

# The Ballad of Tom Dooley

## The Victors (Of History) Go the Spoils

Comparison of the Ballads of Tom Dula, Frankie Silver, and Emmett Till



Ballads are the voices of the common folk, revealing the fabric of their everyday existence through the revelation of mores, prejudices, and defining events of their lives. Moreover, ballads also reveal that history is the story of the victors, illustrating the spin of those in power both in what is revealed and what is concealed. We will be examining the interplay between those in power and those who are marginalized using the ballads of Tom Dula, Frankie Silver, and Emmett Till.

A lesson plan for grade 8 history and social studies

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### Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- Identify the characteristics of a ballad
- Explain how a ballad reveals information about both speaker and intended audience
- Analyze various ballads, comparing and contrasting different forms of the same ballad to determine how lyrics and accompaniment influence the interpretation of the ballad
- Research either "Frankie Silver" or "Emmett Till"
- Evaluate how the common idea of justice has changed over time

### Teacher Planning

Time Required for Lesson

Common lesson - ballad information and "Tom Dooley" 1 to 3 class periods

Differentiated Lessons - 1 to 3 days for research; 2 days to prepare product; 1 day to present product

### Materials Needed

•lyrics of various versions of "The Ballad of Tom Dooley," "The Ballad of Frankie Silver," and "The Ballad of Emmett Till"

- audio and/or video recordings to accompany the lyrics of each ballad

For common lessons (ballad info and "Tom Dooley"):

- Copy of lyrics (either paper copy or digital copy on student devices) of each version

- High speed internet access for group listening activities

Differentiated lessons based on student choice: (students choose either "Frankie Silver" or "Emmett Till")

- High-speed internet access and computers for each student
- Stereo headphones for each student

"Frankie Silver" lesson also needs:

- Copy of Sharyn McCrumb's novel "The Ballad of Frankie Silver" or excerpts concerning the Frankie Silver case itself embedded in the novel

- <http://www.folkstreams.net/film,96> FolkStreams video "The Ballad of Frankie Silver"

- <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-antebellum/5458> lyrics of "The Ballad of Frankie Silver"

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ekOvnW\\_AtC4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ekOvnW_AtC4) Recording of "The Ballad of Frankie Silver" by Byrd Moore and His Hot Shots or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V6rJRj6Ka84> Video recording of "The Ballad of Frankie Silver" by The Dickel Brothers in a performance on 1-17-14

- Gray, John P. "Was the First Woman Hanged in North Carolina a Battered Spouse." *Campbell Law Review* 19.2 (1997): 1-21. Campbell University. Web. 30 July 2015.

<<http://scholarship.law.campbell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1319&context=clr>>

- Excerpts from "They Won't Hang a Woman" by Maxine McCall

- Burke County students should also access the Frankie Silver exhibit at the History Museum of Burke County

"Emmett Till" lesson also needs:

- <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/a-bronzeville-mother-loiters-in-mississippi-mean/> "A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi. Meanwhile, a Mississippi Mother Burns Bacon" by Gwendolyn Brooks

- <http://allpoetry.com/The-Last-Quatrain-Of-The-Ballad-Of-Emmett-Till> "The Last Quatrain of the Ballad of Emmett Till" by Gwendolyn Brooks

- "The Ballad of Emmett Till" by Bob Dylan, available with lyrics online

- [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/till/sfeature/sf\\_look\\_confession.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/till/sfeature/sf_look_confession.html) is a transcript of the killers' confession

- <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/till/tillhome.html> contains primary source materials about the murder of Emmett Till

## Background Information / Pre-Activities

- Review the characteristics of a ballad and characteristics of a folk ballad available at <http://rafiq23.hubpages.com/hub/The-Ballad-Definition-Types-Characteristics> allowing students to highlight from their own devices or take notes using the Cornell Notes method or another method approved by the teacher.

- Review the characteristics of a ballad by playing the quizlet game <https://quizlet.com/56270702/characteristics-of-a-ballad-flash-cards/>

### Activities:

"Tom Dooley" Day 1•Ask if students have ever heard the song "Tom Dooley." If anyone has, ask what they know about it. If no one is familiar with the song, ask students to listen to the audio, jotting down their first impressions as they listen to the Arlie Watson dulcimer edition first (listed as Arlie Watson (dulcimer, v)

Under the Jack Guy collection available at <https://trello.com/c/lkGqtUtU/1-tom-dooley-digital-materials-from-asu-special-collections>

- Discuss first impressions, asking questions such as:

"What type of instruments do you think are being used?"

