



**READING 3** Evaluate the changes in sound, form, and dramatic structure in poetry across literary time periods.

# Barbara Allan Robin Hood and the Three Squires Get Up and Bar the Door Anonymous Ballads

### DID YOU KNOW?

- In early English ballads, Robin Hood was not a champion of the poor but a hardened criminal.
- A sermon dating from 1405 reprimands those who would rather listen to a Robin Hood ballad than attend church services.

### Introduction

## Ballads

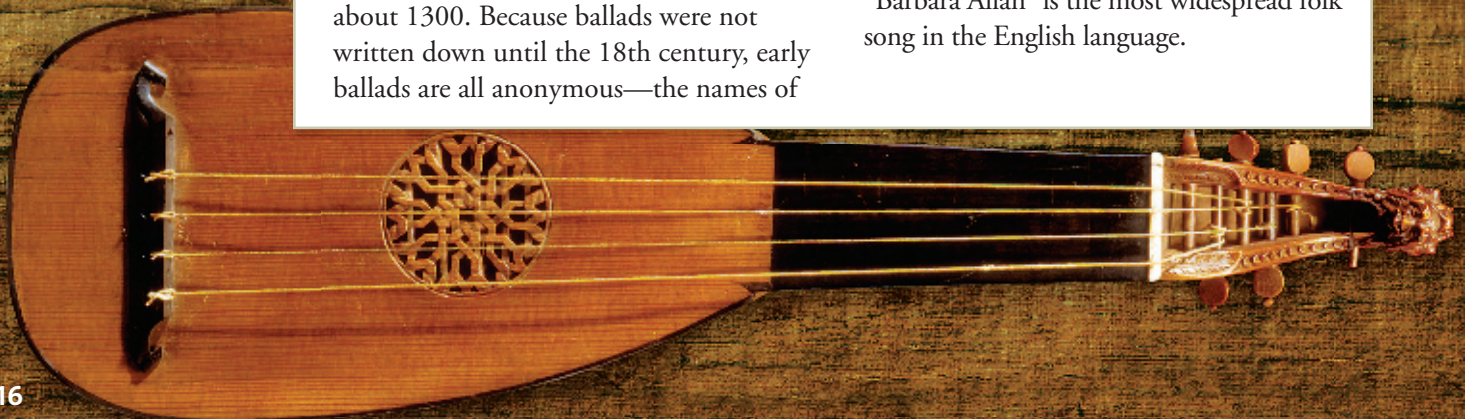
Throughout history, life's tragedies and comedies—real and fictional—have been depicted in song. Narrative songs called **ballads** were popular in England and Scotland during the medieval period, particularly among the common people, many of whom could not read or write. The best of the early ballads were transferred orally from one generation to the next. Stories often changed in the retelling, sometimes resulting in dozens of versions of the same ballad.

**Popular Entertainment** In the Middle Ages, just as today, audiences craved dramatic—even sensational—stories. Typical subjects of ballads included tragic love, domestic conflicts, disastrous wars and shipwrecks, sensational crimes, and the exploits of enterprising outlaws. Later ballads celebrated historical events and romantic heroes of an earlier chivalrous age. Revenge, rebellion, envy, betrayal, and superstition all found thematic expression in the ballad.

**Unknown Authorship** The ballad genre is thought to be nearly 1,000 years old, with the earliest known ballad dating from about 1300. Because ballads were not written down until the 18th century, early ballads are all anonymous—the names of

their composers lost forever in the mists of time.

**The Legacy of “Barbara Allan”** When waves of English, Irish, and Scottish immigrants settled in the New World during the 18th and 19th centuries, they brought many traditions, including their beloved ballads. Over time, some examples have proven consistently popular, becoming part of the American folk heritage. Among these enduring ballads is “Barbara Allan.” In the 19th century, a young Abraham Lincoln reportedly knew and sang this tale of unrequited love. Much later, during the 1920s and 1930s, famed country singer Bradley Kincaid featured it on his radio broadcasts from Chicago and Boston. In the 1960s, there was a great resurgence of interest in folk music, particularly in ballads. Singers and political activists Bob Dylan and Joan Baez both recorded the legendary song to wide acclaim. Over the years, countless variations of “Barbara Allan” have been discovered in the United States, with roughly 100 variations observed in Virginia alone. Indeed, scholars believe that “Barbara Allan” is the most widespread folk song in the English language.



