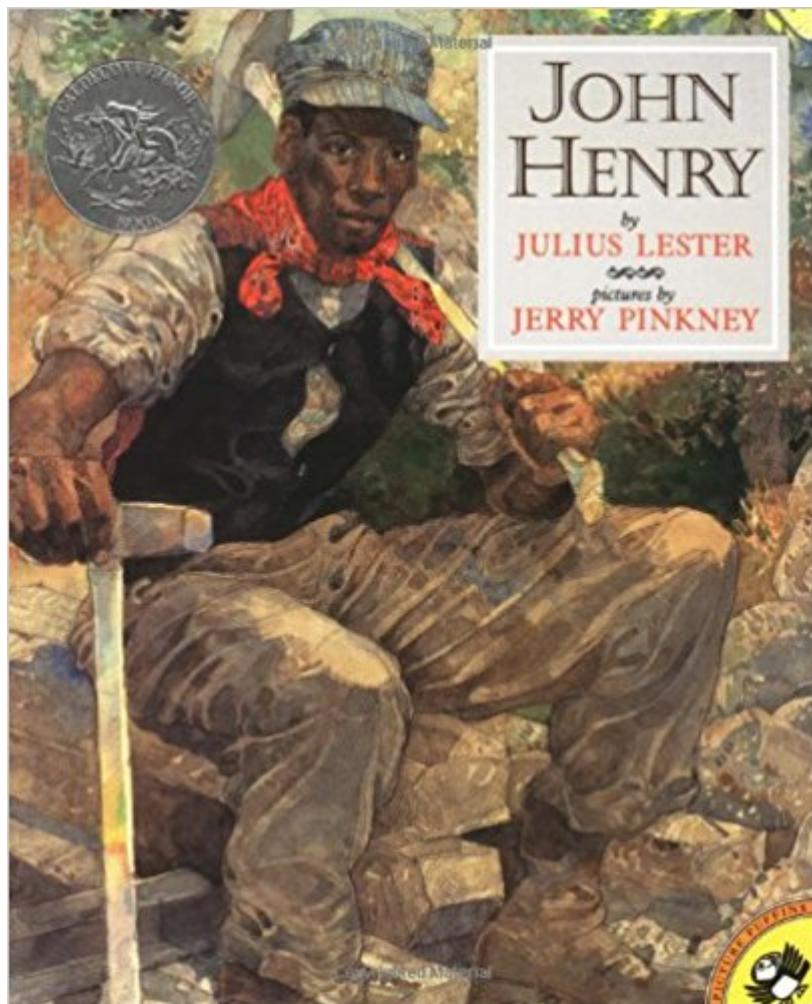


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# John Henry (Picture Puffins)



## **Synopsis**

Julius Lester and Jerry Pinkney's warm, humorous retelling of a popular African-American folk ballad. When John Henry was born the birds, bears, rabbits, and even a unicorn came to see him. He grew so fast, he burst right through the porch roof, and laughed so loud, he scared the sun! Soon John Henry is swinging two huge sledgehammers to build roads, pulverizing boulders, and smashing rocks to smithereens. He's stronger than ten men and can dig through a mountain faster than a steam drill. Nothing can stop John Henry, and his courage stays with us forever. A Caldecott Honor Book\* "This is a tall tale and heroic myth, a celebration of the human spirit . . . The story is told with rhythm and wit, humor and exaggeration, and with a heart-catching immediacy that connects the human and the natural world. " --Booklist, starred review "Another winning collaboration from the master storyteller and gifted artist of Tales of Uncle Remus fame." --School Library Journal "A great American hero comes fully to life in this epic retelling filled with glorious, detailed watercolors . . . This carefully crafted updating begs to be read aloud for its rich, rhythmic storytelling flow, and the suitably oversize illustrations amplify the text." --Publishers Weekly

## **Book Information**

Lexile Measure: AD720L (What's this?)

