

## The Gum Chewing Rattler

written by Joe Hayes  
illustrated by Antonio Castro L.

### About the Book

**Genre:** Fiction (Folktales)

**Format:** Paperback, pages 32

**ISBN:** 9781933693194

**Reading Level:** Grade 3

**Interest Level:** K-4

**Guided Reading Level:** O

**Accelerated Reader® Level/Points:**  
3.7/0.5

**Lexile™ Measure:** N/A

\*Reading level based on the ATOS Readability Formula

**Themes:** Animals (Snakes), Pets, Childhood Experiences and Memories, Fiction, Folklore (Tall Tales), Deserts, United States (Southwest - Arizona), Families (Mothers)

**Resources on the web:**

[leeandlow.com/books/the-gum-chewing-rattler](http://leeandlow.com/books/the-gum-chewing-rattler)

### SYNOPSIS

A humorous tall tale about how one piece of bubblegum saved author Joe Hayes as a young boy.

When Joe Hayes was a boy, he chewed lots of bubblegum. His mom would get so mad when the gum in his shirt pocket made a terrible mess in the wash.

But one wad of bubblegum just happened to save Joe from a rattlesnake's bite. Could you believe it? It really did happen!

All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.

## BACKGROUND

### Rattlesnakes

There are more than 24 species of rattlesnakes. All of them have the signature rattle at the tip of their tails. They use the rattle as a warning signal for possible threats or to confuse prey. The rattling sound comes from muscle contractions that hollow bony plates that clacking together. Each time a rattlesnake molts, more scales are added to its rattle.

Rattlesnakes are carnivores. They do not have ears. They use the tips of their tongue to “taste” the air, ground, and water to help them find prey. They sense movement by feeling vibrations in the ground. They also have a hollow spot between their eyes and nostrils called a “pit.” This sensory organ helps them detect other animals’ body heat.

Rattlesnakes can be found across the Western Hemisphere in desert, mountainous, and grassy habitats. They can also swim when needed. Since they are cold-blooded, they cannot stay active in cold weather. They group together in dens in tangled up in balls to avoid freezing.

For more information, see <https://www.nwf.org/Educational-Resources/Wildlife-Guide/Reptiles/Rattlesnakes>.

### Washing Machines

In many cultures, the earliest laundry strategy was to pound clothes against rocks and then rinse them in a stream or river. Other practices that developed from this included boiling laundry in a cauldron over a fire, stirring with a wooden paddle, or rubbing laundry against a ridged wood or metal washboard before rinsing it. The wringer-type washing machine described in this book has a tub with water and a mechanism to move the laundry around, suds up the soap, and loosen dirt. Then the laundry gets fed through a wringer to squeeze out the dirty water. Some models ran on electricity or gas and some were fully hand-operated. Wringer washers are making a comeback among extra eco-conscious people who want to use less energy and water for doing laundry. For a brief demonstration video, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bxqIXG1gv4Q>.

## BEFORE READING

### Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

- What habits do you have that bug your adult family members (or teachers?) What could be some kid habits related to chewing gum that might bug an adult?
- What do you know about rattlesnakes?
- What do you know about tall tales? What makes a story a tall tale?

You may want to have students journal their responses to these questions or pose the final question as a KWL discussion and chart so that you can refer back to it throughout and after the reading of the book to further their thinking on the topic(s).

## Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1; Craft & Structure, Strand 5; and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)  
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

- **Book Title Exploration:** Talk about the title of the book, *The Gum Chewing Rattler*. Ask students what they think this book will most likely be about and whom the book might be about. What do they think might happen? Do they think this will be a story or an informational book? What makes them think that?
- **Book Walk:** Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page, and illustrations. Display the book and analyze the cover. What do students notice in the illustration?
- **Read Author's and Illustrator's Biographies:** Read the author's and illustrator's biographies on the inside cover and the illustrator information at the end. What do you think the process is like to write a book for young readers? Why do you think these creators made this book for young readers?
- If appropriate, encourage students to stop and jot in their reading notebooks during the reading when they: learn new information, have an emotional reaction or an idea, have a question, or see new words.
- Have students write feeling(s) in their notebook during reading. After reading, ask students why they wrote that feeling down and have them write a journal entry about it. Have students complete one journal entry per each reading session.

## Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out:

- Why does this story have such an interesting title, "*The Gum Chewing Rattler*?"
- What parts of this story are realistic and possibly inspired by the author's life?
- What parts of this story make it a tall tale?

Encourage students to consider why the author, Joe Hayes, would want to share this story with young people.

## VOCABULARY

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 4)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

The book contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below.

Encourage a variety of developmentally-appropriate strategies to support students' vocabulary

# The Gum-Chewing Rattler

Teacher's Guide [leeandlow.com/books/the-gum-chewing-rattler](https://www.leeandlow.com/books/the-gum-chewing-rattler)

acquisition: Look at a photo or picture that represents the word, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, explain the meaning of a word to a partner, act out the meaning of a word, explain how the meaning of one word is the similar and different to another word.

## Content Specific

Arizona, bubblegum, "wringer washing machine," wringer, roller, desert, rattlesnake, fangs, jaws, "knocked out cold," fainted

## Academic Specific

juicy, wad, chomping, snap, squeeze, squish, stain, chomping, rattle, warn/warning, striking, spare, thrashing, whipping, froze, beady, courage

## AFTER READING

### Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses. To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite textual evidence with their answers.

### Literal Comprehension

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Where did the narrator grow up?
2. What details does the boy give about how much he loved bubblegum?
3. What happened when the boy chewed gum at school?
4. Why does the boy's mom get mad? What happens with the gum and the laundry?
5. What happened when the boy was walking in the desert?
6. How did the rattlesnake react to being stepped on? How did the boy react to the rattlesnake?
7. What happened when the rattlesnake got gum in its mouth?
8. What did the boy do when he "got up all his courage?" What happened?
9. What did the boy's mom find when she went looking for him at lunchtime? How did she react?

### Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Who is the narrator in this story? How do you know? What clues do the first and last pages give you?
2. What parts of the story do you think are realistic? Which are not? At what point does the story turn from being realistic to a tall tale?
3. What did you imagine at the part when the rattlesnake had gum in its mouth? Give examples

# The Gum-Chewing Rattler

Teacher's Guide [leeandlow.com/books/the-gum-chewing-rattler](https://leeandlow.com/books/the-gum-chewing-rattler)

of words and phrases from the text that helped you visualize this scene.

4. How do the illustrations help bring the story to life? Give an example.
5. What do you imagine the boy's mother saying in the last scene?
6. Why do you think the author wanted to share this story with young people?
7. Do you think little Joe was telling the truth to his mother? Why or why not?
8. How does the author use his childhood memories and environment to inspire his storytelling?

## Reader's Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. Suggest that students respond in independent or collaborative writing, artwork, or oral discussion. You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. How is this story a tall tale? Think about what you know about the characteristics of tall tales. Make a list of reasons this book could be considered a tall tale.
2. Why do you think the author chose to write this story? What do you think the author's message to the reader is?
3. Have students make a text-to-self connection. What kind of connections did you make from this book to your own life? How is the narrator similar or different to you and your role in your own family?
4. Have students make a text-to-text connection. Did you think of any other books while you read *The Gum Chewing Rattler*? Why did you make those connections?
5. Have students make a text-to-world connection. What kind of connections did you make from this book to what you have seen in the world or on the news? Why did *The Gum Chewing Rattler* make you think of that?
6. What is one big thought that you have after reading this book? Think about different character changes, the setting, and the relationships. What did you learn from reading *The Gum Chewing Rattler*?
7. What do you think about the author, Joe Hayes, as a person after reading this book? Do you think you would have enjoyed being friends with him as a kid? Why or why not?
8. How do the author and illustrator help readers imagine the setting (the time and place) of this story? Make a two-column chart with examples of details about the time and place this story happened

## Multilingual Teaching Activities

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Learners and multilingual learners. The book language used may differ from children's oral language. Comparing any differ-

ences will help children read and understand the story. Words can hold different meanings in other types of Spanish around the world.

