SWAMP ANGEL
by Anne Isaacs, illustrated by Paul O. Zelinsky
(Dutton)
Themes: Art, Folktales, Humor,
Multicultural History
Grade Level: K—5
Running Time: 14 minutes

SUMMARY
This is an original story told in the American
frontier tradition of tall tales. The Swamp Angel
of the title is Angelica Longrider, who was born
scarcely taller than her mother and didn’t build
her first log cabin until she was a full two years
old. In the tallest tale of all, Swamp Angel tracks
down and fights Thundering Tarnation, a huge
bear with a bottomless appetite. Swamp Angel’s
victory comes only after she lassos the bear with a
tornado and fights him all night in her sleep.
Richly illustrated in the primitive style of early
American painting, the story presents a heroine to
match Paul Bunyan and other giants of folklore.

OBJECTIVES
• Children will watch and hear a "tall tale" set in
Tennessee during frontier times.
• Children will distinguish between the "tall tale"
and a true story, and identify parts of the tall tale
that are like real life.
• Children will identify and describe visual details
about how settlers lived on the frontier.

BEFORE VIEWING ACTIVITIES
Start by discussing the title of the program,
defining both the words. Encourage students to
guess who or what a "swamp angel" might be and
to pay attention during the story to see if their
guesses were correct. Ask students to identify
elements of the cover art that are clues to where
and when the story takes place and what kind of
story it is.

AFTER VIEWING ACTIVITIES
Ask students to recall details from the story about
where the story took place (Tennessee) and when
(starting on August 1, 1815). Then have them
share memories of the pictures: how the people
dressed, the kinds of houses they lived in, how
they traveled and how they celebrated. Discuss
which parts of the story were like real life and
which parts were not. Help students understand
that exaggerated humor is one clue to a "tall tale." Compare the story to other tall tales, such as the
story of Paul Bunyan.

Use the pictures in the program as an introduction
to American art. Introduce children to library
books, museum catalogs and Internet sites that
show primitive American art, and ask them to
identify the objects, clothing, animals and other
things they see in the pictures. Arrange for
museum visits if possible.

Encourage children to write and illustrate their
own tall tales or to illustrate stories from
American folktales. To spark their imaginations,
suggest that they start by dreaming up further
adventures for Swamp Angel. Display the results
on posters or in large scrapbooks that can be
shared with others. Children can also write their
stories as poetry or perform them with music and
dance.

Connect the story to American history and
geography with the help of a historical atlas or an
illustrated book about the frontier. Use maps to
show the patterns of European settlement in
Tennessee; use a timeline to establish the dates.
Introduce historical figures from the early 1800s,
several of whom have now become
semi-legendary, such as Daniel Boone, Davy
Crockett and Johnny Appleseed. Arrange for
children to visit frontier forts and historic sites,
both in person and on the Internet.

Other videos and films about folktales available
from Weston Woods include:
JOHN HENRY by Julius Lester, ill. by
Jerry Pinkney
JOHNNY APPLESEED by Reeve Lindbergh, ill.
by Kathy Jakobsen

Other videos and films about American history
and geography from Weston Woods include:
THE SCRAMBLED STATES OF AMERICA
by Laurie Keller
THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND by Woodie
Guthrie, ill. by Kathy Jakobsen

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