

## John Henry Hypertext Exercise

<p><b>The Prophecy</b></p> <p>When John Henry was a little baby Sitting on his mama's knee, He picked up a hammer and a little piece of steel And he said "Steel's gonna be the death of me, Lord, Lord." "Steel's gonna be the death of me."</p>	<p><b>Epilogue</b></p> <p>Well they took John Henry's body And they buried it in the sand. But every locomotive that comes roarin' through that tunnel Is cryin' "There lies a steel driving man, Lord, Lord. There lies a steel driving man."</p>
<p><b>No More Work</b></p> <p>The Captain said to John Henry, "Gonna bring a steam drill 'round, Gonna take that steam drill out on the job, Gonna whop that steel on down, Lord, Lord. Gonna whop that steel on down."</p>	<p><b>Polly Ann Fills In</b></p> <p>John Henry had a little woman Her name was Polly Ann. When her John got sick and had to go to bed. Polly drove steel like a man, Lord, Lord. Polly drove steel like a man.</p>
<p><b>The Challenge</b></p> <p>John Henry said to the Captain, "A man ain't nothin' but a man. But before I let this steel drill beat me down, I'll die with that hammer in my hand, Lord, Lord, Die with that hammer in my hand."</p>	<p><b>Shaker, Why Don't You Sing?</b></p> <p>John Henry said to his shaker, "Shaker, why don't you sing? I'm throwin' twenty pounds from my hips on down, Just listen to the cold steel ring, Lord, Lord, Just listen to the cold steel ring."</p>
<p><b>The Triumph</b></p> <p>The man that invented the steam drill, Thought he was mighty fine. But John Henry drove his fifteen feet, And the steam drill only made nine, Lord, Lord. The steam drill only made nine.</p>	<p><b>Polly Carries On</b></p> <p>John Henry had a little woman Her name was Polly Ann. She picked up his hammer went down to the tunnel. And she drove steel like a man, Lord, Lord. She drove steel like a man.</p>
<p><b>Death</b></p> <p>John Henry hammered on the mountain, And his hammer was striking fire. He drove so hard he broke his poor heart, And he laid down his hammer and he died, Lord, Lord, He laid down his hammer and he died.</p>	<p><b>The Boast</b></p> <p>John Henry said to the Captain, "Look yonder what I see --- Your drill's done broke and your hole's done choked, An' you can't drive steel like me, Lord, Lord. You can't drive steel like me."</p>

<p>The Captain is Afraid</p> <p>The Captain said to John Henry,          "I fear the mountain's cavin' in."          John Henry laughed and he said to the Captain,          "It's only my hammer suckin' wind, Lord, Lord.          It's only my hammer suckin' wind."</p>	<p>Shaker, Why Don't You Pray?</p> <p>John Henry said to his shaker          "Shaker why don't you pray?          Cause if I miss that little piece of steel,          Tomorrow be your burying day, Lord, Lord,          Tomorrow be your burying day."</p>
<p>John Henry was the Best</p> <p>Some say John Henry's from Georgia,          Some say he's from Alabam,          But never I say in the whole USA.          Was ever such a steel-driving man, Lord, Lord          Was ever such a steel-driving man.</p>	<p>John Henry's Birthplace</p> <p>Some say John Henry's from Georgia,          Some say he's from Alabam,          But it's wrote on the rock at the Big Bend Tunnel,          That he was a West Virginia man, Lord, Lord,          That he was a West Virginia man</p>

**Page view:**

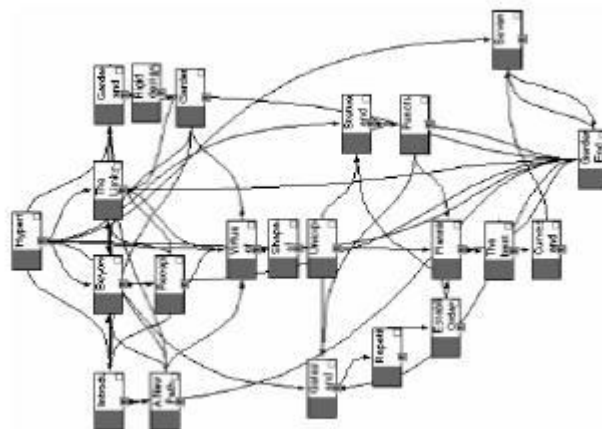
## John Henry Wins the Competition

The man that invented the steam drill,  
 Thought he was mighty fine.  
 But John Henry drove his fifteen feet,  
 And the steam drill only made nine, Lord, Lord.  
 The steam drill only made nine.

