Topic: Medieval Ballads

Instructor: Mrs. Tincher

Date: 26 Sept. 2011

Age Level: 17 to 18 yrs. Old

English Level: English IV and Honors English IV

Sources


Rationale

The NCSCoS requires that we explore British literature, and medieval ballads were an important part of the evolution of British literature. Also, studying ballads gives us, as readers, insight into the lives of those living in the medieval time period much like studying music from our own culture gives us insight into the workings of our own society.

Focus & Review

- Journal: One hundred years from now a historian is given songs from today to analyze and learn how we lived as a society. What kinds of songs would they look at? What assumptions do you think the historian would make about our society? Do you think that the songs would give them a good idea of what life is like today?

Objectives

- Students will understand the history and composition of ballads and how they relate to medieval history.

NCSCoS Standards

1.02 Respond to texts so that the audience will: make connections between the learner's life and the text reflect on how cultural or historical perspectives may have influenced these responses
2.02 Analyze general principles at work in life and literature by: discovering and defining principles at work in personal experience and in literature.

5.01 Explore British literature by:

- recognizing common themes that run through works, using evidence from the texts to substantiate ideas.
- relating the cultural and historical contexts to the literature and identifying perceived ambiguities, prejudices, and complexities.
- making associations between historical and current viewpoints.
- understanding how literary movements influence writers.

5.02 Extend engagement with selected works of British literature by:

- observing how the imaginative experience of literature broadens and enriches real life.
- relating style, meaning, and genre (including fiction, non-fiction, drama, and poetry).
- applying literary, grammatical, and rhetorical terms of literature.
- demonstrating in various print and non-print media the significance of works.
- discerning the effect of interpreting literature from various critical perspectives.

Procedure

1. Brainstorming for Journal 5-10 min.
2. Power Point 15-20 min.
   a. Medieval History
   b. History of Ballads
   c. Types of Ballads
   d. Composition of Ballads
   e. Terms to Know
3. Listen to a modern ballad: “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall,” Bob Dylan 6 min. Youtube Link
4. Read medieval ballads aloud in class 20-30 min.
   a. Twa Corbies
   b. Lord Randall
   c. Robin Hood Rescuing Three Squires No. 140
   
6. Work on Journal 10 min.

Extensions (if left with time near end of class): With partner or solo, create an outline for a ballad of your choosing, including a general summary and plot details listed in chronological order. Students will share ideas with the class.
Teacher Input

- Power Point
- Venn Diagram Handout
- Ballad Outline Handout
- Important Terms Handout
- Modern Ballad Sound Clip

Guided Practice

- Brainstorming for journal topic
- Reading along with me and reading medieval ballads aloud themselves
- Compare and contrast characteristics of modern and medieval ballads

Independent Practice

- Journal
- Creating outline for a ballad with a partner or solo (extension)

Closure

On an exit slip, students will write down two things they learned and one thing they would like to know more about.

Resources

1. Flash Drive for Power Point
2. Bob Dylan Link
3. Bob Dylan Lyrics
4. Lit Book
5. Copy of Robin Hood Poem
6. Venn Diagram
7. Exit Slips
8. Ballad Outlines

Notes

Possible Journal Ideas/Brainstorming Session

What types of songs/artists would the historian be given?

Pop: Rihanna, Lady Gaga, Maroon 5, Bruno Mars

- Materialism, love, dancing, production

Rap: Lil Wayne, Eminem, Pitbull, TI, Young Jeezy
• Materialism, negativity toward women, drug use

Rock: Three Days Grace, Seether, Pink, Paramore, Nickelback

• Tends to be abstract, angry at times, drug use

Country: Miranda Lambert, Blake Shelton, Kenny Chesney

• Sappy love-driven culture, patriotism, small town values

Others…

Power Point

Medieval History

• The medieval time period ran from approximately 500 to 1500 AD
• It was divided into sections
• 1050 – 1300 AD was the time period considered the “High Middle Ages.” During this time Western Europe rose in power equal to China. They had a rich culture and many religious and intellectual reformations or changes during the time period.
• 1500 – 1300 AD was considered the “Late Middle Ages.” The magnetic compass was invented during this time, leading to more overseas expansion and trade.
• But, more importantly, the Bubonic or Black Plague sprang up and reoccurred numerous times during this time spreading over parts of Europe. This plague wiped out nearly 1/3 of Europe’s population.
• So life in the medieval ages, particular in the latter part of the period, could be very grim. We will see evidence of this in most of the ballads we will read.