Series: Picture Puffins

Paperback: 40 pages

Publisher: Puffin Books; Picture Puffins edition (December 1, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0140566228

ISBN-13: 978-0140566222

Product Dimensions: 9.5 x 0.1 x 11.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 40 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #59,050 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #55 in Books > Children's Books > Fairy Tales, Folk Tales & Myths > Multicultural #88 in Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > United States > 1800s #163 in Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Multicultural Stories > African-American

Age Range: 4 - 8 years

Grade Level: Preschool - 3

## **Customer Reviews**

A great American hero comes fully to life in this epic retelling filled with glorious, detailed watercolors. From his momentous birth, when all the animals come to see him and the sun won't go to bed, John Henry works wonders. As a child he helps his father by adding "a wing onto the house with an indoor swimming pool and one of them jacutzis"-and that's just before lunch. Other episodes trace the growth of his generous spirit. His greatest feat is, of course, in his battle against the steam drill, as he races the machine to cut through "a mountain as big as hurt feelings." He dies ("he had hammered so hard and so fast and so long that his big heart had burst"), but the onlookers understand that "dying ain't important.... What matters is how well you do your living." This carefully crafted updating begs to be read aloud for its rich, rhythmic storytelling flow, and the suitably oversize illustrations amplify the text. As only one example, the animal witnesses of his birth reappear throughout, most notably to watch John Henry's funeral train pass by. This may not supplant more traditional retellings, such as Terry Small's *The Legend of John Henry*, but it is a triumph of collaboration from the creators of the noted *Uncle Remus* retellings. All ages. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

Kindergarten-Grade 5-Another winning collaboration from the master storyteller and gifted artist of *Tales of Uncle Remus* (Dial, 1987) fame. Based on several well-known versions of an African American folk ballad, Lester's tale is true to the essence of the steel-driving man; yet, it allows room for touches of whimsy and even includes some contemporary references that tie the hero to our own times. Told with just a trace of dialect, the story moves along briskly toward the climax. Its moral message of the importance of a well-lived life is clearly stated, and the ending is uplifting. Pinkney's marvelous watercolors, abundantly rich in detail, convey both the superior strength and the warm sense of humanity that make John Henry perhaps a more down-to-earth character than some other tall-tale figures. The paintings' muted earth tones add a realistic touch to the text, bringing this John Henry alive. When viewed from a distance, however, figures and details sometimes blend together, making the book better suited to independent reading than group sharing. It will appeal to an older audience than Ezra Jack Keats's *John Henry* (Knopf, 1987) and is a fine addition to any folklore collection. Nancy Menaldi-Scanlan, Wheeler School, Providence, RI  
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Our grandson loves this story. We actually live just over an hour's drive of Talcott, WV; home of the John Henry statue and the tunnel where John Henry raced the steam drill. Our grandchildren have always been interested in the story of John Henry and consider him to be a true American hero.

There are many songs written and sung about him in our area. I was pleased to find this book, especially in hard-cover. Instead of cards (which most people do not keep), my husband and I give our grandchildren a book each year for their birthday and we write our message to them as well as the date and their age on the inside cover. This book was our grandson's "birthday card" or book, I should say; hopefully he will keep the book and be able to remember his birthdate and will always have the message from "Nanny & Poppy" inside.

purchased for my grandson who has read about and retold the story of John Henry many times over. He has shared the book with his class

Right off the bat, I have to let it be known that I gave this book 4 stars because of the sheer impact it made on me when I first heard it in elementary school. Today, I am a middle school special education teacher and realize certain things that could have been better of course, but it's still a memorable book. The rainbow's, Jacuzzi's, the awkward uses of song and onomatopoeia's make the book very lackluster. The uses of personification and the perfect illustration make this book a significant contender for the best renditions of this classic tall tale. Story - 3/5 Word Flow - 2/5 Literary Elements - 3/5 Author's Imagination - 2/5 Illustration - 5/5 Color - 5/5

I'm a music teacher, so I am constantly on the look out for books I can sing to my class. John Henry is a fantastic song of a great African-American hero. While the prose of Julius Lester sings, it isn't the lyrics to the song, so it didn't really meet my needs. It does however read aloud with majesty and grace. I am keeping it for my daughter to enjoy as a bedtime story. If you are looking for a book with gorgeous prose, this is a five-star book. If you are looking for a book you can sing, it won't help you, but the illustrations are so damned gorgeous that I can't help but give it four stars for this.

Used this book to teach a writer's craft lesson on using adjectives to paint a picture. My second graders loved this story and were able to use this as a great mentor text for their writing.

Probably the best written version of this story. Lester is known for his great writing, that makes reading it aloud lively and intriguing to the children.

This is in frequent rotation in our house. Wonderful illustrations and telling of this classic story passed down orally for generations.

one of our family's favorites. Pinkney is a beloved illustrator that absolutely makes this book perfect. I cry every time.

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