# Ballads Lesson Plan

## General Information

Walter Scott began his literary career by collecting ballads and writing imitation ones. This lesson works alongside the *Scott’s Sangs: Revisiting the Ballads of The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border,* specifically the ballad ‘The Wife of Usher’s Well.’ It is hoped that this lesson will allow pupils to use their knowledge of music and rhythm, including contemporary music, to connect with and understand the ballad. This lesson can be used alone, or you could follow it with other lessons and activities based on Walter Scott.

You will need a copy of ‘The Wife of Usher’s Well’ in this class. Before the lesson, ask pupils to bring in the lyrics of a song they like.

## Lesson Plan

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| **Activity** | **Suggested time** | **Description** |
| Before class | - | Ask pupils to bring in the lyrics of a song that they like (with school-friendly lyrics).Alternatively, you can bring in some suitable lyrics. |
| Starter | 10 mins | In pairs, pupils discuss the lyrics of their songs:* What is it about?
* How did you feel when you first heard this song?
* Do you relate to the feelings/actions in the song?
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| Listen  | 5 mins | Play the ballad to the whole class. |
| Discussion | 5 mins | Either in small groups or as a class, ask the pupils for their first reaction to the ballad:* Have you heard this ballad before?
* What is a ballad?
* What do you think this ballad is about?
* What makes you think that? (Encourage the pupils to talk about the lyrics – if they heard them – or the tone of the music.)

The idea of these questions is to engage the pupils with the song so feel free to choose other questions/direction. It does not matter if the pupils heard the lyrics or not. |
| Stanza 1 | 10 mins | Pupils look at stanza 1 of the ballad (see PowerPoint).Explain that ‘wife’ is an old word for woman.Ask the pupils to respond to the discussion questions:* What do you think the wife is like?
* Why do you think she sent her sons overseas?
* When do you think this song is set?
* What do you think will happen next?

If they were able to hear the lyrics/already know the song, delete the final question. |
| Writing  | 10 minutes | As instructed on the PowerPoint, pupils should write a short postcard from the wife’s point of view, explaining why she sent her sons away. |
| *Possible lesson break here.* |
| Reading | 10 minutes | Pupils read the whole ballad. They can use the word bank to look up any unfamiliar words.Ask the pupils to summarise the ballad to make sure they have understood it correctly: the wife’s three sons died so she cursed the world until they came back. They return home at Martinmas wearing hats that could only have been made from a tree in the afterlife. They stay a while, but they have to leave in the early morning.Ask the pupils whether they think the sons are ghosts, zombies, or something else. Ask them if they know any other stories about the undead.  |
| Re-tell | 20 mins | Alone or in pairs, pupils should rewrite the story set today. Encourage the pupils to create a tune or rhythm to go with their re-tellings. |
| *Possible lesson break here. If you would like a break here, you can have the pupils share their re-writings in the lesson above.* |
| Pair work | 20 | In pairs, pupils read the other version of the ballad and compare it to Scott’s version. Pupils should find five differences between the two versions. |
| Group work | 10 | In groups, pupils should brainstorm:* Why might stories/songs change over time?
* Do you know any stories which have different versions?

Pupils may be familiar with playground stories or internet stories (creepypastas). Prompt them if they are stuck. |
| Share with class | 10 | Ask the pupils to share their answers with the whole class.Explain to them that stories and songs from the folk tradition were passed on from person to person over the centuries. Because of this, there are many different versions. Some people collect traditional stories. Walter Scott was one of these people, but there are people still doing this today! |

You may wish to follow this lesson with one of our resources on Scott’s poetry. Ballads remained a huge influence on Scott, especially as he wrote his poetry.

## Curriculum for Excellence

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| Lit 3-01a | […] I can regularly select subject, purpose, format and resources to create texts of my choice, and am developing my own style. |
| Lit 3-02a | When I engage with others, I can make a relevant contribution, encourage others to contribute and acknowledge that they have the right to hold a different opinion. I can respond in ways appropriate to my role and use contributions to reflect on, clarify or adapt thinking. |
| Lit 3-09a | When listening and talking with others for different purposes, I can:* Communicate information, ideas or opinions
* Explain processes, concepts or ideas
* Identify issues raised, summarise findings or draw conclusions
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| Eng 3-12a (also Eng 2-12a, Eng 4-12a) | Through developing my knowledge of context clues, punctuation, grammar and layout, I can read unfamiliar texts with increasing fluency, understanding and expression. |
| Lit 3-13a | I can select and use the strategies and resources I find most useful before I read, and as a I read, to monitor and check my understanding. |
| Eng 3-17a | To show my understanding, I can comment, with evidence, on the content and form of short and extended texts, and respond to literal, inferential and evaluative questions and other types of close reading tasks. |
| Eng 3-27a (also Eng 4-27a) | I can engage and/or influence readers through my use of language, style and tone as appropriate to genre. |
| Eng 3-31a | Having explored the elements which writers use, I can create texts in different genres by:* Integrating the conventions of my chosen genre successfully and/or
* Using convincing and appropriate structures and/or
* Creating interesting and convincing characters and/or
* Building convincing settings that come to life
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| Social studies general outcome | Develop their understanding of history, heritage and culture of Scotland, and an appreciation of their local and national heritage in the world |
| Social studies general outcome | Learn how to locate, explore and link periods, people and events in time and place |

## Further Reading

*The Guardian* newspaper has chosen ‘The Wife of Usher’s Well’ as one of their poems of the week. The article can be found by following this link: [Poem of the week: The Wife of Usher’s Well | Poetry | The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/oct/04/poem-of-the-week-the-wife-of-ushers-well#comments)

Variants of ‘The Wife of Usher’s Well’ can be found here: [mudcat.org lyrics: LADY GAY](https://mudcat.org/%40displaysong.cfm?SongID=3463), [The Wife of Usher’s Well (Roud 196; Child 79) (mainlynorfolk.info)](https://www.mainlynorfolk.info/steeleye.span/songs/thewifeofusherswell.html)