

Web Ballads

Collaborating Poetically Through the Internet

Tools		
<i>Kit Software:</i> The Writing Trek	<i>Other:</i> Computers; the Internet; AppleWorks; a Web page editor, such as Netscape Composer; an email account (such as Apple's iTools Email)	<i>Optional:</i> A digital camcorder; a digital camera; iMovie

Project Duration

Four class sessions, plus portions of others over a period of several weeks

Introduction

The ballad—a story told in rhyming verse—is a form of expression common to many countries around the world. It has been a way of passing down oral traditions, and continues today in many traditional and modern forms, including various kinds of popular music. How can we use the structure of the ballad to help students develop their creativity and their facility with language? What can students learn from a creative, ballad-writing partnership with students in another place?

Project Overview

In this project, students learn about the ballad form as a way of telling stories in verse, and then write their own ballads, in partnership with students in a distant classroom. Throughout the project, the Internet provides a communication link, and a class Web site (created ahead of time by the teacher) serves as a collaborative workspace and publishing forum.

Phase 1: Learning about ballads

After identifying a partner classroom (see the Preparation section), launch the project with a discussion about how people have told stories throughout history, touching on epic poems, songs of heroic deeds, and ballads. Ask students for examples of modern storytelling that borrow from these traditional forms.

Next, invite groups of three or four to explore the unit on Ballads in The Writing Trek. In this unit, students read model ballads, learn about the elements of ballads, and are given opportunities to test their knowledge and practice writing this type of poetry. When they have completed the unit, ask groups to write (in AppleWorks) short reports entitled “What We Have Learned About Writing Ballads,” which will be shared with students in the partner classroom in Phase 2.

Groups exchange email messages with their contacts in the partner classroom, introducing themselves, describing the project and how it will work, and sending their reports on writing ballads.

Phase 2: Beginning the stories

Ask groups to invent a main character about whom they’d like to write a ballad. Groups brainstorm different characters, agree on a particular one, and then flesh out this character by defining some of his or her characteristics. Groups can also define a second character with whom the main character will interact.

Using a Web page editor such as Netscape Composer, each group creates a Web page for the ballad that they will write (together with the partner group) about the character. This page contains a short description and image of the character, and a description of the partner group in the distant classroom. (See the “Web Ballads Template” on the kit Web site.)

Groups write four-line stanzas to begin their ballads, and give the ballads titles. The stanzas each have a rhyming scheme, determined by the group, that will be followed for the remainder of the ballad. Each group writes its stanza directly on the Web page it began at the beginning of this phase.

Phase 3: Taking turns telling the story

Each group posts its Web page to the class ballad site (see the Preparation section). It then sends an email to its contact in the partner classroom, announcing that the ballad has been posted. It is then the partner group’s turn to write a stanza.

The partner group writes its stanza, and sends it to the group via email. The group then meets to write another stanza that continues the story. Once this stanza is written, the group adds both new stanzas to the Web page and reposts the page to the class ballad site.

Phase 4: Taking stock

Each group repeats the process outlined in Phase 3, until, by mutual agreement, the ballad is completed. When all the ballads have reached a conclusion, each group reads its collaboratively written ballad to the entire class. In a follow-up class discussion, students talk about what they learned.

Technical and Facilitation Tips

Facilitation Tips: Phase 1

- In the initial discussion, you may want to prompt students by pointing out that the ballad form in its most general sense (the telling of a story in verse) is alive and well today in the musical genres of country & western, rap, and hip hop.

- Ask students to complete the short lessons on Line, Rhyme, and Sound in the Concepts section of the Poetry Corner, either before or after the unit on Ballads. Each lesson includes a short assessment and a practice activity. These poetic concepts will come in handy when students begin to write their own ballads in Phase 2. (Click the framed picture on the back wall in the Poetry Corner to access the Concepts section.)
- Ask students to complete the Check It assessment in the Ballad Basics lesson.
- Encourage students to read some of the sample ballads in the More section, and to take note of their rhyming schemes, meter, and narrative structure.
- The student reports can summarize The Writing Trek lessons and include the group’s ideas and insights on how to write modern-day ballads.
- Before students contact their partners in the other classroom, make sure they understand the nature of the project and what they should say to their partners. Also, provide each group with the name and email address of its contact in the other classroom.
- This project is intended to be initiated by you and your classroom, with the partner classroom simply following your lead. (However, it is possible to work out a symmetrical partnership, in which groups in the partner classroom are initiating their own ballads as well. See the Options section.)
- As long as there are enough computers and The Writing Trek CDs, The Writing Trek unit can be completed in a single class session. The reports and emailing may take part of another session.