"What impression do you have about the singer?"

"What do you think the song is about?"

"What evidence in the song contributes to your impression?"

"Who do you think is the intended audience for this song? Why?"

"What feeling do you have as you listen to this song? Why?"

- Listen to the version of the song listed as Tab Ward (b, v), Jack Guy (v), Russell Ward (g)

Ask the same questions as before, but add:

"What differences do you notice in the two versions?"

"What can you infer about what was happening as this version was recorded? What evidence supports this inference?"

"How do you feel as you listen to this version? Was it the same way you felt as you listened to the first version? If not, what makes you feel different?"

"Why do you think the song has such a happy feel if it is talking about a murder? What effect does this have on the audience?"

•Post copy of the lyrics of the folk song. If using printed version, have students circle words or phrases that are persuasive and influence the audience's feelings about the topic. If using SmartBoard, do collectively.

"Is the audience supposed to feel sympathy for Tom? Why or why not?"

"How is the audience supposed to feel about Laurie Foster? What evidence do you have for your opinion?"

"Why does the song shift from third person to first person narration? What is the intended effect?"

•Listen to the Cath or Lucy Ellicher version Cath or Lucy Ellicher (v) -- Kingston Trio style

"How does this version without accompaniment make you feel? Why?"

"Is this version's effect more appropriate to the content? Why or why not?"

"Why do you think that the other versions had such happy music paired with such tragic content? What is the intended effect on the audience? Is it supposed to be ironic? Why or why not?"

•Listen to the Kingston trio version available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZYjc57V55U>

"What is different about this version and the earlier versions?"

"What features of the song are different? Why would the song change?"

"What features about the musicians are different?"

"Who do you think would be the intended audience for this version? How can you tell that the intended audience is different?"

•Use the lyrics transcribed by Mrs. E.J. Preston Mrs. E.J. Preston (from Abrams collection)

Highlight the personal pronouns in the lyrics.

"What is the effect of the repeated pronoun 'you' in the first verse?"

"Who is the narrator?"

"How does the narrator feel about what happened to Laura?"

"Does the narrator hold Tom accountable for Laura's murder? Why or why not?"

"Some versions of the song say, 'Now you're bound to die,' and other versions say, 'Poor boy, you're going to die.' How do these small differences influence the listener? Which version is more sympathetic to Tom?"

•Read "Laura Foster" from the I.G. Greer collection

<http://omeka.library.appstate.edu/files/original/2f89263a097db58c0f469c9cac82c4a1.pdf>

1. Summarize the plot of the lyrics. What happens?

2. How is Laura portrayed? What words influence how the audience feels about her?

3. How is Tom portrayed? What words influence how the audience feels about him?

4. Is there a motive for her murder? Why do you think that Tom killed her?
5. Do you think that the audience has a complete understanding of the crime? Why or why not? What more would you like to know about it?

Day 2 - Folkways episode <http://video.unctv.org/video/2352068489/>

As students watch the video, they should take notes about what they learn from the video that they did not get from any version of the song.

Paideia discussion utilizing the following questions:

1. Do you think that Tom was the murderer? Why or why not?
2. If you think that Tom killed Laurie, why did he do it?
3. If you do not think that Tom killed Laurie, who do you think killed her and why?
4. What do we learn about the audience and/or community in which these songs were popular based upon the songs? What evidence supports our inferences?
5. How does this folk song relate to the idea of who has power and/or influence and who doesn't?
6. Why would someone make this story into a song or a poem?
7. How are the songs and the poem different?
8. What explains why the Kingston Trio version of the song was popular internationally and why the other versions were not? What does this indicate about what makes music popular?
9. Based on what the songs and poems say, as well as what they do not say, what values are important to the community who is the audience? How can you tell?
10. Does the song and/or poem demonize the accused? Defend your answer.

Day 3

Student will re-imagine "The Ballad of Tom Dooley" as either another type of music or as another art form (drawing, sculpture, dance, etc.). At the end of the class period, classes will do a museum walk through to present their art forms to one another.