John Henry Boasts

John Henry Dies

**Node-link view:**



Core Verses:

No More Work → The Challenge → Triumph

Very Familiar Verses

The Prophecy    Epilogue

## John Henry (From Wikipedia)



USPS 1996 John Henry stamp

**John Henry** is an American [mythical](#) (usually [African-American](#)) [folk hero](#), who has been the subject of numerous songs, stories, plays, and novels.

Like other "Big Men" such as [Paul Bunyan](#), [Pecos Bill](#), and [Iron John](#), John Henry served as a mythical representation of a particular group within the melting pot of the 19th-century working class. In the most popular story of his life, Henry is born into the world big and strong. He grows to be one of the greatest "steel-drivers" in the mid-century push to extend the [railroads](#) across the mountains to the West. The complication of the story is that, as machine power continued to supplant brute muscle power (both animal and human), the owner of the railroad buys a steam-powered hammer to do the work of his mostly black driving crew. In a bid to save his job and the jobs of his men, John Henry challenges the inventor to a contest: John Henry versus the steam hammer. John Henry wins, but in the process, he suffers a [heart attack](#) and dies.

In modern depictions John Henry is usually portrayed as hammering down rail spikes, but older songs instead refer to him driving blasting holes into rock, part of the process of excavating railroad tunnels and cuttings.

While he may or may not have been a real character, Henry became an important symbol of the working man. His story can be seen as an archetypically tragic illustration of the futility of fighting the technological progress so evident in the ongoing 19th century upset of traditional physical labor roles. Some [labor advocates](#) interpret the legend as saying that even if you are the most heroic worker of time-honored practices, management remains more interested in efficiency and production than in your health and well-being; though John Henry worked himself to death, they replaced him with a machine anyway. Thus the legend of John Henry has been a staple of [leftist](#) politics, labor organizing and American [counter-culture](#) for well over one hundred years.

## John Henry

What is an information topology—why do they matter

This is an exploration of which information topology?

*Multipath*

Not one fixed linear sequence. We are giving our folksinger optional pathways.

Reasons: how long she wants the song to go, mood? Audience?

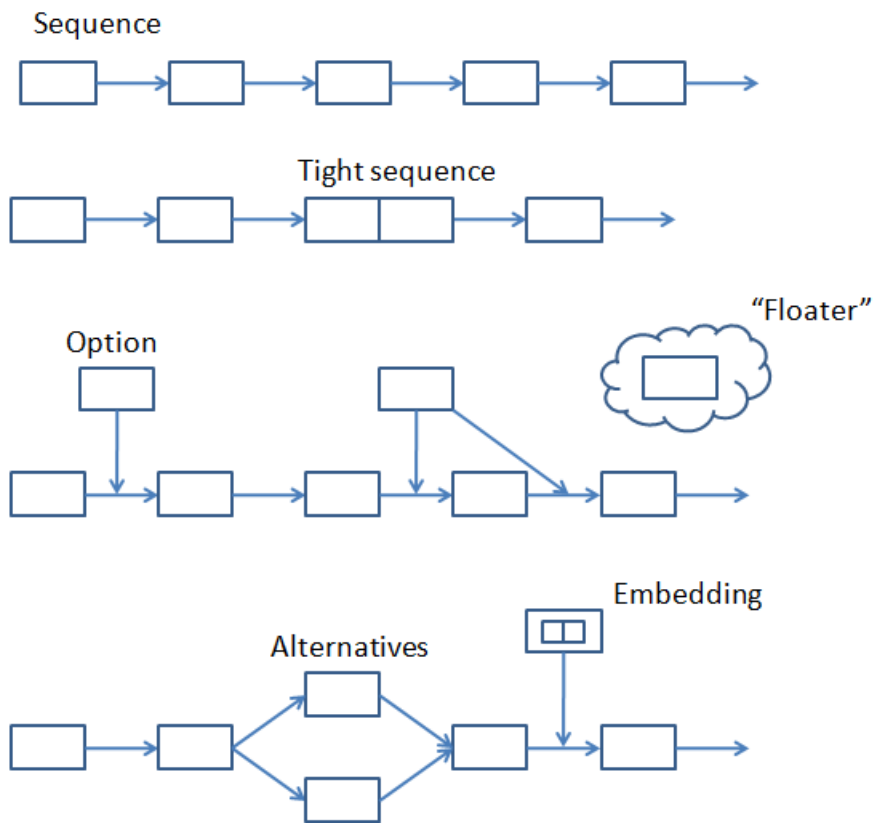
Premise: Audience may not be familiar with story; we want to tell a narrative that makes sense.