Tech Tips: Phase 1

- The Ballads unit is located in the Poetry Corner. Move the pointer over the papers held by the girl reading in front of the group and click. Then click the Project Outline label.
- If you do not currently have an email account, you can get one free through Apple’s iTools. The Step-by-Step Card “Setting Up an iTools Account” provides the necessary information.

Facilitation Tips: Phase 2

- Groups’ characters can be real or fictional. If they are real, they should not be anyone known personally to the students. Good choices for characters are well-known sports or entertainment figures, superheroes, and historical figures.
- The description of the partner group in the distant classroom can include the school’s name and location, the teacher’s name, and the names of students in the group.
- Part of the fun of this project is not knowing ahead of time how the stories told in the ballads will turn out. For this reason, it is probably a good idea to advise students not to follow the Ballads unit’s suggestion that a dramatic or climactic event be identified before writing the ballad. However, a dramatic event may be implied in the description of the character, or the relationship between the main character and the secondary character.
- Groups can choose how they want to write their stanzas together, but to ensure equal participation you may want to suggest a particular process, such as taking turns writing the lines.

- Students can choose from among three basic rhyming schemes: AABB, ABCB, and ABAB. The ABCB scheme is perhaps the most common one for ballads, and is less restrictive than the other two. Several of the model ballads in *The Writing Trek* use this scheme.
- You may want students to pay attention to meter and rhythm, as well as rhyme. They can establish a meter in the first stanza they write, and ask their partner classroom to follow it. Both the Ballads unit and the Poetry Corner Concepts lessons include information on meter.
- Encourage students to use repetition and dialogue in their stanzas. (The Ballads unit in *The Writing Trek* identifies these as common elements of a ballad.)
- Make sure that students know they can use the Rhyming Dictionary in *The Writing Trek* for ideas on creating rhymes.
- For this phase, and the remainder of the project, you may want to suggest that groups establish specialized roles for their members. The most important role is group spokesperson, who will handle the email communication with the partner classroom. Other roles can be Webmaster, who handles the updating (and possibly the uploading) of the Web page; and editor, who takes charge of polishing the stanzas.
- This phase can be completed in a single class session, but it may be best to allow students parts of two sessions to create their characters, write their stanzas, and write their pages.

Tech Tips: Phase 2

- To use Netscape Composer, open Netscape Communicator and choose Composer from the Communicator menu.
- Netscape Composer has an extensive help system. Choose Help from the Help menu, then select Creating Web Pages from the list on the left side of the screen.
- Groups' Web pages can include links back to the main page of the Web Ballad site (if they lack these links, however, visitors to the sites can use the Back button on their browsers to return to the main page).
- As an alternative to working in a Web page editor, students can create and edit their ballad pages in AppleWorks, and then save them as html files before posting them. Choose Save As from the File menu. Choose HTML from the File Format pop-up menu, use a filename that ends with ".htm," then click Save.

Facilitation Tips: Phase 3

- When each new stanza is added to the ballad, the space next to the stanza can be used to add information about the stanza—for example, the names of the people who wrote the lines, the day the lines were written, and so on.
- Make sure each group's spokesperson has the email address for the group's partner classroom contact.
- This phase will likely take place over a period of several weeks; during that period, students will need occasional class sessions, or portions of sessions, to write their new stanzas and post the updated pages.

Tech Tips: Phase 3

- Each group's Web page should have a unique, pre-designated filename. As long as this filename is preserved, each time the page is uploaded to the server containing the site the new file will replace the old one, preserving any links that have been established.