•Students who choose to re-imagine "Tom Dooley" as another type of music will need to answer the following questions:

1. Why is this type of music the most appropriate form for the story of Tom Dooley?
2. To what audience would this type of music appeal? Why?
3. What style of music would have the broadest appeal? Why?

•Students who choose to re-imagine "Tom Dooley" as art should answer the following questions:

1. In what style of art did you choose to portray the "Tom Dooley" story?
2. Why is this style appropriate to the content?

3. Who is your intended audience?
4. What in your art appeals to this audience?

•Students who choose to portray “Tom Dooley” as performance art should answer the following questions:

1. What in your performance tells the story of Tom Dooley?
2. What do you think are the key elements of the story?
3. How is your performance appropriate to tell the story?

Differentiated lessons: Comparing “Tom Dooley” to “The Ballad of Frankie Silver” and/or “The Ballad of Emmett Till.”

For students who choose to compare to “Frankie Silver,” use the materials listed in the materials section above.

•Compare the Dickel Brothers version of “The Ballad of Frankie Silver” to “The Ballad of Tom Dooley.” Students may complete a double bubble map or a venn diagram to compare and contrast the two versions.

•Use the other materials to research the Frankie Silver case. Students may then use the materials to conduct a classroom trial of the Frankie Silver case. Students who researched Emmett Till will be the jury, while students who researched Frankie Silver will conduct the trial, acting as the major participants.

•At the end of the trial, students who conducted research on this topic will explain the differences between the outcome of the class trial and the real trial, explaining those differences.

For students who choose to compare to “Emmett Till,” use the materials listed in the materials section above.

•Compare the Bob Dylan version of “The Ballad of Emmett Till” to “The Ballad of Tom Dooley.” Students may complete a double bubble map or a venn diagram to compare and contrast the two versions.

•Use the other materials listed to research the Emmett Till case (teachers who do not specialize in Language Arts may need the help of the Language Arts teacher to interpret the poems.) Students will create a Frontline type news program showing the array of reactions to the Emmett Till murder and trial. Students who researched Frankie Silver will provide a plus/delta for feedback for the quality of the presentation and the information given.

## **Assessment**

Final paideia about the ballads should include the following questions:

- Why would someone choose to make the Frankie Silver story into a song or poem? Why would Emmett Till be immortalized in song and poetry?
- How is the accused portrayed? What words influence the audience’s perceptions?
- Do you think the accused was guilty? Why or why not? Was justice served in this case? Explain your answer.

- What does this story reveal about the community's values and mores? How do you know?
- How does this story relate to marginalization? What group(s) are marginalized? How?
- What made each case notorious ("Tom Dooley," "Frankie Silver," and "Emmett Till")? What does this suggest about what people find interesting? Why do we choose to glorify bad behavior?
- How is the intended audience different from the mainstream? How does this audience relate to marginalization?
- What is the author's purpose for each ballad? How do you know?
- Would the outcome of each trial be the same today? Why or why not? What does this suggest about our interpretation of justice today as opposed to the time period in which this event occurred?
- How does a community's idea of justice relate to the Bill of Rights? To the introduction of the Declaration of Independence? To the idea of victim's rights? Why do you think that our concept of justice has changed so much over time? Are we more just now than we were in the past, or are values from the past better? Defend your answer.

## **Critical Vocabulary**

**Ballad**-A song that tells a story

**Marginalization**-To place in a position of marginal importance, influence, or power

## **Supplemental Material**

Bill of Rights

Declaration of Independence

## **North Carolina Essential Standards**

### **SOCIAL STUDIES**

#### **Grade 8**

- 8.H.1.1 (Construct charts, graphs, and historical narratives to explain particular events or issues)
- 8.H.1.2 (Summarize the literal meaning of historical documents in order to establish context)
- 8.H.1.3 (Use primary and secondary sources to interpret various historical perspectives)
- 8.H.1.4 (Use historical inquiry to evaluate the validity of sources used to construct historical narratives)
- 8.C.1.1 (Explain how influences from Africa, Europe, and the Americas impacted North Carolina and the United States)
- 8.C.1.2 (Summarize the origin of beliefs, practices, and traditions that represent various groups within North Carolina and the United States)
- 8.TT.1 (Use technology and other resources for assigned tasks)
- 8.RP.1 (Apply a research process to complete project-based activities)