' bear. Bill rode bareback on the rim of that twister, lookin' straight down inside it. There was a city's worth of houses, a herd or two of cattle, and pretty much everything else you could need just swirling around in there.

Twister arched its back and kicked up its tail like a buckin' bronco at a rodeo. It didn't do any good, though. Bill rode Old Twister like he was a kid ridin' on a rockin' horse. He was havin' so much fun that he decided there oughta be some good done along the way. It was a shame to let Old Twister smash up all those houses. People movin' west had a long stretch to travel without comin' to a town, so Bill reached down inside the whirlwind and pulled out the houses one by one. As he tossed the houses behind the twister, they settled down in neat rows, makin' up the prettiest town you could imagine. Now people'd have a place to stop and rest when they crossed that long, dry stretch of prairie.

Bill scooped up all the grass and plants inside the twister, too, and threw 'em into a giant stack near the town. Each time the twister tried to roar off across the prairie, Bill just dug in his spurs, and while the twister spun around in circles going nowhere, Bill scooped out the cattle and dropped 'em onto the stack of grass so they'd have enough to eat until the next wagon train came rumblin' along. When he was finished, Bill had made a fine place to settle down, and he told himself that, one day, he'd do just that.

Old Twister was empty now and as tired as a mother hen that had spent the day chasin' after her chicks. It was nothin' but a little breeze and as gentle as a newborn lamb frolickin' across a meadow. As for Bill, he'd had enough travelin' for a while, so he just went back to ridin' Bulldozer around the ranch and howlin' at the moon.

Questions About The Day Pecos Bill Rode Old Twister

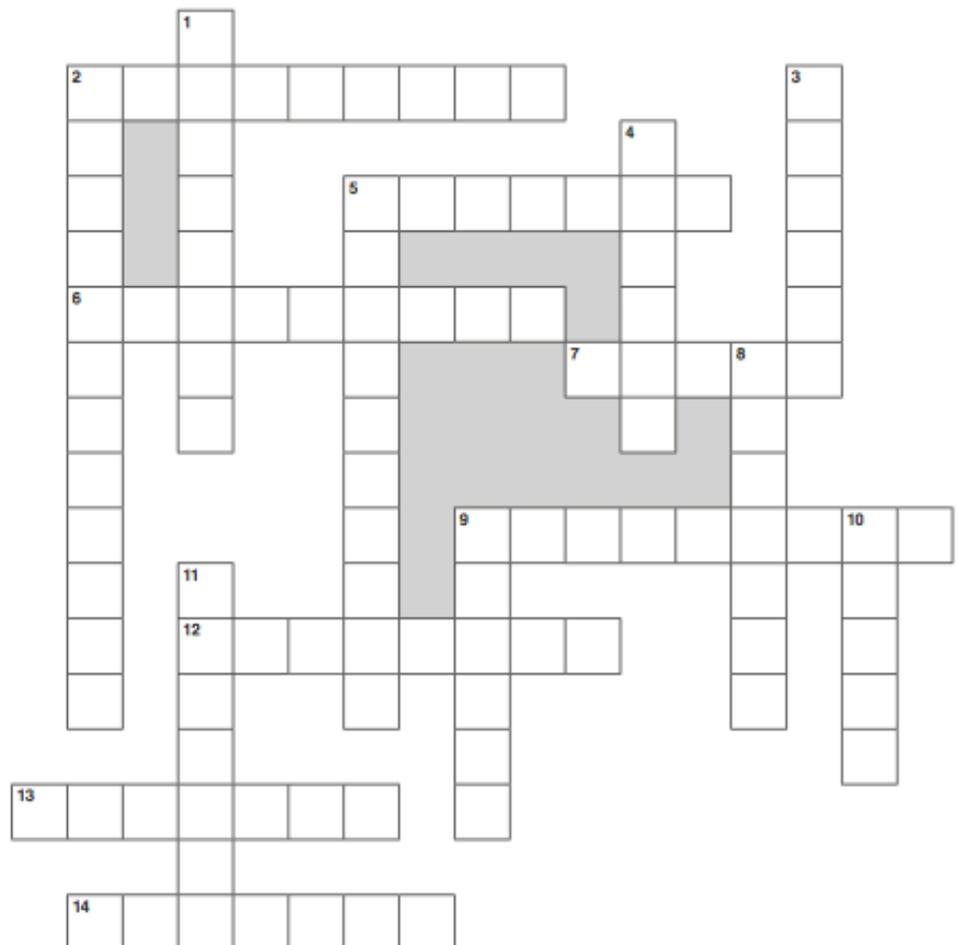
1. How did Pecos Bill drive the cattle to Abilene?
2. How did Pecos Bill learn to howl like a coyote?
3. How did Pecos Bill know there was a twister coming?
4. How did Pecos Bill catch the twister?
5. What made Pecos Bill think that the twister wouldn't stop until it tore up the whole ranch?
6. What did Pecos Bill do with the houses and the cattle that were caught up in the twister?
7. What finally happened to the twister?

Vocabulary Crossword

Use the words in the word box to complete the crossword puzzle. Record in your notebooks with a Down Column and an Across Column.

Word Box

bareback
bolted
bronco
bunkhouse
cellar
fringed
frolicking
lasso
panther
sidestepping
spooked
spurs
stampeded
stationed
stretch
twister
wrangler



Across

2. rushed forward wildly as a group
5. having thin strips hanging from the edges
6. positioned at a certain place
7. a rope with a noose that is used to catch horses and cattle
9. a building that has rows of beds or cots for cowboys to sleep on
12. a cowboy who herds horses or cattle
13. a large, black wild cat
14. a long or wide piece of land

Down

1. on a horse without a saddle
2. moving from side to side to avoid one or more obstacles
3. a wild horse
4. an underground storage area
5. running and playing merrily; romping
8. frightened
9. ran off quickly and suddenly
10. sharp-edged metal disks that are worn on the heels of cowboy boots
11. a whirling funnel-shaped windstorm

Similes

A **simile** is a figure of speech that describes a person or an action by comparing it to something completely different. The comparison uses the words like or as.

Examples: Pecos Bill was as strong as an ox. (describes a person) He howled like a coyote. (describes an action)

Find phrases in the story that contain similes for each of the following sentences.

1. Pecos Bill was truthful.
2. Pecos Bill was tall.
3. Bill's hair stood straight up.
4. His shirt was fringed.
5. Bill was calm.
6. The twister arched its back and kicked up its tail.
7. The twister turned into a little breeze.
8. Old Twister came roaring across the ranch.

Exaggeration

Tall tales are stories that contain exaggerated descriptions and actions that readers know are not true to life or cannot happen in real life.

Examples: Pecos Bill let out a howl that echoed all across Texas.

No human sound is loud enough to be heard across such a distance.

Bill rode Old Twister like he was a kid ridin' on a rockin' horse.

A person cannot ride on wind and would be injured or killed trying.

Find five more exaggerations in the story and explain why they are not true to life or cannot happen.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.