## ● POETIC FORM: BALLAD

Early English and Scottish **ballads** are dramatic stories told in song, using the language of common people. These ballads were composed orally and passed on to subsequent generations through numerous retellings. The three ballads in this lesson are written versions of folk songs that date back centuries.

Like works of fiction, ballads have characters and settings. Most examples also include certain conventions, such as

- tragic or sensational subject matter
- a simple plot involving a single incident
- dialogue

Additionally, ballads usually feature four-line stanzas, or **quatrains**, with rhyming second and fourth lines. The lines are heavily accented, and the stanzas contain repetition of words, phrases, and ideas. In the following example from “Barbara Allan,” observe how the patterns of rhyme and repetition help make the lines musically appealing and easy to remember:

*Ō slówlŷ, slówlŷ ráse šhe úp,  
Tō the pláce whēre hé wās lŷin’;  
And whén šhe drēw the cúrtain bý,  
“Yóung mán, I thínk yóu’re dŷin’.”*

## ● READING STRATEGY: UNDERSTAND DIALECT

**Dialect** is a distinct language spoken by a specific group of people from a particular region. In the ballads you are about to read, certain words from Scottish dialect appear—*twa*, for example, meaning *two*. To help you understand other examples of dialect in the poems, follow these steps:

- Read each ballad through once, using the notes to help you identify the meaning of each word in dialect, then reread the line in which it appears.
- Paraphrase the events in the section of the poem you are reading to make sure you understand what is happening at that point in the story. Understanding these events can provide a context to help you decipher dialect used in that section of the poem.



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

## Why tell stories in SONG?

From time to time, you’ve probably been infected by an “earworm”—a song that gets stuck in your head and plays over and over and over until you want to scream. Although a nuisance, earworms illustrate what a potent combination rhyme, melody, and lyrics can be—something that no doubt helped ensure the survival of ballads over the centuries.

**QUICKWRITE** Think of a popular song, radio commercial jingle, or song you remember from your childhood for which you know all or most of the words. Write it down and analyze the elements that make the song so memorable.



# BARBARA ALLAN

It was in and about the Martinmas time,  
When the green leaves were a-fallin';  
That Sir John Graeme in the West Country  
Fell in love with Barbara Allan.

**1 Martinmas:** November 11 (St. Martin's Day).

5 He sent his man down through the town  
To the place where she was dwellin':  
"O haste and come to my master dear,  
Gin ye be Barbara Allan."

**8 Gin** (gĭn): if.

O slowly, slowly rase she up,  
10 To the place where he was lyin',  
And when she drew the curtain by:  
"Young man, I think you're dyin'."

**9 rase** (rāz): rose.

"O it's I'm sick, and very, very sick,  
And 'tis a' for Barbara Allan."  
15 "O the better for me ye sal never be,  
Though your heart's blood were a-spillin'."

**15 sal:** shall.

"O dinna ye mind, young man," said she,  
"When ye the cups were fillin',  
That ye made the healths gae round and round,  
20 And slighted Barbara Allan?"

**17 dinna ye mind:** don't you remember.

**19–20 made . . . Allan:** made toasts (drinking to people's health) but failed to toast Barbara Allan.





### ◀ Analyze Visuals

Notice the lighting and colors in this photograph. What mood do they help convey? Explain.

He turned his face unto the wall,  
And death with him was dealin':  
"Adieu, adieu, my dear friends all,  
And be kind to Barbara Allan."

23 **Adieu**: goodbye.

25 And slowly, slowly, rase she up,  
And slowly, slowly left him;  
And sighing said she could not stay,  
Since death of life had reft him.

28 **reft**: deprived.