1. Assign Multilingual Learners to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
  - Review the illustrations in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.
  - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, synopsis, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about their favorite story from the book and why they liked it.
5. The book contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose Multilingual Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.
6. Have students identify true cognates throughout the book. Students can begin with one to two pages and gradually increase to a chapter(s) where students highlight true cognates and determine the meaning to the word if they do not already know it. This can also be a great opportunity to also discuss false cognates with students. If time allows, have students reflect on the cognates that they found. Did they know the word in English? Did they know the word in Spanish? If it was an unknown word in English, did the identification of the Spanish cognate help them define the word? Consult ¡Colorin Colorado! for more ideas on how to use cognates in the classroom with ELs: <https://www.colorincolorado.org/using-cognates-ells>.
7. Additional resources to support multilingual students is: <https://www.multilinguallearning-toolkit.org/>.
8. Have students act out some of the key scenes in the story to support comprehension. (E.g., gum going through the washing machine and getting stuck, the boy stepping on the snake and the snake biting his pocket with gum, the boy popping the bubble and fainting, the boy telling his mother what happened.)

## Social and Emotional Learning

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1-3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4-6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1-3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4-6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 6)

Social and emotional learning involves being aware of and regulating emotions for healthy

development. In addition to understanding one's own feelings, strong socio-emotional development allows individuals to develop empathy for others and to establish and maintain relationships.

Use the following prompts to help students study the socio-emotional aspects of this book.

1. What Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) skills does the boy exhibit over the course of the book? Some examples of SEL skills include problem-solving, grit and perseverance, self-regulation, and perspective taking. How does the boy demonstrate these skills?
2. Have students go on a Social and Emotional Learning scavenger hunt in the text, looking for evidence in the details from the book. Assign students to relevant Social and Emotional Learning themes, such as: empathy, problem-solving, perspective taking, perseverance, and recognizing and managing emotions. Using the illustrations to recognize and label emotions would be especially appropriate for this book.
3. Choose an emotion that interests you: happiness, sadness, fear, anxiety, frustration, hope, perseverance and so on. Illustrate or act out what that emotion looks like in .
4. Do you think the author wants the boy to be a role model for young people or an example of caution? Why or why not?
5. Host a classroom debate: Is telling tall tales dishonest? Why or why not? Encourage students to give examples of how tall tales might make someone feel to relate to both sides of the debate.

## INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Students who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

### English Language Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3; Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6; Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9; Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3; Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6; Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9; Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3; Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Revisit the first half of the story and talk about what students can learn from it about personal narrative writing.** Highlight or make a list of craft moves and favorite phrases to use as examples of effective storytelling. Talk about how the ending of the story may have gone if the author continued it as a true personal narrative.
- **Read other tall tales by Joe Hayes, such as *My Pet Rattlesnake* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/my-pet-rattlesnake>) and *The Lovesick Skunk* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/the-lovesick-skunk>).** Make connections between texts. Talk about how the stories are tall tales and what common elements they are missing (such as a larger-than-life character).



- **Analyze the story structure with students as a way to help them plan their own tall tales.** For instance, create a chart or graphic organizer that lists key elements, such as “Narrator gets in trouble,” “Narrator has a run-in with an animal,” “Unbelievable events happen to solve the narrator’s problem.” Have students plan and write their own tall tales inspired by this story structure. It might also help to read Joe Hayes’s response about “fun writing topics” in this Q & A (<https://www.joehayesstoryteller.com/adult-q-a>), in which he refers to a tall tale as a “what if?” story.
- **Talk about the power of oral storytelling.** Show students Joe Hayes’s oral version of this story (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mruSVrlyIVg>). Compare the book format to the oral version; how does each help readers/listeners appreciate the story in different ways?
- **In small groups, have students read the Q & A with the author found on his website** (<https://www.joehayesstoryteller.com/kids-q-a>). Have each group prepare a short presentation to explain what the author’s answer to one of the questions in their own words, and make connections between the answer and the book.

## Social Studies

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1-3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4-6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7-9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10) (Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, and Range of Writing, Strand 10) (Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Find Arizona on a map.** Learn about the climate of the Southwest US and look at real photos of typical Arizona landscapes. Make connections to the book illustrations. Brainstorm how this story may have been different (e.g., a different walk location and different animal) if it was set in a different region.