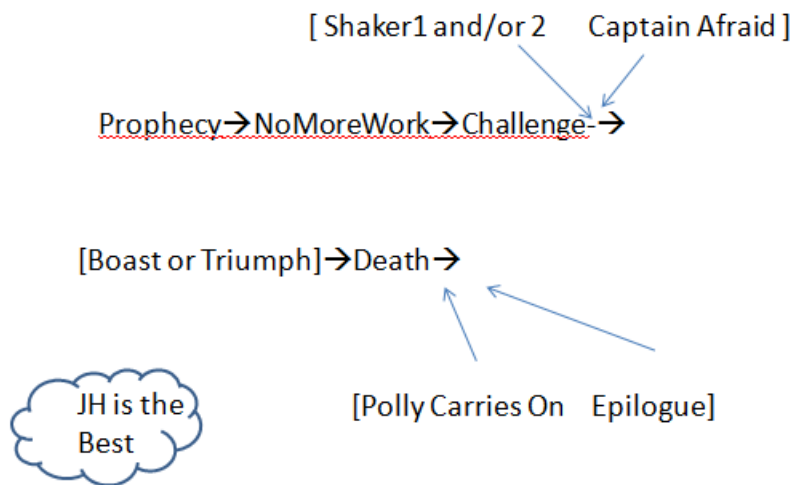
We want an aesthetically satisfying story (subjective notion)

We want a simple, graphical representation for folksinger (minimum annotations). One glance.

Label boxes to represent stanzas

A basic visual syntax for representing the multipath topology





Shaker Sing and Shaker Pray are a good unit—although you could pick between them. They are an option here. Captain is Afraid is another option but it comes after Shaker stanzas. Boast or Triumph are redundant and so are alternatives. You can end with Death. Polly Ann Carries On and Epilog are good options—but should be in specified sequence. John Henry is the best is a floater



# The John Henry Legend

Era of building the railroads in the Eastern US.

You need to blast tunnels through hills and mountains.

To plant the explosive, you need to hammer a deep hole in which to set the charge.

Construction crews hammered steel rods deep into the earth.

The story of John Henry comes from that time.

The company (The captain) wants to use a steam drill to tap down the steel rods—no more work for the crews who did the hammering.

John Henry saves everyone's job with a bet. He can beat the steam drill.

Dies in doing so. Worker's hero. Man against machine.

May have been a freed slave.

Always said to be black, but no verses mention race.

The tunnel drilling community may have only cared about how much steel you could drive.

## Premise of the Exercise: You are a consultant to folksingers (!)

Your client sings a “basic” version of the famous ballad “John Henry.” Sometimes, this is fine. Other times, he/she wants a longer version (long set, etc.)

You're job is to map out the ways in which the other verses can be incorporated into the traditional version. Probably, but not absolutely, the core verses will remain in the traditional sequence.

In effect, you're creating hypertext; your client is a “reader” every time he/she sings the song and chooses from among your links.

Alt:

John Henry hammered on the mountain,  
With the blood runnin' down his side.  
He drove so hard he broke his poor heart,  
And he laid down his hammer and he died, Lord, Lord,  
He laid down his hammer and he died.