

## Ballads: Stories and Poems in Songs



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A ballad tells a story and is often set to music, though it also has a literary tradition. This class examines British and American ballad traditions. In America, some ballads continued to be sung in older versions than in Britain itself. Later, the ballad went West to become a favored mode of expression of the Cowboy, while in Australia, a rich tradition of "bush ballads" developed. We'll start with medieval ballads and end with the folk revival of the 1960s while considering the distinctions between ballads as printed or sung poetry. Students will be introduced to an important literary and musical genre which has impacted the lives of most Americans, from the medieval Scots poem "Sir Patrick Spens" to "Tom Dooley" and modern balladeers and bluesmen like Leadbelly, Woody Guthrie, Bob Dylan, Steve Earle, Bruce Springsteen, Joan Baez, Mary Chapin Carpenter and others. Students will learn to distinguish types of ballads and examine the relationship between music and lyrics in conveying emotional meaning and dramatic purpose.

**Week 1: History and development of ballad tradition in English song and literary tradition, including collectors and chroniclers of the tradition.**



**Week 2 & 3:**

**British and Irish tradition with representative ballads and ballad genres.**

*Ballad tropes & representative types of ballads: murder ballads, love ballads & broken token songs, supernatural ballads, roving ballads, sea shanties.*

**Week 4: Literary ballad tradition: A sampling of literary ballads.**

**Week 5: American ballad tradition: Appalachia to the Wild West.**

**Week 6: Balladeers in Black and White: Ballads and Blues**

*Woody Guthrie, Josh White, Leadbelly, Big Bill Broonzy, Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Steve Earle, Mary Chapin Carpenter.*

*Bob Dylan as Nobel Prize winner in Literature.*

John Henry



*We will be listening to ballads and variations in class. The instructor will also provide a list of recordings of ballads and singers to recommend that students may access through YouTube and other online or commercial sources.*

**Suggested Text: Folk Song in England by Steve Roud (2017)**