History of Ballads

• Ballads were told in verse and were meant to be sung.
• Like Beowulf, they were preserved through the oral tradition. They were passed down for centuries before they were finally recorded.
• This is why we have so many different variations of the same ballad. As people recited them from memory, they would change parts of them.
• They begin to become common probably around the 12th century
• But, they became more consistent around the 15th century. As more and more people learned to read and write, they began to write the ballads down.
• In the 18th century, the ballads began to be printed, making access to them more widespread and stabilizing the variations even more.

Collections of Ballads
There are some important collections of ballads that we have today.

In 1765 Sir Thomas Percy printed his collection of ballads titled *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*. This is important because this is the first well-known written collection of ballads.

In the late 19th century, Francis James Child published a book of popular Scottish and English ballads along with their American variants.

By and large, we tend to go by the definition of the ballad that he set in this publication.

The collection contains around 305 ballads or variants.

Types of Ballads

- There are a few different types of folk ballads. A folk ballad is simply a traditional song or poem that tells a story in a number of short stanzas. It is usually sung by the common people of a region and is specific to their culture.
- Border Ballads refer to the ballads that sprang up between the border of England and Scotland. These ballads have a heavy Scots dialect, so you can often recognize them by the way the words in the poem sound.
- Broadside Ballads were popular at the end of the 17th century. They were usually about the current news of the day, and they were printed on cheap song sheets called broadsides and sold on street corners for entertainment.
- Modern ballads include jazz ballads, which emphasize the instrumental aspect of the song (Louis Armstrong, Billie Holiday, etc…), rock ballads (The Beatles, Bob Dylan), and country music ballads, since country music is often narrative in nature (When the Thunder Rolls anyone?)

Common Characteristics of Ballads

- Fairly simple language, ballads told in a way that the average common person can understand
- Stanzas usually consist of four lines, but this isn’t always the case. Remember, a stanza is a division of poetry much like the paragraph in prose. Remember, prose is plainly written language, the opposite of poetry, not told in meter and verse.
- Ballads are narrative, meaning that they tell a story
- They focus more on action and dialogue (dialogue is the speech between two or more people) rather than characterization (building or describing of a character), description, and emotion
- They usually have a set rhyme scheme in which the second and fourth line rhyme at the end of the line, which is called end-rhyme.
  - Example: This is an ABCB rhyme scheme. We name the end rhyme sounds for letters of the alphabet, going in order. So, the first line “toune” we would name A. The second line “wine” we would name B. The third line is another distinct end rhyme, “skipper” so we would name it C. But what happens when we get to the fourth line? Why do we call that B? Because it rhymes with the second line, so it isn’t different, so it would be called B as well.
• Ballads are known for their repetition. They often have repeated lines or stanzas called a refrain. If we look at music today, we have something similar called a chorus.
  o We can also have an incremental repetition or refrain, which is when the refrain is changed or modified as the story progresses for a certain effect. We find an example of this in “Lord Randall”
• Ballads also have a lot of third person narration, which is when the speaker is isolated from the story. Not directly involved but watching from afar.
• Sometimes the narration will transition to first person when speaking from a character’s point of view.

“A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall,” Bob Dylan

Background Information: Protest song written during the Vietnam War and shortly before the Cuban missile crisis.

Discussion Questions:

1. Characteristics of Ballad:
   a. Rhyme scheme – sporadic, some near rhymes “son” and “one” in the refrain but rhyming lines are scattered throughout poem and have no set pattern.
   b. Fairly simple language
   c. Focused on dialogue (conversation between the mother and son) and action (what the speaker has done and witnessed and what he plans to do)
   d. Repetition – refrain repeated at beginning of each stanza
   e. Has stanzas but not four lines – they are longer and vary in length
   f. A lot of first person narration because they characters are speaking for themselves

2. In the first stanza, what is the significance of the number of places the speaker has traveled? Do we get the impression that he has been around the world and has seen it all?

3. What images did the speaker see and hear in the second and third stanza? Newborn surrounded by wolves, weapons in the hands of young children, a diamond highway with no one on it… Thunder as a warning, person starving while people laughing, crying clowns… Are these positive images?

