

# Comprehension

## Part A

Answer the questions in as much detail as you can.

1. Based on the description in the poem, draw how you imagine the scene from stanza 1 and 2 to look.

2. Based on the description in the poem, choose 3 adjectives to describe each of the following characters:

Bess: \_\_\_\_\_

The highwayman: \_\_\_\_\_

Tim: \_\_\_\_\_

The red-coats: \_\_\_\_\_

3. How do we know this is a historical poem?

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4. Why is the highwayman described as 'the dead man' in Part 2, stanza 3?

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5. Why is 'the hours crawled by like years' in Part 2, stanza 4 an effective description?

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# Comprehension

## Part B

Answer the questions in as much detail as you can.

1. Read Part 1, stanzas 1 and 2. Re-write the stanzas as if you were writing the opening of the story about the highwayman.

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2. Who are the heroes and villains in the poem?

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3. To what extent is the time of day important in the poem?

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4. Describe the mood and atmosphere in the poem. What words, phrases and techniques has the poet used to create this impression?

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### Challenge Task

Complete the following 3 questions and then answer them.

1. What words/phrases tell us \_\_\_\_\_?

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2. What words/phrases are used to describe \_\_\_\_\_?

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3. What does \_\_\_\_\_ mean?

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# Comprehension Answers

## Part A

1. Based on the description in the poem, draw how you imagine the scene from stanza 1 and 2 to look.

*Children's answers should depict a selection of the following features:*

- *show it is night-time,;*
  - *large moon;*
  - *cloudy sky;*
  - *purple (heather-covered) moorland/hills;*
  - *thin snaking road illuminated;*
  - *the highwayman on a horse dressed in a French cocked-hat; a shirt with lace at the neck; a deep-red coat; tight brown trousers; thigh-high boots;*
  - *sword and gun.*
2. Choose three adjectives to describe the characters.
    - *Bess - loyal, brave, strong*
    - *The Highwayman - bold, confident, proud*
    - *Tim - sneaky, crazy, vengeful*
    - *red-coats - cruel, rough-handed, vicious*
  3. How do we know this is a historical poem?
    - *There are some old-fashioned words, e.g. ostler, inn, harry, thee.*
    - *Type of clothing described.*
    - *Mention of red-coats and King George indicates poem is set in the 18th century.*
  4. Why is the highwayman described as 'the dead man' in Part 2, stanza 3?
    - *The description is from Bess's point of view. Bess knows that the highwayman is doomed to die if he returns to her and is captured by the red-coats.*
  5. Why is 'the hours crawled by like years' in Part 2, stanza 4 a good description?
    - *The description emphasises how tortuous it is for Bess as she tries to regain some control of the situation.*

# Comprehension Answers

## Part B

1. Read Part 1, stanzas 1 and 2. Re-write them as if you were writing the opening to a story about the highwayman.
  - *It was a dark, cloudy night and the trees gushed and swayed in the wind. A highwayman rode along the ribbon of moonlight over the heather-topped moor. Impeccably dressed, he wore a claret velvet coat, lace-collared shirt and tight brown leather trousers. Illuminated by the light of moon, his rapier and pistol twinkled like the jewelled sky and his thigh-high boots urged his horse on towards the inn.*
2. Who are the heroes and villains in the poem?
  - *Arguably, Bess is the one true heroine as she sacrifices her own life in an attempt to save the highwayman. The red-coats behave villainously by treating Bess the way they do, although they are acting within the law in their attempt to ensnare the highwayman and would have been considered protectors of the civilians. The highwayman could also be regarded as a villain for his choice of occupation – hijacking and stealing from travellers on the road, but he is also depicted as a distinguished, respectable man who loves Bess and he acts like a hero in his attempt to avenge those responsible for her death. Tim is depicted as a crazed individual who, we can infer, betrays Bess and the highwayman to the authorities. It can be argued that this act of spite paints him as a villain.*
3. To what extent is the time of day important in the poem?
  - *The time of day is central to the poem; all the action happens at night and repeated references to the moonlight occur throughout. The atmosphere in the poem is built around the dark, moonlit, ghostly and eerie scenes that occur and Bess and the highwayman's encounters continue, even beyond their deaths...when the moonlight and other combination of factors are aligned.*
4. Describe the atmosphere in the poem. What words, phrases and techniques has the poet used to create this impression?
  - *A ghostly, eerie atmosphere is created at the very beginning of the poem through the description of the setting. We get the impression of the highwayman racing across the moor like an apparition in the night. There are multiple references to the dark, e.g. 'dark in the dark old inn-yard' and the moonlight, 'watch for me by moonlight' and hints at blood and death, 'red-lipped/I'll come to thee...though hell should bar the way'. The poet uses repetition to emphasise the theme and build tension, e.g. 'tlot tlot' is repeated across two stanzas creating suspense and intrigue.*