

— Readers' Theater —
Scripts for Young Readers

John Henry



Primary Concepts®

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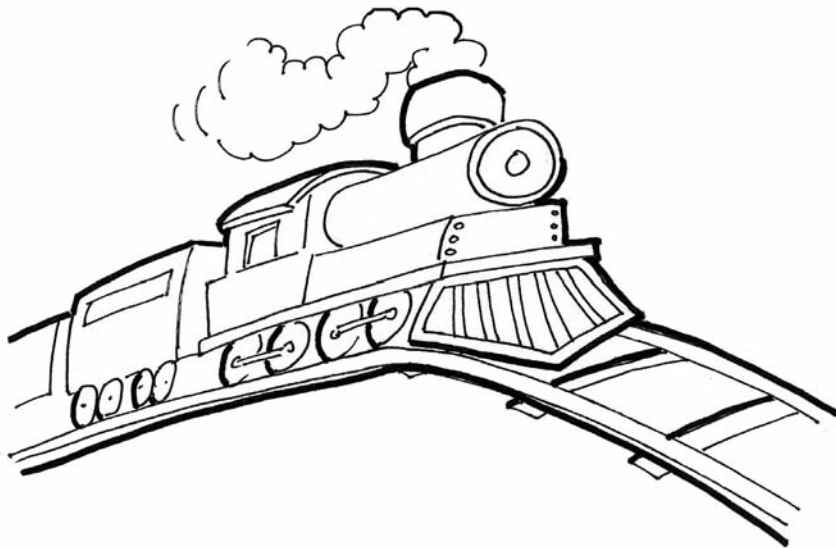
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- 5 Have you ever heard the tale of John Henry?
- 2 He worked long ago on the railroads.
- 1 He was strong. He worked hard.
- 3 He was the best railroad worker ever.
- 6 No one knows for sure if there ever was a real John Henry.
- 4 But many songs tell of such a man.

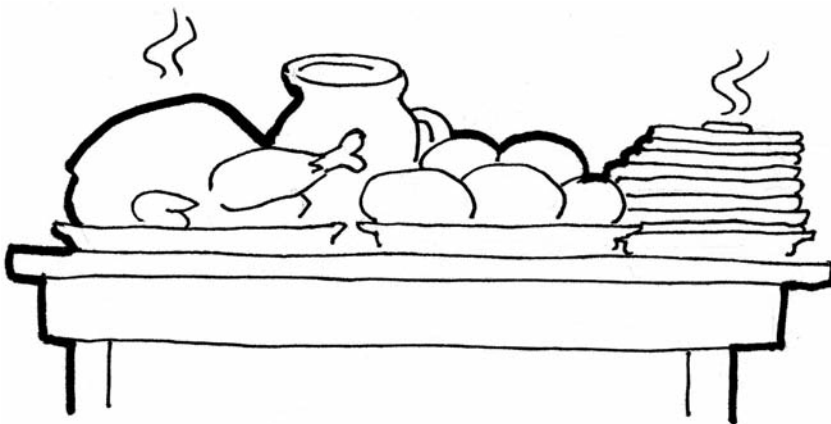




- 3 John Henry was born in the South.
- 4 He was the biggest baby ever seen in those parts.
- 6 But one thing was even more amazing than his size.
- 5 John Henry was born with a hammer in his hand!
- 1 A five-pound hammer!
- 2 That's what they say.



- 5 John Henry only put his hammer down to eat.
- 4 For that, he needed two hands.
- 1 That baby could eat!
- 2 He ate more than five men ate.
- 3 And that was just the first day!
- 6 Nobody could believe how much that baby could eat.





- 5 One day, John Henry sat on his daddy's knee.
- 1 He had a hammer in his hand.
- 4 He held up that hammer for his daddy to see.
- 2 He lifted it like it was a feather.
- 3 Then baby John said his very first words.
- 6 He said, "I'll die with a hammer in my hand."





- 5 John Henry's mama didn't like the sound of that.
- 2 She took that hammer away.
- 4 John Henry tried to play with other things.
- 6 But nothing was as good as his hammer.
- 3 That hammer felt like a part of him.
- 1 He missed that hammer.



- 5 John Henry grew to be a big, fine man.
- 4 Soon it was time for him to leave home.
- 3 He needed to make his own way now.
- 6 When he left, his daddy gave him something.
- 1 It was his hammer!
- 2 Now everything seemed right.





