

4.3 THE ADVENTURES OF BARON MÜNCHAUSEN



FOCUS QUESTIONS:

- What lessons about people, places, environments/weather, and humor can be learned from reading tall tales from various cultures?

STANDARD #1 CULTURE.

LESSON OVERVIEW:

The students will learn of Baron Münchhausen's tall tale adventures during this lesson. This is an excellent opportunity for students to read literature that was written in Germany over 200 years ago and is still enjoyed today as part of German elementary school curricula.

TEACHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Karl Friedrich Hieronymus, Freiherr von Münchhausen (1720 –1797), known as Baron Münchhausen, was a German aristocrat in the service of the Elector of Brunswick-Lüneburg. After serving in the Russian military in campaigns against the Ottoman Turks, he retired in 1760 to his estate in Bodenwerder. While entertaining his friends he supposedly told a number of farfetched stories about his life as a soldier, hunter, and sportsman. In 1785, a friend of Münchhausen and a penniless scholar and librarian professor from Kassel, Rudolf Erich Raspe, anonymously published a book of the stories (with additional tales) in English — *Baron Munchhausens Narrative of His Marvellous Travels and Campaigns in Russia*. The book was a great success and was translated back into German in 1786. Later and much larger editions, none of which had anything to do with the historical Baron Münchhausen, became widely known and popular in many languages.



TIME:

2 (45-minute Class Periods)

INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES:

- Baron Münchhausen Stories (**Handout 4.3 A on Resource Disc**)
- *The Fantastic Adventures of Baron Münchhausen* by Heinz Fanisch and Aljoscha Blau; Enchanted Lion Books, LLC, NY, 2010.



PROCEDURE:

DAY 1:

- **Anticipatory Set:** The teacher may begin the class by asking, “Did you hear the one about... The fish that was caught that was this long?... Have you ever heard of a Blue Ox? Who has heard or read a story about

someone or something that just doesn't seem possible?" The teacher should let the students share these stories. The teacher should then explain that these are *tall tales*, stories that are filled with unbelievable events and characters, yet told as if they were true. Their purpose is to entertain. Next, the teacher may show students an item in the room and in one minute have someone explain how it was made, in "tall tale" form.

- Next, the teacher should refer to the Teacher Background Information and share the true story of Baron Münchhausen and explain that they are going to read a few of his tall tales.
- The stories provided are of varying reading levels due to the time period of the translation; therefore, the teacher must review the provided stories and determine which reading level would be appropriate for the students. The teacher may pair students or have them work independently. The teacher will distribute one of the Baron Münchhausen stories to each pair or individual students (**Handout 4.3 A on Resource Disc**). After reading the story, the students will choose one assignment to complete:
 - a. **For the writer:** You are a reporter and were present during one of Baron Münchhausen's adventures. Write an eyewitness account of the event using the standard journalism question format: who, what, where, when, how, why. Include a headline and a hand drawn picture depicting the event.
 - b. **For the speaker:** Think of five words that describe events of the story from beginning to end in the order in which they occurred. Write one word per index card. You must be prepared to give a 5 minute presentation to the class. As you present each card separately, you will use the word to help you summarize that portion of the story. Continue the same format for each card. Place each card on the board as you finish.
 - c. **For the artist:** Graphic novels are a recent phenomenon in the publishing world. You are asked to republish one of Baron Münchhausen's adventures using this style of publishing. Retell the story using a 5-7 box layout with captions.

DAY 2:

This may be needed for students to complete and present their projects to the class.

WHOLE GROUP REFLECTION:

- Why do we enjoy tall tales even when we realize that the story cannot possibly be true? What lessons about people, places, environments/weather, and humor can be learned from reading tall tales from various cultures?

MODIFICATIONS:

- The teacher may wish to read one of the tales with the students as a class and take the opportunity to discuss the "tall tale" elements of the story as well as the vocabulary that may be challenging.
- The teacher who is familiar with literature circles may wish to use this format. The class will be divided into groups with each student assigned one of the jobs: summarizer, vocabulary enricher, illustrator, discussion director, connector, and literary luminary. Each group will read one or more of the stories depending on teacher discretion. The group may then share their results with the other group.
- As a read-aloud activity, the teacher may wish to share the picture book *The Fantastic Adventures of Baron Münchhausen* by Heinz Fanisch and Aljoscha Blau; Enchanted Lion Books, LLC, NY.
- The teacher may wish to show various YouTube clips of the Baron Münchhausen films found online.

EXTENSIONS:

- The teacher may ask students to use Baron Münchhausen as the main character but change the setting to modern times. They should keep Baron Münchhausen in character, but have the adventure take place in the 21st century.



- The students may conduct research on the real Baron Münchhausen's life. They may write an essay about his actual historical exploits.
- Students will read five of the tales and create a scrapbook containing pictures of artifacts for each tale read. They should include pictures of objects and primary source documents that Baron Münchhausen may have kept to remind him of the event.

Source: Krause, K.E.H. (1886). Münchhausen, Hieronimus Karl Friedrich Freiherr von: *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, 23. Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, pp. 1–5.