

## Before You Read

### *The Highwayman*

#### Connect to the Poem

Think about people you rely on and people who rely on you. If someone is counting on you, how far do you go to help that person? Do you value others' safety as much as your own? Explain.

**Quickwrite** Freewrite for a few minutes about the sacrifices you are willing to make for those who count on you.

#### Build Background

"The Highwayman" is about a thief who robs coaches in eighteenth-century England.

- In eighteenth-century England, many landowners became wealthier than they had ever been. Yet poverty and crime remained widespread.
- Thousands of poor, unemployed men were forced by the British government to serve for life as soldiers.
- By the eighteenth century, horse-drawn coaches traveled regularly on English roads.
- A highwayman is a roadside robber, especially one on horseback. In England, from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth century, highwaymen would stop coaches by gunpoint and demand that passengers surrender their money and other valuables. Highwaymen who were caught were usually severely punished.
- Some highwaymen became popular, at least among those who were never robbed. A few highwaymen became legends in their time, inspiring songs, poems, and stories in the popular newspapers of the time. One of them, Jonathan Wild, became the hero of a novel and an opera in the eighteenth century.

#### Meet Alfred Noyes



**Popular Poet** Alfred Noyes was one of the most popular British poets of the early twentieth century. Because he became a successful poet while still in his twenties, Noyes was able to pursue a full-time career as a poet. Many other British poets at that time were modern in their writing styles, but Noyes wrote traditional poetry in the manner of the great nineteenth-century Romantic poets.

**Literary Works** Noyes wrote more than fifty books, including novels, short stories, and poetry. Alfred Noyes was born in 1880 and died in 1958.



Literature Online

**Author Search** For more about Alfred Noyes, go to [glencoe.com](http://glencoe.com) and enter QuickPass code GL29763u1.

## Set Purposes for Reading

### **BO** BIG Question

As you read the poem, ask yourself, how do the highwayman and his love, Bess, show their support for each other?

### **Literary Element** Narrative Poetry

The purpose of **narrative poetry** is to tell a story. Narrative poems share many of the narrative elements of short stories, including **plot** and **setting**. The plot is the sequence of events in the poem. The time and place in which the action occurs make up the setting.

Plot and setting are important elements of narrative poetry because they help create a vivid story. The plot of "The Highwayman" twists and turns as it moves towards an eerie ending. Details about the setting help readers visualize the action and sense the atmosphere, or mood, of the poem.

As you read, ask yourself, how do details of plot and setting help to shape the story told in the poem?

### **Reading Strategy** Summarize

When you **summarize** a poem, you state the main ideas and important details of the poem in your own words. You omit unimportant details, so that the summary is much briefer than the piece it is summarizing. Summarizing helps you remember, organize, and explain a series of events. Summarizing shows that you understand the main message of what you have read.

To summarize, decide what's most important as you read. Ask the basic questions: *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *why*, and *how*. Using your own words, write your answers to these questions in a logical order. Leave out examples and unimportant details. You may find it helpful to use a graphic organizer like the one below.

Who	
What	
When	
Where	
Why	
How	

### Learning Objectives

For pages 60–69

In studying this text, you will focus on the following objectives:

**Literary Study:** Analyzing narrative poetry.

**Reading:** Summarizing.

### TRY IT

**Summarize** When a friend asks you to tell him or her about a movie you have seen, you summarize the events in the movie to explain it to him or her. With a partner, summarize the plot of a book you have read recently or a movie or television show you saw recently.

# The Highwayman

Alfred Noyes



## PART 1

- The wind was a torrent<sup>1</sup> of darkness  
among the gusty trees.  
The moon was a ghostly galleon<sup>2</sup> tossed upon  
cloudy seas.  
The road was a ribbon of moonlight over the purple  
moor,<sup>3</sup>  
And the highwayman came riding—  
5        Riding—riding—  
The highwayman came riding, up to the old inn door.  
He'd a French cocked hat on his forehead, a bunch of  
lace at his chin,  
A coat of the claret velvet, and breeches of brown  
doeskin.  
They fitted with never a wrinkle. His boots were up  
to the thigh.  
10 And he rode with a jewelled twinkle,  
His pistol butts a-twinkle,  
His rapier hilt<sup>4</sup> a-twinkle, under the jewelled sky.  
Over the cobbles he clattered and clashed in the dark  
inn yard.  
He tapped with his whip on the shutters, but all was  
locked and barred.  
15 He whistled a tune to the window, and who should  
be waiting there  
But the landlord's black-eyed daughter,  
Bess, the landlord's daughter,