4. In the fourth stanza what person that he meets stands out from the rest? Girl that gives him a rainbow… What do you think he means by this? How do we usually think of children? Do you think he means that hope lies within a young child due to their innocence?

5. In the fifth stanza, what does the speaker decide to do? Who does he decide to try to help?

6. In that same stanza, what does he mean by “Then I’ll stand on the ocean until I start sinkin’”’ Does this mean that the speaker is determined to spread his message until he “sinks” or is stopped by unstoppable forces?

7. What do you think the “hard rain” symbolizes? Is this a warning song for something yet to come?

Dylan’s Quote: "No, it's not atomic rain, it's just a hard rain. It isn't the fallout rain. I mean some sort of end that's just gotta happen... In the last verse, when I say, 'the pellets
of poison are flooding the waters', that means all the lies that people get told on their radios and in their newspapers."

“Twa Corbies”

Summary: Two ravens are looking for food and spot a newly-slain knight. The only ones that know he is there are his hawk, his hound (animals that cannot talk or have motive to kill him), and his “lady fair.” The ravens talk of how no one will ever discover that he lies there. The poem seems to suggest that he was killed by his “lady fair,” since she has so quickly taken another mate.

Vocab Words:
1. Twa - two
2. Corbies – ravens
3. Alane – alone
4. Tane – one
5. Tither – other
6. Whar – where
7. Sall – shall
8. Behint – behind
9. Yon – yonder
10. Auld – old
11. Fail dyke – bank of earth
12. Naeboby – nobody
13. Kens – knows
14. Gane – gone
15. Hame – home
16. Anither – another
17. Hause-bane – neck bone
18. Mony – many
20. Evermair – evermore

Discussion Questions

1. What characteristics of the ballad are evident in the poem? Rhyme scheme, language, dialogue, repetition, stanzas, dialogue?
2. Do we think this is an accidental death? What clues are we given that this is a murder? Who is responsible for the knight’s death based on the evidence in the poem?
3. Is this a romantic portrayal of love?

“Lord Randall”

Summary: The dialogue in the poem is between Lord Randall and his mother. The mother asks where he has been, and he answers that he has been in the woods hunting. He isn’t feeling well
and wants his mother to make his bed so that he can lie down. We learn that he was fed dinner by his “true love,” and soon after his hounds swelled and died. His mother declares that she fears he is poisoned in the last stanza, and the refrain changes to “I’m sick at the heard, and I fain wald lie down.”

Vocab Words:
1. Fain – gladly
2. Wald – would

Discussion Questions
1. What clues are we given that the poem might not end so well?
2. How is this poem similar to “Twa Corbies?”
3. How is it similar to Bob Dylan’s song?

“The Ballad of Barbara Allen”

Summary: This is a tragic love story. Sir John Graeme falls in love with Barbara Allen and dies of lovesickness for her. She reminds him that he slighted her while giving toasts, and he finally dies of sadness.

Vocab Words:
1. Gin ye be – if you are
2. Hooly – slowly
3. Dinna ye mind – Don’t you remember
4. Healths – toasts

Discussion Questions:
1. In line 5 “his man” refers to who or what?
2. Do you think Sir John knew that he had hurt Barbara Allen’s feelings even before she reminded him of the slight? Do you think this is the reason for his heartsickness?
3. What is the significance of Barbara Allen’s request that her mother make her bed “soft and narrow”? What else is soft and narrow?
4. Do you think Barbara Allen is justified in letting Sir John Graeme die without resolving their differences?
5. Does Barbara Allen regret this choice? How do you know?
6. What is the main idea we get from most of these poems? How are they similar?

“Robin Hood Rescuing Three Squires, No. 140”

Summary: Robin Hood learns about three squires that are being hanged for killing one of the king’s deer in the woods. He pays an old beggar to trade clothes with him and goes to the hanging in disguise. He meets the Sheriff walking along the town and asks what he will give
him to be his hangman for the day. The Sheriff offers him clothing and money, and Robin Hood attacks him. He calls his men with his horn, and they release the three victims and hang the Sheriff instead.

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you think the hanging of the three squires is justified? Does their crime equal the punishment of death?
2. What is the significance of Robin Hood’s disguise? Why is it important that he dresses up like a beggar? Is there a hidden meaning?