She had not gane a mile but twa,  
30 When she heard the dead-bell knellin',  
And every jow that the dead-bell ga'ed  
It cried, "Woe to Barbara Allan!" **A**

29 **gane** (gān): gone; **twa**: two.

30 **dead-bell**: a church bell rung to announce a person's death.

31 **jow** (jou): stroke; **ga'ed**: gave.

"O mother, mother, make my bed,  
O make it soft and narrow:  
35 Since my love died for me today,  
I'll die for him tomorrow."

### **A** UNDERSTAND DIALECT

Reread lines 25–32. Which words capture the Scottish **dialect**, or regional language? Explain the strategies you used to understand these words.

# ROBIN HOOD AND THE THREE SQUIRES

There are twelve months in all the year,  
As I hear many men say,  
But the merriest month in all the year  
Is the merry month of May.

5 Now Robin Hood is to Nottingham gone,  
*With a link-a-down and a-day,*  
And there he met a silly old woman,  
Was weeping on the way.

7 **silly:** poor; innocent.

“What news? what news, thou silly old woman?  
10 What news hast thou for me?”  
Said she, “There’s three squires in Nottingham town,  
Today is condemned to dee.”

11 **squires:** well-born young men  
who served as knights’ attendants.

12 **dee:** die.

“O have they parishes burnt?” he said,  
“Or have they ministers slain?  
15 Or have they robbed any virgin,  
Or with other men’s wives have lain?”

“They have no parishes burnt, good sir,”  
Nor yet have ministers slain,  
Nor have they robbed any virgin,  
20 Nor with other men’s wives have lain.”

“O what have they done?” said bold Robin Hood,  
“I pray thee tell to me.”  
“It’s for slaying of the king’s fallow deer,  
Bearing their longbows with thee.” **B**

23 **fallow:** yellowish red.

**B UNDERSTAND DIALECT**  
**Paraphrase** lines 21–24. Why  
have the three squires been  
condemned to die?



25 “Dost thou not mind, old woman,” he said,  
“Since thou made me sup and dine?  
By the truth of my body,” quoth bold Robin Hood,  
“You could not tell it in better time.”

Now Robin Hood is to Nottingham gone,  
30 *With a link-a-down and a-day,*  
And there he met with a silly old palmer,  
Was walking along the highway.

“What news? what news, thou silly old man?  
What news, I do thee pray?”  
35 Said he, “Three squires in Nottingham town  
Are condemned to die this day.”

“Come change thine apparel with me, old man,  
Come change thine apparel for mine.  
Here is forty shillings in good silver,  
40 Go drink it in beer or wine.”

“O thine apparel is good,” he said,  
“And mine is ragged and torn.  
Wherever you go, wherever you ride,  
Laugh ne’er an old man to scorn.”

**31 palmer:** someone who carried a palm leaf to signify that he or she had made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

**39 shillings:** former English silver coins, each worth 1/20 of a pound.

45 “Come change thine apparel with me, old churl,  
Come change thine apparel with mine:  
Here are twenty pieces of good broad gold,  
Go feast thy brethren with wine.” **C**

Then he put on the old man’s hat,  
50 It stood full high on the crown:  
“The first bold bargain that I come at,  
It shall make thee come down.”

Then he put on the old man’s cloak,  
Was patched black, blue, and red:  
55 He thought it no shame all the day long  
To wear the bags of bread.

Then he put on the old man’s breeks,  
Was patched from ballup to side:  
“By the truth of my body,” bold Robin can say,  
60 “This man loved little pride.”

Then he put on the old man’s hose,  
Were patched from knee to wrist:  
“By the truth of my body,” said bold Robin Hood,  
“I’d laugh if I had any list.”

65 Then he put on the old man’s shoes,  
Were patched both beneath and aboon:  
Then Robin Hood swore a solemn oath,  
“It’s good habit that makes a man.”

Now Robin Hood is to Nottingham gone,  
70 *With a link-a-down and a-down,*  
And there he met with the proud sheriff,  
Was walking along the town.

“O Christ you save, O sheriff,” he said,  
“O Christ you save and see:  
75 And what will you give to a silly old man  
Today will your hangman be?”

