



## WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

### SPOT: Epics, Legends, & Tall Tales

*Jumping Into Genre: Folklore  
(developing wide reading)*



#### Stories of Long Ago

Epics and legends grew out of the oral tradition of storytelling. While the storyteller may have embellished the details, epics and legends are considered to be historic in time and place and were believed to be true. We often don't know when they were first told, but by considering the events in the story, or the determining when the hero of the story would have lived, we are able to gather clues as to when the story may have originated. It is much easier to determine when the story was first written down. The ancient cultures of Sumer, Babylonia, Egypt, Persia, Greece, India, and China recorded their stories and scholars can date the material that has survived. Writings from earlier times continue to be discovered as archaeologists unearth ancient civilizations.

#### Stories of Today

Tall tales and urban legends have much more modern beginnings. American heroes, such as Davy Crockett, John Chapman (Johnny Appleseed), and Abraham Lincoln are real people, but some of the accomplishments attributed to them have been embellished so much, that the stories are considered fiction. In the early 1900s, advertising and magazine writers created others heroes, such as the lumberjack, Paul Bunyan, cowboy, Pecos Bill, or steel worker, Joe Magarac. These American legends are called "tall" tales because of their exaggerated claims.

Urban legend is a term applied to gross and horrifying rumors that run rampant, most often forwarded through e-mail or on Internet sites. They are retold because they serve a purpose for people. They help us deal with areas of life about which we are uneasy or afraid. Telling these stories is a way to talk about fears without actually mentioning them. When urban legends are told, the teller swears that they *are* true and happened to a friend of a friend. Websites, such as [www.snopes.com](http://www.snopes.com), and television programs, such as *MythBusters*, are devoted to determining the truth behind the tales.

#### Why Legends Appeal to Us

Legends are popular because we love to hear and read about people who have accomplished great tasks. Often, we hope that a special opportunity will come along in our own lives so that we can act in a way that will bring us lasting fame. We plan how we would respond to a great challenge because we know what our heroes would do. We first heard about these heroes during our bedtime stories. Later we studied their legends in school. They appear in comic books, magazines, newspapers, television, and movies. Some of us never tire of these people and we continue to read about them in historical fiction, drama, and epic literature.

#### References:

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