- 3 Soon John Henry found a wife.
- 1 Her name was Polly Ann.
- 2 They were very happy together.
- 5 But something still wasn't right.
- 4 John Henry wanted something more.
- 6 He wanted to work with his hammer in his hand.
- 2 Then everything would seem right.



- 4 So John Henry and Polly Ann moved west.
- 6 One day, they heard a sound. Shhhh! Listen!
- 3 “Ring! Clink! Ring! Clink! Ring! Clink!”
- 1 Right away John Henry knew!
- 5 It was the sound of hammers hitting steel.
- 4 John Henry got a good feeling. Something just felt right.





- 2 John Henry hot-footed it right to the sound.
- 5 He saw men making a railroad tunnel through a mountain.
- 3 The men hit long, steel spikes with their hammers.
- 1 They hammered the spikes into the rock.
- 6 Then they took the spikes out and put dynamite in the holes.
- 5 Little by little, they blasted through the mountain.
- 3 The men were called steel-drivers.
- 6 Before the day was done, John Henry had a job.



- 1 Steel-driving was hard work.
- 2 But John Henry took to it right away.
- 4 He could swing a 20-pound hammer.
- 5 He worked so fast it sounded like church bells.
- 2 “Clink, ring! Clink, ring! Clink, ring!”
- 3 Soon he was the best steel-driver ever.
- 6 Then one day a man came to the camp with a funny-looking machine.
- 1 He said it was a steam drill.
- 4 He said it could drill holes faster than five men.



- 6 But John Henry knew he could beat the steam drill.
- 5 So they set up a race.
- 3 “Clink, ring. Clink, ring.”
- 1 “Ssssss. Ssssss.”
- 4 “Clink, ring. Clink, ring.”
- 2 “Ssssss. Ssssss.”
- 4 John Henry’s hammer rang.
- 2 The steam drill hissed.
- 3 Faster and faster they worked.
- 6 John Henry worked so fast that his hammer sounded like thunder.



- 5 At the end of the day, the race was over.
- 1 John Henry was right.
- 3 He could beat a steam drill.
- 4 His holes were bigger and deeper.
- 1 The men all cheered.
- 2 John Henry was still the best.
- 6 But John Henry lay down, tired to the bone.
- 5 And he died with his hammer in his hand.
- All He died with his hammer in his hand.

A Note to the Teacher

Primary Concepts *Readers' Theater* scripts are a powerful way to help children develop fluent reading skills. Readers' theater is the performance of literature that is read aloud expressively rather than acted. Because the goal is to perform the selections in front of a group, readers' theater gives children an incentive for reading familiar text over and over, thus improving their fluency. *Readers' Theater* scripts provide the following benefits:

- Develop skill in pacing, articulation, phrasing, and expression.
- Encourage children to monitor their own reading for fluency.
- Build cooperative skills in a small group.

Using the Scripts

Students work in groups of six. They either choose or are assigned a part to practice: the greater the part number, the higher the reading level.

You may wish to use a highlighter or highlighting strips to mark a part in each book. In one book, all the 1's would be marked, in another all the 2's, and so on. Highlighting the lines the child will read may be helpful for some children.

Practice Makes Perfect

Each child should be given his or her own script book. The group reads and rereads the text, perfecting their fluency, pacing, phrasing, expression, and the flow from one reader to the next. The group can listen to the audio model of the script, or you may wish to model the reading yourself.

Students typically listen critically to their own readings and try to improve with each reading. Members of the group should be encouraged to listen attentively and give each other feedback. Remind students how to give positive feedback by first telling what is working and then describing what might be improved and how.

Encourage groups to experiment with special ways to read the text:

- Use expressive voices.
- Say some words or phrases loudly and others softly.
- Slow down or speed up text.
- Shorten or lengthen pauses.

Performance Time

After the children have practiced to near perfection, have them read selections in front of an audience (e.g., their classmates, another classroom, or their parents). Consider inviting parents for a Readers' Theater Tea. Students will enjoy making the invitations. The formal tea will make all their hard work pay off with the applause of pleased parents. No costumes or props are required for these performances. The main focus is on the celebration of reading.

Performance Assessment

As the children read in front of a group, assess individual reading fluency.

- Is the reading smooth, without hesitation or mistakes?
- Does the student use expression in reading?

Other Resources

Readers' Theater script books and audio are available in several genres. For these and other resources for teachers, please consult a Primary Concepts catalog or visit our website at **www.primaryconcepts.com**.