Facilitation Tips: Phase 4

- During the closing discussion, you can ask students questions such as the following:
 - Were you surprised by how the story in the ballad turned out?
 - What did you like about working with your partner group in the other classroom? Why? What did you not like and why?
 - How much did your group talk about different ways of writing lines?
 - What kind of process did you use for writing your stanzas? How did you give each person room to contribute?
 - When you were writing a stanza, how did you try to influence what would be written in the next stanza?
- Ask each group to write a thank-you email to its partner group at the conclusion of the project.

Outcomes

After completing this project, students will be able to

- describe what a ballad is, and what characteristics define it
- define important poetic concepts related to ballads, including meter, rhyming scheme, and dialogue
- write lines of poetry that fit a certain rhyming scheme and metric pattern
- identify examples of ballads in popular literature
- use a Web site as a collaborative workspace

In addition, students will have

- improved their facility with language
- worked collaboratively on projects over time and space
- learned skills associated with publishing on the Web
- improved their abilities to work in groups and contribute to a common goal
- learned skills or acquired knowledge relating to each of the state and national standards referred to in the Project Standards section

Project Standards

From the Secondary Language Arts & Social Studies Web site, you can identify select state curriculum standards and national educational technology standards that correlate to this student project. To locate these standards, go to the kit Web site and click the Curriculum button. Locate and open this student project and click the "Project Standards" button.

Assessment Suggestions

- In Phase 1, when groups are exploring the Ballads unit in The Writing Trek, students can assess their learning by completing the Check It activity in the Ballad Basics lesson.
- At the conclusion of the project, each group's participation can be assessed by applying a rubric covering such issues as communication with the partner classroom, creativity, and use of rhyme and dialogue.
- Copies of groups' Web pages containing their completed ballads can be included in each student's electronic portfolio as examples of their creative work.

Preparation

This project requires two important preparation steps:

- 1 Establish email contact with another teacher in an English-speaking classroom, anywhere in the world, who is willing to participate in this project. Make sure the teacher of the partner classroom understands the project, makes a firm commitment to it, and is aware of the following expectations:
 - The stanzas should be written collaboratively in groups, not individually (how this is actually done, however, is of course up to the teacher in the partner classroom).
 - The groups in the partner classroom should respond in a timely manner to each request for a new stanza for the ballad.
 - The class will continue to participate until there is mutual agreement that the ballad has reached its conclusion.
 - Each group in the partner classroom will need a single contact person to whom email will be sent (it is not necessary for each contact person to have his or her own email account, but this will be helpful).

To find another teacher with whom to collaborate, you can visit the Apple Learning Interchange site (www.ali.apple.com), go to the Forums area (click Collaboration on the ALI main page), and add a message to the Language Arts Round Table forum. You can also visit the Global Schoolhouse site (www.gsn.org) and post a message on one of the discussion boards in the Communication Tools section. Or, go to the Forum in the Communications section of the Apple Learning Series Secondary Language Arts & Social Studies Web site (sign in at www.apple.com/learningseries) and post a message saying that you are seeking a partner classroom for this project.

- 2 Create a basic Web site for this project before students are ready to post their initial pages. This site should consist of a single main page with links to as many "placeholder" pages as you will have groups. By setting up empty placeholder pages ahead of time, you will greatly simplify the process of uploading pages later. Each placeholder page (either a copy of the "Web Ballads Template" or an empty html page) should be given a unique filename that you will then assign to a specific group. The group will use that filename for its Web page, so that when the page is uploaded to the server, it will replace the placeholder page, preserving any links you have set up in advance.

The main page of the site should describe the project and list the participating partner classroom. The links to the group pages will initially have to be group numbers or similar designations, but once groups have titled their ballads, these titles can replace the group numbers. You may want to consider asking some student volunteers to help you design the site. For help creating the Web site, see the Step-by-Step Cards “Using Netscape Composer,” “Adding a Graphic to a Composer Web Page,” “Working with Tables in Netscape Composer,” “Moving Back and Forth Between Netscape Composer and Navigator,” and “Adding Links in Netscape Composer.” The site can be published on the Web using an Apple iTools account (see the Step-by-Step Cards “Setting Up an iTools Account” and “Publishing Your Web Pages With iTools”).