“Some suits, some suits,” the sheriff he said,  
“Some suits I’ll give to thee;  
Some suits, some suits, and pence thirteen,  
80 Today’s a hangman’s fee.”

**C BALLAD**

Identify patterns of **repetition** and **rhyme** in lines 33–48. In what ways do these sound devices help you understand Robin’s exchange with the old man?

**57–58 breeks . . . side:** trousers reaching to just below the knees, patched from the center to the side.

**61 hose:** tight-fitting outer garment.

**64 list:** wish to do so.

**66 aboon:** above.

**68 habit:** clothing.

**73 O Christ you save:** A respectful greeting meaning “God save you” or “God be with you.”

**79 pence thirteen:** thirteen pennies.

Then Robin he turns him round about,  
And jumps from stock to stone:  
“By the truth of my body,” the sheriff he said,  
“That’s well jumped, thou nimble old man.”

82 **stock:** a tree stump.

85 “I was ne’er a hangman in all my life,  
Nor yet intends to trade.  
But cursed be he,” said bold Robin,  
“That first a hangman was made.

“I’ve a bag for meal, and a bag for malt,  
90 And a bag for barley and corn,  
A bag for bread, and a bag for beef,  
And a bag for my little small horn.

“I have a horn in my pocket:  
I got it from Robin Hood;  
95 And still when I set it to my mouth,  
For thee it blows little good.”

“O wind thy horn, thou proud fellow:  
Of thee I have no doubt;  
I wish that thou give such a blast  
100 Till both thy eyes fall out.”

97 **wind:** blow.

98 **doubt:** fear.

The first loud blast that he did blow,  
He blew both loud and shrill,  
A hundred and fifty of Robin Hood’s men  
Came riding over the hill.

105 The next loud blast that he did give,  
He blew both loud and amain,  
And quickly sixty of Robin Hood’s men  
Came shining over the plain.

106 **amain:** with full force.

108 **shining:** riding courageously.

“O who are those,” the sheriff he said,  
110 “Come tripping over the lea?”  
“They’re my attendants,” brave Robin did say,  
“They’ll pay a visit to thee.”

110 **tripping over the lea** (lē): running over the meadow.

113 **slack:** a very small valley or hollow.

They took the gallows from the slack,  
They set it in the glen;  
115 They hanged the proud sheriff on that,  
Released their own three men. **D**

### **D BALLAD**

Describe the **subject matter** of this ballad. Which aspects of the ballad would most likely appeal to an audience of common people? Explain your opinion.



# GET UP AND BAR THE DOOR

It fell about the Martinmas time,  
And a gay time it was then,  
When our goodwife got puddings to make,  
And she's boild them in the pan.

5 The wind sae cauld blew south and north,  
And blew into the floor;  
Quoth our goodman to our goodwife,  
“Gae out and bar the door.”

“My hand is in my hussyfskap,  
10 Goodman, as ye may see;  
An it should nae be barrd this hundred year,  
It's no be barrd for me.”

They made a paction tween them twa,  
They made it firm and sure,  
15 That the first word whae'er should speak,  
Should rise and bar the door. **E**

Then by there came two gentlemen,  
At twelve o'clock at night,  
And they could neither see house nor hall,  
20 Nor coal nor candle-light.

“Now whether is this a rich man's house,  
Or whether is it a poor?”

**1 fell . . . time:** happened around St. Martin's Day, November 11.

**3 goodwife . . . make:** mistress of the household had sausages to make.

**5 sae cauld:** so cold.

**7 Quoth** (kwōth) . . . **goodwife:** This husband said to his wife.

**8 Gae . . . door:** Go out and use the bar to fasten the door shut.

**9 hussyfskap:** household chores.

**11–12 An . . . me:** If it should not be barred for a hundred years, it shall still not be barred by me.

**13 paction . . . twa:** agreement between the two of them.

**15 whae'er shoud:** whoever should.

**E UNDERSTAND DIALECT**  
Reread and **paraphrase** lines 1–16. What do the husband and wife agree to do? Why?



But ne'er a word wad ane o' them speak,  
 For barring of the door.  
 25 And first they ate the white puddings,  
 And then they ate the black;  
 Tho muckle thought the goodwife to hersel,  
 Yet ne'er a word she spake.

