

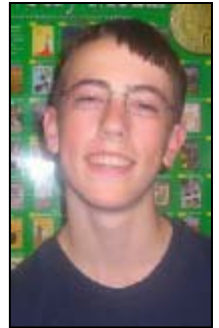
Here, three eighth graders, inspired by Jerry Spinelli's writing style in [Maniac Magee](#), created their own modern day tall-tale characters.

Read their original stories here. Prepare to discuss these writers use of *voice* and *word choice*, since those are the traits these students focused on during drafting and revision.

How did these writers manage to make their modern day stories seem like traditional tall tale? Click [here](#) to access the online assignment that inspired this writing.

## Greg the Greyhound

by Connor, 8th grade writer



Some say he was 4 ½ feet long.

More say he was all grey with one white spot between his eyes.

Others claim his left eye was green with his right appearing blue.

Myths speculate he was the fastest living thing alive; unfortunately, there was an accident.

They say his owner beat him after a big race he lost in November. Sometime during that beating, Greg lost feeling in his tail. It was paralyzed, and Greg could run fast anymore without his confidence.

Life is now good at the Lotsabux residence for Greg. Greg is always happy and running around to gain speed. He knows there is a big race today. It is the same race he lost last year. Greg also knows that Mr. Lotsabux is like the devil because he will beat Greg after he loses a race, especially after a big race like this.

"Ah, race day," says Mr. Lotsabux.

Greg knows he has to win today or else bad things will come. Greg lines up at the starting gate. The gate opens, and Greg bolts forward. He has the lead all the way. Then, he gets that cramp. Greg slows down and loses. After the race, Greg looks for Mr. Lotsabux, but he is nowhere to be found. He has left.

Greg wanders the street, looking for somewhere to live. He finds a dumpster. Next to it, a bum appears. He sees Greg has nowhere to go, so he takes him as his own. The bum explains to Greg that he has no name.

After weeks of care and barely getting by, the bum realizes Greg is a greyhound. The bum knows greyhounds are meant to run, but the bum has no money to put Greg in a race. Then, the bum notices \$20 on the ground. He knows he can buy a good dinner with it, but he uses it to put Greg in a race.

Greg lines up and sees Mr. Lotsabux in the stands.

Greg is determined to win.

Greg runs like the wind and wins the race.

The bum who started with \$20 (knowing the odds on Greg were 50 to 1) now has \$1000.

## The Chef

by Andria, 8th grade writer

Hazel answered the telephone, which hardly ever rang. "Hello, this is Hazel. May I help you?" Hazel rarely talked to people because everyone said her voice sounded very dull and boring.

The voice on the other end of the telephone finally answered back. "Uh, wrong number," it said. Then the line went dead.

This was normal for Hazel and when the caller disconnected, she wasn't surprised. Hazel was the secretary with the boring voice. She couldn't help it. She was who she was.



One day, as Hazel was typing out her weekly office report, a young girl walked into the room. She had a handful of flyers and looked as if she was in a hurry to get them all handed out. The girl quickly put one on Hazel's desk and then left the office in a rush. As Hazel read the flyer, excitement began to build. The flyer was an announcement for a cooking contest. The winner of the contest would get to compete against the top chef of the town, Jacob Spack. Hazel began to grin. She knew that this was her chance to become famous. She immediately dialed a number to enter herself in the competition.

The cooking competition was to be held in a small park up on the hill. On the day of the contest, the weather was sunny and perfect. The old park had playground equipment that was ready to fall apart, but that didn't matter to the cooks. There were five stations set up for the contestants. Only five! Each station had an apron waiting. On each apron was a name tag. Hazel quickly found her station. Each one had a small gas oven set up and next to each oven was a cooler full of cooking supplies.

In front of all the stations was a judging stand, and sitting there was the famous Jacob Spack himself. His wavy black hair flowing in the breeze, Jacob cleared his throat to get everyone's attention. "Okay contestants, the recipe you will be making today is a dish created by the world famous Chef Francis Gesto. It is smoked salmon with sautéed onions and mushrooms. In your coolers you will find a whole fish, some onions and mushrooms, and several spices. You must decide how to use them. On your mark, get set, GO!"

All the cooks grabbed their knives and began. Hazel worked quickly. She knew exactly what she was doing. Her voice might be the most boring voice in the world, but her cooking was not. Because she didn't have any friends, she spent most of her free time in the kitchen perfecting her cooking skills.

The timer buzzed and all the cooks had to stop. The competition was over, and it was time to judge the food. Only the top three got to compete against Jacob in the cook-off. A young woman named Marisa won first place, and Hazel placed second! She was going to the final round.

