

The Wreck of the Hesperus

'T WAS the schooner Hesperus,
That sailed the wintry sea;
And the skipper had taken his little daughter,
To bear him company.

Blue were her eyes as the fairy-flax,
Her cheeks like the dawn of day,
And her bosom white as the hawthorn buds
That ope in the month of May.

The skipper he stood beside the helm,
His pipe was in his mouth,
And he watched how the veering flaw did blow
The smoke now West, now South.

Then up and spake an old Sailor,
Had sailed the Spanish Main,
"I pray thee, put into yonder port,
For I fear a hurricane.

"Last night the moon had a golden ring,
And to-night no moon we see!"
The skipper he blew a whiff from his pipe,
And a scornful laugh laughed he.

Colder and colder blew the wind,
A gale from the North-east;
The snow fell hissing on the brine,
And the billows frothed like yeast.

Down came the storm, and smote amain
The vessel in its strength;
She shuddered and paused, like a frightened steed,
Then leaped her cable's length.

“Come hither! come hither! my little daughter,
And do not tremble so;
For I can weather the roughest gale
That ever wind did blow.”

He wrapped her warm in his seaman's coat
Against the stinging blast;
He cut a rope from broken spar,
And bound her to the mast.

“O father! I hear the church-bells ring,
O say, what may it be?
“ 'Tis a fog-bell on a rock-bound coast!”
And he steered for the open sea.

“O father! I hear the sound of guns,
O say, what may it be?”
“Some ship in distress, that cannot live
In such angry sea!”

“O father! I see a gleaming light,
O say, what may it be?”
But the father answered never a word,
A frozen corpse was he.

Lashed to the helm, all stiff and stark,
With his face turned to the skies,
The lantern gleamed through the gleaming snow
On his fixed and glassy eyes.

Then the maiden clasped her hands and prayed,
That saved she might be;
And she thought of Christ, who stilled the wave,
On the Lake of Galilee.

And fast through the midnight dark and drear,
Through the whistling sleet and snow,
Like a sheeted ghost, the vessel swept
Towards the reef of Norman's Woe.

And ever the fitful gusts between
A sound came from the land;
It was the sound of the trampling surf,
On the rocks and the hard sea-sand.

The breakers were right beneath her bows,
She drifted a dreary wreck,
And a whooping billow swept the crew
Like icicles from her deck.

She struck where the white and fleecy waves
 Looked soft as carded wool.
But the cruel rocks, they gored her side
 Like the horns of an angry bull.

Her rattling shrouds, all sheathed in ice,
 With the masts went by the board;
Like a vessel of glass, she stove and sank,
 Ho! ho! The breakers roared!

At daybreak, on the bleak sea-beach,
 A fisherman stood aghast,
To see the form of a maiden fair,
 Lashed to a drifting mast.

The salt sea was frozen on her breast,
 The salt tears in her eyes;
And he saw her hair, like the brown sea-weed,
 On the billows fall and rise.

Such was the wreck of the Hesperus,
 In the midnight and the snow!
Christ save us all from a death like this
 On the reef of Norman's Woe!

—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Name _____ Date _____

Exploring the Ballad

Read "The Wreck of the Hesperus" again and do the following:

1 Circle the words that rhyme and draw a line connecting the rhyming words.

2 Mark off the stressed syllables in the first five stanzas of the poem. What pattern for the stressed syllables do you notice in these stanzas?

3 Think of a different ending for this ballad, perhaps one that is happier, or one that might surprise the reader. In the space below, summarize your new ending in a few sentences:

4 On another sheet of paper, take your idea for a new ending and write it as four-line stanzas to end the poem.

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The Ballad

Name _____ Date _____

Brainstorming with a Partner

With a writing partner, jot down some ideas for your ballad in the spaces below.

1 Name three people you admire a great deal, or three people who have done something heroic.

Who Are They?

What Have They Done?







2 List below three spectacular events from history. Then, on the back of this sheet, briefly answer the journalist's basic questions about each event: Who? What? When? Where? How? and Why?







Name _____ Date _____

Planning Your Ballad

Before you begin writing your ballad, make sure you know the following part of the poem:

1 Who is the main character? _____

2 Who are the supporting characters? _____

3 What is the main conflict in the story? _____

4 How is the conflict resolved at the end of the ballad? _____

5 Name four or five important steps in the plot of your ballad.

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⊙ _____

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