Resources

Internet

Apple Learning Interchange

<http://www.ali.apple.com>

The Babs Ballads by W.S. Gilbert

<http://www.bookrags.com/books/3babb/index.htm>

The Ballad Stanza

<http://www.english.upenn.edu/~afilreis/88/ballad-stanza.html>

Desktop Movies in Education

<http://www.apple.com/education/dv/>

Global Schoolhouse (for finding a partner classroom)

<http://www.gsn.org>

Handbook of Terms for Discussing Poetry

<http://www.cc.emory.edu/ENGLISH/classes/Handbook/Handbook.html>

Poetic Terms Dictionary

<http://www.english.upenn.edu/~afilreis/88/poetic-terms.html>

The Traditional Ballad Index

<http://www.csufresno.edu/folklore/BalladSearch.html>

Writing a Period Ballad

<http://www.dnaco.net/~aleed/ballad/>

Step-by-Step Cards

- Adding a Graphic to a Composer Web Page
- Adding Links in Netscape Composer
- Moving Back and Forth Between Netscape Composer and Navigator
- Publishing Your Web Pages With iTools
- Setting Up an iTools Account
- Using Netscape Composer
- Working with Tables in Netscape Composer

Templates

- Web Ballads Template

Prerequisite Skills

To complete this project successfully, students should be able to do the following:

- use a mouse to navigate through a multimedia application by clicking icons and links
- send and receive email messages
- create and edit simple Web pages using a Web page editor such as Netscape Composer (see the Step-by-Step Cards “Using Netscape Composer,” “Adding a Graphic to a Composer Web Page,” “Moving Back and Forth Between Netscape Composer and Navigator,” and “Adding Links in Netscape Composer”)

Background Information

Here is some information you may find useful as you plan how to implement this project or introduce it to your students.

- Stories can be told or written in two ways: in prose or in verse. The poetic (verse) form of storytelling has ancient roots and includes the epic poems of Homer, songs of the heroic exploits of medieval knights, and the ballads of nineteenth-century American folklore and popular history.
- The difference between prose and verse is that verse pays attention to sound. In traditional forms of verse (such as ballads), this entails a metric structure (a pattern of emphasized and unemphasized syllables) and a rhyming scheme.
- Telling stories in the form of verse (loosely defined) is continued today in various musical genres, including rap, hip hop, and country & western.

Options and Extension Activities

Options

- Recruit a few knowledgeable students to help you set up the class Web site ahead of time.
- This project may be set up so that the partner classroom initiates its own ballads on separate Web sites and solicits the creative assistance of your students, as well as helping your students compose their ballads. This approach will add new dimensions to the project, but require a bit more advance planning.
- If it is possible to give the partner classroom posting privileges for the class Web site (which will be the case if the site is published on an iTools account), you can set up the project so that the partner classroom posts its new stanza to the site directly, instead of emailing it to your students. To do this, the partner classroom downloads a Web page from the site, adds the new stanza with a Web page editor, and then re-uploads the page. Email communication will still be important for coordinating this process.

- Instead of forging a relationship with a single partner classroom, you can create relationships with many classrooms, so that each of your groups has a partner relationship with its own whole classroom.
- Students can take their pictures with digital cameras and post the photos, along with short biographies, on the class Web site.

Extension Activities

- If the ballads have mostly stuck to the same metric pattern or rhythm, they can be put to music. Students can make up a melody to which each stanza can be sung (as a musical verse), and they can perform the ballad in class.
- If a digital camcorder is available, students can be recorded reading (or singing) their ballads, and the video files can be edited with iMovie to make desktop movies that can be included on the ballad Web site. For help using iMovie, visit the “Desktop Movies in Education” Web site.
- Investigate the storytelling traditions of other cultures. One possible focus of study is the stories of Native Americans (a lesson on this topic is in the Extensions in the More section of the Ballads unit in *The Writing Trek*).

The Home-School Connection

- Invite family members to visit the class ballad Web site and to read the ballads posted there.

This Project as a Model

This project suggests a general approach for using the Internet to extend the boundaries of the classroom and engender collaborative work: a creative work is constructed piece by piece through alternate contributions by your students and by those in another classroom. This approach can be applied to other genres of creative works covered in *The Writing Trek*, including modern poetry, mysteries, and science fiction stories.