

Minnesota Storytime  
Reading Guide

**Title:** *Cowboy Sam and Those Confounded Secrets*

**Author:** Kitty Griffin and Kathy Combs

**Illustrator:** Mike Wohnoutka

**Publisher and  
Copyright Date:** Clarion Books, 2001

**Connection to  
Minnesota:** Minnesota illustrator

**Summary:** This is the story of Cowboy Sam, who is smart and tough and kind. He's everybody's favorite because he can keep a secret—under his enormous ten-gallon hat. In fact, he tells everyone who shares a secret, "I'll keep it under my hat." But when his hat can't hold any more secrets and it pops off his head, Sam has to come up with a new way to protect all the townspeople's secrets.

**Suggested ages:** 4-6, 7-10

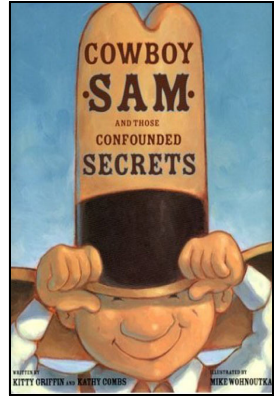
**Tips for Reading:**

- Read this story set in Texas with the flavor of a tall tale, exaggerating many of the words and making the story bigger than life. If you feel comfortable speaking with a Western twang, give it a try.
- Emphasize the many phrases that are repeated to show how smart or kind Sam is. This repetition is typical of a tall tale.
- Point out the "secrets" in the illustrations as they escape from Sam's hat.

**Questions  
before reading:**

- What do you think a secret looks like?
- Who do *you* tell your secrets to?
- Do you worry about that person telling someone else your secrets?
- Where do you keep the secrets people tell you?

**To Introduce  
this story say:** We're going to read a story about a cowboy named Sam who is everyone's friend. They all tell him their secrets because they know they can trust him. But what happens if Sam can't keep one more secret? Let's find out.



**Questions  
After Reading:**

- Is Sam someone you would like for a friend?
- Does this illustrator draw secrets the way you imagined they would look? Why do you think he drew them to look that way?
- Why do you think Tessa would trust her secret to Sam's heart, but not to his hat?
- If someone tells you a secret, how important is it to keep the secret and not tell anyone?

**RELATED ACTIVITIES**

**Art:**

- Draw what a secret looks like to you.

**Language:**

- Split the group up into pairs, and have them share a secret number or password with each other. Then as the day goes on, see how long each person can "keep" the secret.

**Music:**

- Play a CD or cassette of cowboy songs.

**Suggestions for  
English Language  
Learners:**

- Talk about "exaggeration" in language, and "tall tales." Talk about the words in English that mean "stretching the truth" and how that differs from a lie. How do people in their culture tell stories that "stretch the truth"?
- Discuss "cowboys" and western life.
- Discuss the phrase "I'll keep it under my hat" as used in the story.

**Related Books:**

- ***Swamp Angel*** by Anne Isaacs, illustrated by Paul O. Zelinsky (Dutton, 1994)
- ***Dirty Cowboy*** by Amy Timberlake, illustrated by Adam Rex (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2003)
- ***John Henry*** by Julius Lester, illustrated by Jerry Pinkney (Dial, 1994)
- ***Paul Bunyan*** by Steven Kellogg (Morrow, 1985)