The next day, Hazel got up early to prepare for the showdown with Jacob. She was heading for her kitchen, when all of a sudden the doorbell rang. When she opened the door, she saw that somebody had left a basket on her step. There was a note too. The note read, "Here are some cookies. Congratulations for second place in the cooking contest."

Hazel decided to save them and eat them on the way to the competition. She put them in her purse so she wouldn't forget them. Little did she know. As she was driving, she reached for a cookie and tried to eat it. The cookie was horrible! It was hard as a rock. She couldn't even bite into it. She had to grab the cookie with both hands and break off a piece. When she did this, she noticed something strange. Green specks of something filled the middle of the cookie.

Because she was curious, she ate some of it. Her throat began to tingle immediately. Hazel thought to herself, "Could this cookie be poisoned?" She chewed on it more, and then her whole mouth started to burn and her tongue went numb. That's when she realized that the cookies were made with jalapeno peppers. Somebody had played a dirty trick on her. But who would do this?

Maybe it was the girl who had come in fifth place. She had glared at Hazel when she'd won the second place prize. This made Hazel angry and she knew what she had to do. The final competition was held in a large stadium. There were only four stations set up. Jacob's was one of them. With her mouth still burning from the pepper cookie, Hazel went to work. She chopped and stirred angrily. The burning mouth seemed to help her cook even better.

When it came time to judge, Hazel brought up her dish: a very delicious cooked crab and some sushi rolls. It was so good that Hazel took first place. She had won the championship and beaten Jacob Spack. When the grand prize was announced, Hazel couldn't believe it. She was given a fancy new apartment with a huge kitchen.

Hazel no longer cared that people thought her voice was boring. Her cooking wasn't.

## Ve-juh-tuh-buls

by Jordan, 8<sup>th</sup> grade writer

There's green, small town with a population of 56 people. The town is called Spoons, and it lies 60 miles east from Seattle, Washington. It was so small that, at a point in time, no one really cared about them. They even forgot the town existed.

On Thursday, November 18, 1999, Spoons experienced the worst thunderstorm America had ever seen. It was so bad that the thunderstorm couldn't be recorded because of the unstable patterns that no one could see.

Lightning destroyed both roads to the town. Because of this, the grocery store and gas station



were both out of supplies by the end of the week. By the next Thursday, no one's pantry could support a family, but there was a woman who could solve everyone's problem.

The woman's name was Tahnee. She was a middle-aged widow. When her husband had passed away, she'd moved to the rainiest place in America because she loved the smell of a wet ground. When she moved to Spoons, she kept to herself. In fact, the only person she'd ever talked to was the grocer, Hector Fal. But the only words that came out of her mouth to him were "thank" and "you."

Tahnee's grandmother had developed a formula, using common household items, that made vegetables grow ten times larger than their common size. To solve the town's problem, Tahnee was going to use the formula to grow vegetables for the town. She went down to Hector's store and noticed that it was closed. When she peered inside, she saw a dark room with bare shelves, a cluttered floor, and two magazines on a rack in the front of the counter.

"I guess I'll have to ask around for seeds," she told herself. And she did. When she knocked on every door in the town, the people were shocked that she even talked when she explained what she wanted to do. After she asked for seeds, the citizens became flustered over their only source of food and slammed the door in her face.

No one gave her any seeds, so Tahnee went home. While cooking herself dinner, a girl knocked on the door. Tahnee hurried over to the door and opened it. "My name is Amanda," the girl piped.

"Oh, yes, the Billiste's daughter. Come in," Tahnee moved aside, but Amanda stood still.

"I'm not supposed to go inside strangers' houses," Amanda swayed.

"Fair enough. What is it that you need?"

"I heard you talking to my Mom about that stuff and making ve-juh-tuh-buls big. I'm really hungry. Can you make a carrot big?" Amanda held out her hand. In it, was a pale seed that matched her skin tone.

"Come back, in three days. Then we will pull your carrot out of the ground and you can take it home." Tahnee took the seed from Amanda, planted it, and soaked it in her grandmother's formula.

After three nights and three days, Amanda came back. Amanda and Tahnee pulled a red-orange carrot, in tandem, out of the ground. Amanda thought it was the size of her father's arm.

She raced home. Although she struggled with the weight, Amanda made it. By the end of the night, the entire town had heard about the large carrot Amanda had brought home from Tahnee's house.

On the morrow, everyone held a seed in front of Tahnee's house.

After another three days, whether it was corn, carrots, or potatoes, the whole town picked or pulled a vegetable. All 56 people took a bite of the vegetable. CRUUNNCH!