27 **muckle**: a great deal.

28 **spake**: spoke.

Then said the one unto the other,  
 30 "Here, man, tak ye my knife;  
 Do ye tak aff the auld man's beard,  
 And I'll kiss the goodwife."

31 **tak . . . beard**: take off the old man's beard.

"But there's nae water in the house,  
 And what shall we do than?"  
 35 "What ails ye at the pudding-broo,  
 That boils into the pan?"

35–36 **What . . . pan?**: What's wrong with using the broth the puddings are boiling in?

O up then started our goodman,  
 An angry man was he:  
 "Will ye kiss my wife before my een,  
 40 And scad me wi' pudding-bree?"

40 **scad**: scald; **bree**: broth.

Then up and started our goodwife,  
 Gied three skips on the floor:  
 "Goodman, you've spoken the foremost word,  
 Get up and bar the door." **F**

# **F BALLAD**

What might account for the enduring popularity of "Get Up and Bar the Door"? Consider the ballad's subject matter, dialogue, and musical qualities in your response.

## Comprehension

1. **Recall** Why does Barbara Allan want to die?
2. **Summarize** What specific steps does Robin Hood take to rescue the three squires from execution?
3. **Clarify** In “Get Up and Bar the Door,” what do the couple argue about?



**READING 3** Evaluate the changes in sound, form, and dramatic structure in poetry across literary time periods.

## Literary Analysis

4. **Draw Conclusions About Characters** What does each of the following events suggest about the relationship between Barbara Allan and Sir John Graeme?
  - his request to see her (lines 1–8)
  - the reason for his illness (lines 13–14)
  - her statement “I’ll die for him tomorrow” (line 36)
6. **Understand Dialect** Dialect often provides clues about a poem’s setting, or location and era. How does dialect help establish the setting of “Get Up and Bar the Door”? Cite evidence to support your ideas.
7. **Analyze Ballad Form** Provide an example from one ballad of repetition and regular rhyme and meter. How do these elements help make its story memorable and entertaining?

## Literary Criticism

8. **Historical Context** What general impressions of medieval society do you get from reading the ballads? Support your response with details.

### *Why tell stories in* **SONG?**

What are some modern examples of stories told in song? Why do you think telling stories through song remains popular today?

## Medieval Life and Times

Centuries after they were written, the colorful, dramatic tales of Chaucer and the lilting medieval ballads continue to entertain modern readers. These lively stories also provide insight into the culture of the Middle Ages. Medieval Europeans lived in a world vastly different from the secular, scientifically ordered world we know today. Consider Chaucer's description of a doctor.

*"A Doctor too emerged as we proceeded;  
No one alive could talk as well as he did  
On points of medicine and of surgery,  
For, being grounded in astronomy,  
He watched his patient closely for the hours  
When, by his horoscope, he knew the powers  
of favorable planets, then ascendent,  
Work on the images for his dependant."*

Can you imagine a trip to the hospital in which your doctor analyzed your horoscope? It was not only in matters of science but also in courtship, communities, religion, and daily life that the Middle Ages differed so wildly from our own contemporary age.

### Writing to Analyze

Of the selections found on pages 144–225, choose three and analyze what they reveal about medieval life—not just how people looked and acted but what they believed and valued.

#### Consider

- the conflicts faced by the characters, as well as their goals and motivations
- the physical descriptions of the characters, their professions, their behavior, and any direct commentary on their values
- details about the communities in which they lived
- the tone displayed in the selections, and in particular the sense of humor

*View of London*, Jan Griffier, the Elder. Galleria Sabauda, Turin, Italy.  
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### Extension

**VIEWING & REPRESENTING** On the basis of Chaucer's descriptive details and your own impressions, select one pilgrim and visually represent that character in a drawing or computer-generated design. Be prepared to explain why you have represented the pilgrim as you have.



**WRITING 15A** Write an analytical essay.