**Narrative Poetry** What do you learn about the setting from the first few lines of the poem?

1 A *torrent* is a strong rush of anything (usually water) flowing swiftly and wildly.

2 A *galleon* (gal'yən) is a large sailing ship of the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries.

3 A *moor* is an area of open, rolling, wild land, usually a grassy wetland.

12 A *rapier* is a long, lightweight sword, and the *hilt* is its handle.



*Moon Landing,*  
1977. Jamie  
Wyeth. Oil on  
canvas, 29 x 43 in.  
Private collection.

- Plaiting° a dark red love-knot into her long black hair.  
And dark in the dark old inn yard a stable wicket°  
creaked  
20 Where Tim the ostler° listened. His face was white  
and peaked.°  
His eyes were hollows of madness, his hair like  
mouldy hay,  
But he loved the landlord's daughter,  
The landlord's red-lipped daughter.  
Dumb as a dog he listened, and he heard the robber  
say—  
25 "One kiss, my bonny° sweetheart, I'm after a prize  
tonight,  
But I shall be back with the yellow gold before the  
morning light;  
Yet, if they press me sharply, and harry° me through  
the day,  
Then look for me by moonlight,  
Watch for me by moonlight,

18 Bess is braiding (*plaiting*) a red ribbon into her hair.

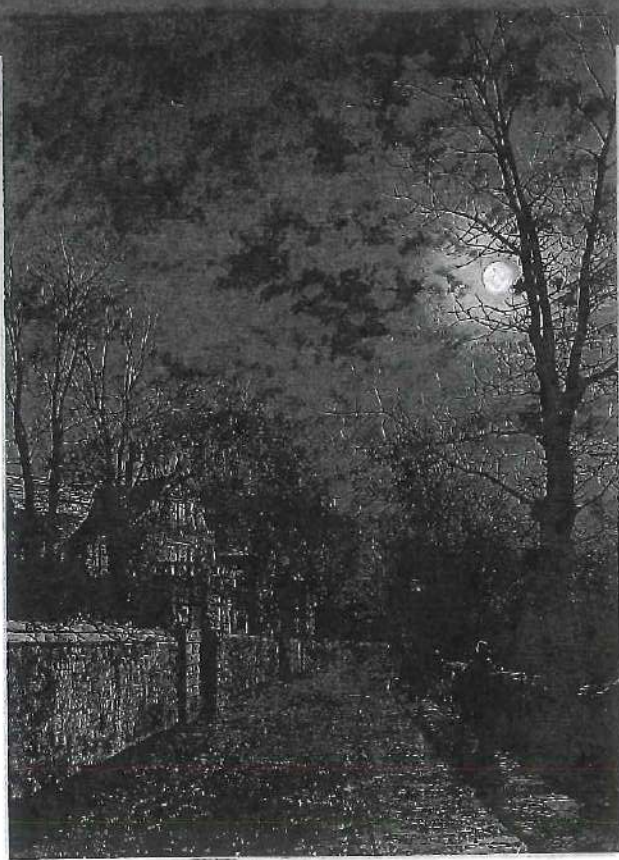
19 A *wicket* is a small door or gate; this one leads into the stable.

20 As the *ostler* (a shorter form of hostler), it's Tim's job to take care of the horses at the inn. A *peaked* face looks pale and sickly.

25 *Bonny* (a Scottish word) means "good-looking, fine, or admirable."

27 To *harry* is to trouble, bother, or worry.





*A Wet Winter's Evening*,  
1880. John Atkinson  
Grimshaw.

View the Art What does  
this painting tell you about  
the setting of this poem?

30 I'll come to thee by moonlight, though hell should bar  
the way."

He rose upright in the stirrups. He scarce could reach  
her hand,

But she loosened her hair in the casement.<sup>o</sup> His face  
burnt like a brand

As the black cascade of perfume came tumbling over  
his breast;

And he kissed its waves in the moonlight,

35 (O, sweet black waves in the moonlight!)

Then he tugged at his rein in the moonlight, and  
galloped away to the west.

