(Preacher talks to the audience.)

Preacher: Hear that train? Whenever I hear a train whistle, I think of John Henry. He drove steel spikes into mountains, to help make tunnels so trains could run right through. I remember the night John Henry was born.


Pa: He’s a fine son, my dear. Don’t you agree, Preacher?

Preacher: (to parents) Well, I’ve never seen anyone like him.

(to audience) And I hadn’t either. His arms were as thick as trees. His shoulders were as broad as a boulder. And this I wouldn’t believe if I hadn’t seen it myself . . . he was born with a hammer in his hand.
Ma: What's this? It looks like a hammer.

Pa: Now, where'd he get a thing like that?

Preacher: (to parents) Looks like John Henry will be a steel-driving man.

(to audience) And that's just what he grew up to be. John Henry became the best steel driver in the land. In fact, he could do the work of four steel drivers put together.

Steel Driver 1: Boy, I'm beat.

Steel Driver 2: Me, too.

Steel Driver 3: I gotta rest.

Steel Driver 4: Right now.

John Henry: Can I help you fellas?

Steel Driver 1: Aren't you tired too, John Henry?

John Henry: Nah. I love my work and it comes easy to me. I was born with a hammer in my hand and I'll die the same way!

Steel Driver 2: I sure do wish I had your energy.

Steel Driver 3: We sure do appreciate your help.

Steel Driver 4: Thanks a lot.

John Henry: Well, a man ain't nothing but a man. He's just got to do his best.

Preacher: John Henry finished all the work for them in no time. One day a salesperson came to town.

(Salesperson enters with City Folk.)

John Henry: What is that huge piece of metal?

Salesperson: Step right up! Come see the greatest invention of all time—the steam drill! This baby can drive steel faster than three people!
Boss: I’ve got a worker who can beat that, mister. What do you say we make a bet. If my man beats your machine, I get the machine for free. If he doesn’t, I’ll buy it from you.

Salesperson: Deal!

Boss: John Henry, do you think you can do it?

John Henry: Well, I reckon I can—if I can use two hammers, one in each hand.

Preacher: John Henry’s wife was there that day visiting with their son, John Jr. Lucy didn’t like what she heard.

Lucy: Don’t be a fool, John Henry.

John Jr.: Will you do it, Pa?

John Henry: Son, I can’t stand the thought of machines taking the place of good, hardworking people. I’ve got to prove that people are worth more than machines.

Lucy: Well, I don’t want to see you get hurt. Come on, John Jr. We’ll wait for your Pa at home. Be careful, John Henry.

Preacher: So the race was on. The steam drill took off much faster than John Henry. Soon it was in the lead.

City Person: That machine will win in no time!

Country Person: Just give John Henry time. You won’t believe your eyes.

Preacher: Sure enough, John Henry began gaining on the machine. Soon he was ahead. Sweat was pouring down his forehead like a waterfall.

Country Folk: Go, John Henry!

City Folk: Go, steam drill!

Preacher: Suddenly the crowd heard the machine sputter and choke.
Boss: Looks like I won the bet, friend. But all I won is a broken machine.

Country Folk: Hooray for John Henry! Hooray!

Salesperson: Fair enough. John Henry is amazing. And look! He's still going strong!

Boss: Okay, John Henry, you can stop. The race is over.

John Henry: Just a bit more, Boss. I can make it through this mountain.

Preacher: Well, just as John Henry cleared a pass right through the mountain, he fell down and died.

Boss: John Henry always said he was born with a hammer in his hand and he'd die the same way.

Preacher: So next time you hear a train whistle, do what I do. Think of John Henry. And think of how he helped to tunnel a way through the mountains so America could grow.

THE END