

Exploring, Analyzing and Evaluating the Heroes and Legends of the American West

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The Cowboy is the ultimate American hero that has lasted the tests of time. He is a dashing man that is brave, courageous and intelligent; he is the best gunslinger of the frontier that fights against injustice in the west...according to pop culture and films. This is what many people interpret and consider a cowboy to be. However, this is historically inaccurate and romanticized for the sake a good story. Unfortunately many people, including myself for some time, were willing to accept these embellishments as truth and didn't question what was stated. My students struggle when it comes to generating their own conclusions and making inferences about content that is not directly stated. They also assume that what is directly stated in a text to be truth; they do not reflect, question or analyze the information. My students are unable to differentiate between what details are embellished and what is considered to be valid information based on their statements about political campaign advertisements. I want my students to see the exaggerations in the tall tale of Pecos Bill and start to realize that we as a society may have romanticized this image of the American cowboy to be larger than life—just like Pecos Bill—through the means of popular culture and hearsay. I also want them to be able to differentiate between what we see as a society define a legend to be in comparison to what was seen as a legend and hero of the past by examining Wyatt Earp and Jesse James.