## PART 2

He did not come in the dawning. He did not come  
at noon;

32 The *casement* is the window frame, and the *brand* is a burning torch.

**Summarize** Think about the  
most important events of  
Part 1. What does the  
highwayman promise Bess?

And out of the tawny° sunset, before the rise of  
the moon,  
When the road was a gypsy's ribbon, looping the  
purple moor,  
40 A red coat troop° came marching—  
Marching—marching—  
King George's men came marching, up to the old  
inn door.

They said no word to the landlord. They drank his  
ale instead,  
But they gagged his daughter, and bound her, to the  
foot of her narrow bed.  
45 Two of them knelt at her casement, with muskets at  
their side!  
There was death at every window;  
And hell at one dark window;  
For Bess could see, through her casement, the road  
that he would ride.

They had tied her up to attention, with many a  
sniggering jest.°  
50 They had bound a musket beside her, with the  
muzzle beneath her breast!  
“Now, keep good watch!” and they kissed her. She  
heard the doomed man say—  
*Look for me by moonlight;  
Watch for me by moonlight;  
I'll come to thee by moonlight, though hell should bar the way!*  
55 She twisted her hands behind her; but all the knots  
held good!  
She writhed° her hands till her fingers were wet with  
sweat or blood!  
They stretched and strained in the darkness, and the  
hours crawled by like years,

38 **Tawny** is a brownish-gold color.

40 The **red coat troop** is a group of soldiers wearing bright red coats.

49 Bess is tied to a pole, arms at her sides in what a soldier would call “at attention,” while the soldiers laugh disrespectfully (*many a sniggering jest*).

56 **Writhed** means “twisted and turned.”

**Narrative Poetry** How does the plot take an unexpected turn when the soldiers are introduced?

**Narrative Poetry** How do details about the setting affect the mood of the poem?



Till, now, on the stroke of midnight,  
Cold, on the stroke of midnight,  
60 The tip of one finger touched it! The trigger at last  
was hers!

The tip of one finger touched it. She strove no more  
for the rest.

Up, she stood up to attention, with the muzzle  
beneath her breast.

She would not risk their hearing; she would not  
strive again;

For the road lay bare in the moonlight;

65 Blank and bare in the moonlight;

And the blood of her veins, in the moonlight,  
throbbed to her love's refrain.<sup>o</sup>

*Tlot-tlot; tlot-tlot!* Had they heard it: The horsehoofs  
ringing clear;

*Tlot-tlot, tlot-tlot,* in the distance? Were they deaf that  
they did not hear?

Down the ribbon of moonlight, over the brow of  
the hill,

70 The highwayman came riding—

Riding—riding—

The red-coats looked to their priming!<sup>o</sup> She stood up,  
straight and still!

*Tlot-tlot,* in the frosty silence! *Tlot-tlot,* in the echoing  
night!

Nearer he came and nearer. Her face was like a light.

75 Her eyes grew wide for a moment; she drew one last  
deep breath,

Then her finger moved in the moonlight,

Her musket shattered the moonlight,

Shattered her breast in the moonlight and warned  
him—with her death.

He turned. He spurred to the westward; he did not  
know who stood

66 In a song or poem, the *refrain* is a phrase or verse that is repeated regularly.

72 The soldiers are *priming* their weapons, or loading their muskets with ammunition.

**Summarize** What happens  
in lines 50–74?

**BQ** BIG Question

How does Bess show that  
the highwayman can count  
on her?

80 Bowed, with her head o'er the musket, drenched with  
her own red blood!  
Not till the dawn he heard it, and his face grew grey  
to hear  
How Bess, the landlord's daughter,  
The landlord's black-eyed daughter,  
Had watched for her love in the moonlight, and died  
in the darkness there.

85 Back, he spurred like a madman, shrieking a curse to  
the sky,  
With the white road smoking behind him and his  
rapier brandished<sup>o</sup> high.  
Blood-red were his spurs in the golden noon, wine-  
red was his velvet coat;  
When they shot him down on the highway,  
Down like a dog on the highway,  
90 And he lay in his blood on the highway, with a bunch  
of lace at his throat.

