

Definition of a Ballad

(Big Hint: tell a story) (example: tell the story of the water main break yesterday)

1. A poem/song narrating a story that focuses on a specific story. Often ballads are about love---either lost, found, or unrequited, or an event, interaction that tells about the human condition.
 - a. They can be funny, romantic, tragic, or satirical.
 - b. Common themes: love, work, death, scandal, violence, disasters, current events in the news
 - c. Usually categorized by the people who sing those— miners, cowboys, sailors, Native Americans, etc.

** (We will be focusing on the North American ballad versus the Traditional British)
2. Ballads include a setting, characters, plot, spots of dialogue and descriptive imagery, and are told in a linear storyline (sequential) relying on unsettling situations to build suspense.
3. Traditional ballads have stanzas of 4-6 lines.
4. They have one of 3 different types of rhyme: **abac, aabb, abcb**
5. Ballads incorporate repetition! (words phrases, “chorus”)

Notes:

1. Pick your theme: (example: telling a story about a lost love is meant to make us feel grateful of the lives we lead and the love we experience.)
2. Pick an event to describe: a significant historical event or something small and personal.
3. Single out the most important elements of the plot. Narrative style
4. Find a starter phrase: opening line can be the hardest to write but it is also the most important because it “hooks” the audience. Ballads often start with stock phrases such as Come all ye...salutations. (Ex: Come all ye comrades, come all ye maidens, etc.) OR You can focus on the introducing the reader to the story. “Oh my darling, how can it be?”, “It happened in the dead of night...”, “The shotgun hung in Grandpa’s lodge.l..”, “What a difference one day can make...” (pick one if you are desperate for a starter. 😊)
5. Establish a rhythm and rhyme scheme: four-line verses, of which two or more rhyme. Get started with the first verse (stanza) and complete it the way you like it, then use it as the basis for the rest of the lines (keeping length, rhythm, and end rhyme of each consistent) [Refer to #4 for the patterns in the definition above.]
6. Chorus: this flexible. It can be one line that is repeated in every verse, two lines that are repeated every few verses, and entire verse. You can repeat the chorus verbatim or change it slightly each time for dramatic effect.
7. Complete the ballad using your structural template. Once you have the verse style down, you just need to complete your story following the same structural guidelines.
** If you need to vary the length of a line or verse here and there, go ahead and do it. If you want to deviate from your rhyme pattern feel free to do so if it will make your ballad better.
8. Make sure your ballad has some type of dénouement/ resolution.
9. Be sure to double space between stanzas
10. Reminders: check for punctuation, grammar, line breaks. Also—dialogue can reflect dialect for impact. “Well, ain’t that a purty sight to behold”, she murmured as she...
11. HAVE FUN WITH IT!

Ballad Example

CASEY JONES *by: Wallace Saunders? (excerpt starter)*

COME all you rounders, for I want you to hear,
The story of a brave engineer.
Casey Jones was the rounder's name.
On a big eight wheeler of a mighty fame.

Caller called Casey 'bout half-past four,
He kissed his wife at the station door,
Climbed to the cab with the orders in his hand,
He says, "This is my trip to the holy land."

Out of South Memphis yard on the fly,
Heard the fireman say, "You got a white eye."
Well, the switchmen knew by the engine moan
That the man at the throttle was Casey Jones.

The rain was comin' down five or six weeks.
The railroad track was like the bed of a creek.
They slowed her down to a thirty mile gait
And the south-bound mail was eight hours late.

Fireman says, "Casey, you're runnin' too fast,
You run that block board the last station you passed."
Casey says, "I believe we'll make it though,
For she steams a lot better than I ever know."

Casey says, "Fireman, don't you fret,
Keep knockin' at the fire door, don't give up yet,
I'm going to run her till she leaves the rail,
Or make it on time with the south-bound mail."

Around the curve and down the dump,
Two locomotives was a bound to jump,
Fireman hollered, "Casey, it's just ahead,
We might jump and make it but we'll all be dead."

Around the curve comes a passenger train,
Casey blows the whistle, tells the fireman, "Ring the bell,"
Fireman jumps and says "Good-bye,
Casey Jones, You're bound to die."

Well Casey Jones was all right.
He stuck to his duty day and night.
They loved his whistle and his ring number three,
And he come into Memphis on the old I.C.

Fireman goes down the depot track,
Begging his honey to take him back,
She says, "Oranges on the table, peaches on the shelf,
You're a goin' to get tired sleepin' by yourself."

Mrs. Casey Jones was a sittin' on the bed.
Telegram comes that Casey is dead.
She says, "Children, go to bed, and hush your cryin',
'Cause you got another papa on the Frisco line."

Headaches and heartaches and all kinds of pain.
They ain't apart from a railroad train.
Stories of brave men, noble and grand,
Belong to the life of a railroad man.

Read more at http://www.poetry-archive.com/s/casey_jones.html#fMEEExw07uKVvczQj.99