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Ballads

A ballad is a type of poem that tells a story, and it is often set to music. They were also popular through medieval times up till the 1800s, although there are certainly many modern ballads today.

Ballads tend to focus on the details of the story, rather than on the emotions of the speaker (like in modern ballads/songs). They also have a refrain, a section that is repeated throughout the poem/song. Many also have incremental repetition, where the same phrase appears over and over with minor differences as the story goes along.

Like sonnets, ballads have a very careful rhyme scheme. Like sonnets, many ballads were written in variations of iambic but ballads vary much more from poet to poet - some had up to 14 beats in a line, others had only 10, some alternate between 14 and 10 throughout the ballad.

The next assignment uses a modern Canadian ballad, “The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald” by Gordon Lightfoot. The song is about a ship wreck that happened on Lake Superior on November 10, 1975.
Complete the following assignment on looseleaf paper and in full sentences, where appropriate. If you need to look back in the unit at some of the literary term definitions, feel free to do so. The song follows on the next 2 pages.

1. Identify a simile from the song.

2. Identify an example of personification from the song.

3. Identify a metaphor from the song.

4. A ballad tells a story. In your own words, what is the story that is told in the song? Your answer should be a short paragraph when you are finished. (5)

5. In this case, the refrain is at the beginning and end of the song. What is the refrain?

6. In this song, the incremental repetition revolves around the word November. Can you identify the incremental repetition phrases, IN ORDER? Note the stanza number for each phrase (it’s in brackets beside each stanza for your reference).

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A section or “paragraph” within a poem.

7. Identify the rhyme scheme for the first stanza.

8. You may notice that the rhyme scheme doesn’t seem to follow a very strict pattern, and yet it does rhyme. Look at the first, third, fifth and seventh lines of the same stanza. What do you notice?
The legend lives on from the Chippewa on down
Of the big lake they called 'Gitche Gumee'
The lake, it is said, never gives up her dead
When the skies of November turn gloomy
With a load of iron ore twenty-six thousand tons more!
Than the Edmund Fitzgerald weighed empty,
That good ship and crew was a bone to be chewed
When the gales of November came early.

The ship was the pride of the American side
Coming back from some mill in Wisconsin
As the big freighters go, it was bigger than most
With a crew and good captain well seasoned
Concluding some terms with a couple of steel firms!
When they left fully loaded for Cleveland
And later that night when the ship's bell rang
Could it be the north wind they'd been feelin'?

The wind in the wires made a tattle-tale sound
And a wave broke over the railing
And every man knew, as the captain did too,
'Twas the witch of November come stealin'.
The dawn came late and the breakfast had to wait!
When the Gales of November came slashin'.
When afternoon came it was freezin' rain
In the face of a hurricane west wind.

When suppertime came, the old cook came on deck sayin'.
Fellas, it's too rough to feed ya.
At seven p.m., a main hatchway caved in, he said
Fellas, it's been good t'know ya
The captain wired in he had water comin' in!
And the good ship and crew was in peril.
And later that night when his lights went outta sight
Came the wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald.

Does any one know where the love of God goes
When the waves turn the minutes to hours?
The searchers all say they'd have made Whitefish Bay
If they'd put fifteen more miles behind her.
They might have split up or they might have capsized;
May have broke deep and took water.
And all that remains is the faces and the names
Of the wives and the sons and the daughters.
Lake Huron rolls, Superior sings
In the rooms of her ice-water mansion.
Old Michigan steams like a young man's dreams;
The islands and bays are for sportsmen.
And farther below Lake Ontario
And the iron boats go as the mariners all know
With the Gales of November remembered.

In a musty old hall in Detroit they prayed,
In the Maritime Sailors' Cathedral.
The church bell chimed till it rang twenty-nine times
For each man on the Edmund Fitzgerald.
The legend lives on from the Chippewa on down!
Of the big lake they call 'Gitche Gumee'.
Superior, they said, never gives up her dead
When the gales of November come early!