*And still of a winter's night, they say, when the wind is  
in the trees,  
When the moon is a ghostly galleon tossed upon  
cloudy seas,  
When the road is a ribbon of moonlight over the  
purple moor,*

*A highwayman comes riding—  
95 Riding—riding—  
A highwayman comes riding, up to the old inn door.  
Over the cobbles he clatters and clangs in the dark inn  
yard.  
He taps with his whip on the shutters, but all is locked and  
barred.  
He whistles a tune to the window, and who should be  
waiting there  
100 But the landlord's black-eyed daughter,  
Bess, the landlord's daughter,  
Plaiting a dark red love-knot into her long black hair.*

Summarize Why did the  
highwayman die?

86 The highwayman waved his sword threateningly (*brandished*).



## After You Read

### Respond and Think Critically

1. What is the setting of this poem? Include details from the poem to support your answer. [Recall]
2. Describe the actions of the soldiers. How does their behavior make you feel about the highwayman and Bess? Explain. [Interpret]
3. Lines 19–24 describe Tim the ostler. What role does Tim play in the poem? How do the soldiers know to wait for the highwayman in Bess's room? Explain. [Analyze]
4. Why do you think the highwayman reacts the way he does when he finds out what has happened to Bess? What does his reaction reveal about him? Explain. [Infer]
5. How would the poem be different if it ended just before the final two stanzas? Support your answer. [Compare]
6. **BQ** **BIG Question** What do Bess's actions show about her feelings toward the highwayman? Do you think her actions are foolish, heroic, or both? Explain. [Evaluate]

### Academic Vocabulary

Bess made a drastic decision because she did not think she had an **alternative** solution to save the highwayman. In the preceding sentence, *alternative* means "offering a choice." Think about Bess's decision. What alternative decisions could she have made? Then fill in the blank for this statement: As an alternative to taking her own life, Bess could have \_\_\_\_\_.

### TIP

#### Comparing

When you compare two things, you look at how they are alike and how they are different. To help answer question 5, first reread the last two stanzas of the poem.

- Notice the similarities and differences between the feeling, or mood, of the first three stanzas and the last two stanzas.
- What important information do you learn in the last two stanzas?
- How does this information add to the mood of the poem?
- How would the poem be different if the last two stanzas were not there?



Keep track of your ideas about the **BIG Question** in your unit Foldable.



Glencoe Online

#### Selection Resources

For Selection Quizzes, eFlashcards, and Reading-Writing Connection activities, go to [glencoe.com](http://glencoe.com) and enter QuickPass code GL29763u1.

## Literary Element Narrative Poetry

### Test Skills Practice

1. Which events in this poem did you find especially alarming or striking? Explain.
2. What details in the opening stanza help to create a mysterious mood? Explain.
3. Describe what happens to Bess. Explain why.

### Review: Setting

#### Test Skills Practice

4. Which of the following is a detail that describes the setting?
  - A "his eyes were hollows of madness"
  - B "the landlord's black-eyed daughter"
  - C "she twisted her hands behind her"
  - D "the wind was a torrent of darkness"

### Reading Strategy Summarize

5. Refer back to the graphic organizer that you filled out as you read the poem. Use it to help you write a one-paragraph summary of the poem.

### Speaking and Listening

**Performance** With a small group, plan a choral reading of "The Highwayman." Individual group members can take turns reading parts of the poem. Other parts can be read by a chorus of group members. Begin by planning how you will divide the parts. Then practice reading the poem before presenting it to the class.

## Grammar Link

**Main and Helping Verbs** A verb can be more than one word. Verbs of two or more words are called verb phrases. For example:

One-word verb: Her finger **moved** in the moonlight.

Verb phrase: They **had tied** her up to attention.

The most important word in a verb phrase is the **main verb**. The other verbs in the phrase are **helping verbs**. These verbs help the main verb tell when an action or state of being occurs. For example:

They **had tied** her up to attention.

The verb phrase "had tied" includes the main verb *tied* and the helping verb *had*. The helping verb *had* tells that the action "to tie" takes place in the past.

Helping verbs may help the main verb tell whether an action or state of being will occur in the future. For example:

I'll come to thee by moonlight.

In the verb phrase "will come" (*I'll* is a contraction of the words *I* and *will*), *come* is the main verb and *will* is the helping verb. The helping verb *will* shows that the action "to come" takes place in the future. When you analyze the parts of a verb phrase, mentally cross out such words as *never*, *always*, and *not*. These words are adverbs, not verbs.

**Practice** Use the summary you have written of "The Highwayman," or work with a partner to create a short summary of the poem. Underline the main verbs and circle the helping verbs in your summary.