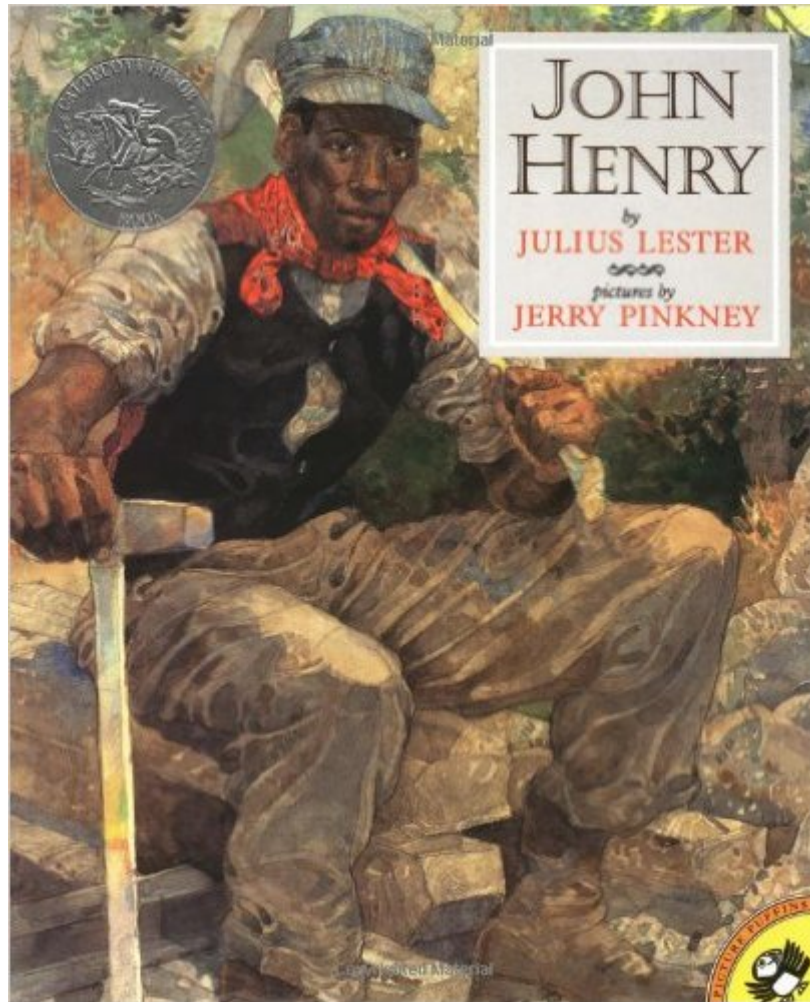


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# John Henry (Picture Puffins)



## Synopsis

John Henry is stronger than ten men, and can dig through a mountain faster than a steam drill. Julius Lester's folksy retelling of a popular African-American folk ballad has warmth, tall tale humor, and boundless energy. Jerry Pinkney illustrates the story with "rich colors borrowed from the rocks and the earth, so beautiful that they summon their own share of smiles and tears" (Booklist).

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: AD720L (What's this?)

Series: Picture Puffins

Paperback: 40 pages

Publisher: Puffin Books; Picture Puffins edition (December 1, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0140566228

ISBN-13: 978-0140566222

Product Dimensions: 9.5 x 0.1 x 11.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (35 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #35,901 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #36 in [Books > Children's Books >](#)

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[Cultures > Multicultural Stories > African-American](#) #2840 in [Books > Children's Books >](#)

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Age Range: 4 - 8 years

Grade Level: Preschool - 3

## Customer Reviews

If you haven't read a book that combines the individual talents of Lester and Pinkney (Julius Lester writes, Jerry Pinkney draws) then this might be a good place to start. The two artists have reinterpreted a variety of classic African-American tales to their own liking. From their, "The Tales of Uncle Remus: The Adventures of Brer Rabbit" to the more recent "Sam and the Tigers" (a reworked "Little Black Sambo") they are nothing if not prolific. With this book they tackle one of this country's tallest tales. The legend of John Henry. And whether you delight in their version or cling to the story you learned as a child (as I confess, I did while reading it) you have to step back and admire their enthusiasm. In this version of "John Henry" the duo has consulted a variety of texts and versions, adding some special touches and flourishes of their own. This John Henry is a baby one day and an

adult the next. He can outrace the meanest man in town and carve through solid rock with a rainbow draped across his shoulders. When the final showdown against a steam drill comes, John Henry's ready. He beats that drill only to die from a burst heart. We are assured, however, that he is buried on the White House Lawn and that at night you can hear his voice singing. There's some getting used to here, certainly. No refrain of, "I'm gonna die with a hammer in my hand" is chanted. And John Henry doesn't work the railroads with everyone else. Rather, he accidentally stumbles across the man with the steam engine while on travels of his own. And then Lester has tried to make the story applicable to the youth of today. He did this in "The Tales of Uncle Remus" too, and I had some very similar problems.

In a three star review, the reviewer writes, that a reference to jacuzzi is confusing in the story of John Henry. Julius Lester, the author of John Henry, explains in his book "Unlce Remus, The Complete Tales, "...the reader will notice a shifting from past to present tense in some stories. Black English does not make hard distinctions between past and present. Is something that happened in the past but is present in emotions, past or present? It is both, according to black people". I am not black but I get it, and totally agree. Mr. Lester writes that John Henry added onto his parents home an indoor swimming pool and a "jacutzis". But John Henry is a legend from 1929? How then could a jacuzzi be a part of the story? The reference to the "jacutzis", I found while reading to my grandhchildren, is simply wonderful, a little gift! It delighted the children as I read to them because children instantly feel the excitement of a swimming pool and "jacutzis". It does not matter that the story takes place in 1929 to a child. What matters is that the mention of a "jacutzis" instantly creates excitement in children and they relate to John Henry as a fun loving and caring son who gifted his parents with such gifts of love and appreciation. (It also serves as a clever writing tool, for older children). There are more clever examples of past and present emotions used in this wonderful story. But the real treat comes at the end when you read what matters most of all in life is "how well you do your living". The coupling of Julius Lester with Jerry Pinkney is a wonderful enticement to readers of all ages. It is impossible to turn the page without resting your eyes on each detail that Pinkney so unselfishly provides. His art is never ending.

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