## Science/STEM

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1-3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4-6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1-3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4-6)

- **Have students make a two-column list of facts and non-facts about rattlesnakes portrayed in the story.** Then have them research rattlesnakes and add more true facts to their list.
- **Use the reference to a wringer washing machine in the story to talk about how other appliances or tools have changed over time.** Have students choose an appliance that interests them to research. Have them create a picture timeline of how that appliance looked at different points in history and make a presentation to the class about how its operation and/or features have changed over time.
- **Have students generate questions about bubble gum and use books or online sources to research them.** (E.g., How is gum made, what makes it able to form a bubble, what’s the biggest bubble ever blown, etc.)



## Art

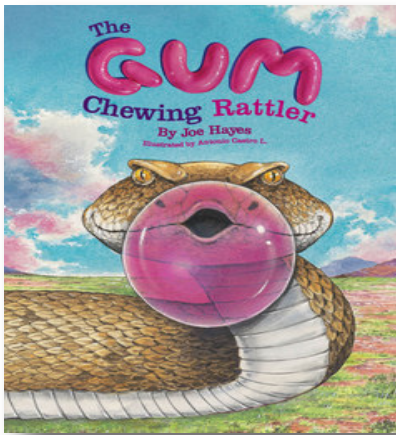
(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9) (Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10) (Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Revisit the illustrator's note and photos at the end of the story, in which he talks about using photos of people to inspire his illustrations.** Have students work with partners to stage photos depicting different emotions or reactions to events. Then print the photos and have students use them as inspiration for drawings, paintings, or illustrations for their own narrative or tall tale writing.

## Home-School Connection

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1-3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)  
(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4-6)

- **Work together to develop a set of interview questions for students to ask an adult at home about their experiences growing up.** For instance: Where did you grow up? What did you do as a kid that annoyed your family or teacher? Did you ever make up a story to avoid getting in trouble? What was the story? Share and compare responses at school.



## Ordering Information

### General Order Information:

[leeandlow.com/contact/ordering](https://leeandlow.com/contact/ordering)

### Secure Online Ordering:

[leeandlow.com/books/the-gum-chewing-rattler](https://leeandlow.com/books/the-gum-chewing-rattler)

**By Phone:** 212-779-4400 ext. 25

**By Fax:** 212-683-1894

### By Mail:

Lee & Low Books, 95 Madison Avenue,  
New York, NY 10016

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Joe Hayes** is one of America's premier storytellers. He grew up in a small town in southern Arizona where he started learning Spanish from his classmates. As Joe got older, he began reading the work of folklorists and anthropologists and gathering the old stories from the Southwest region. His books have received the Arizona Young Readers Award, two Land of Enchantment Children's Book Awards, the Texas Bluebonnet award, and the National Storytelling Network Talking Leaves Award. He lives in New Mexico. Learn more about him at [johayesstoryteller.com](https://johayesstoryteller.com)

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

**Antonio Castro Lopez (L.)** was born in Zacatecas, Mexico and has lived in the Juarez-El Paso area for most of his life. He has illustrated dozens of children's books including *Barry, the Bravest Saint Bernard* (Random House), *Pajaro Verde*, *The Treasure on Gold Street*, *The Day It Snowed Tortillas* and *The Gum-Chewing Rattler* (Cinco Puntos Press). His artwork for *My Tata's Remedies/Los remedios de mi tata* won a Pura Belpré Honor for illustration

## Reviews

"Veteran storyteller Hayes masterfully spins a kid-pleasing tall-tale from the Arizona desert... A surefire storytime pleaser." – *Children's Literature*

"An upbeat and playful story, perfectly accentuated by the wry yet realistic art." – *Midwest Book Review*

"A fun book for just about any kid." – *School Library Journal*

## ABOUT LEE & LOW BOOKS

**LEE & LOW BOOKS** is the largest children's book publisher specializing in diversity and multiculturalism. Our motto, "about everyone, for everyone," is as urgent today as it was when we started in 1991. It is the company's goal to meet the need for stories that children of color can identify with and that all children can enjoy. The right book can foster empathy, dispel stereotypes, prompt discussion about race and ethnicity, and inspire children to imagine not only a world that includes them, but also a world where they are the heroes of their own stories. Discover more at [leeandlow.com](https://leeandlow.com).