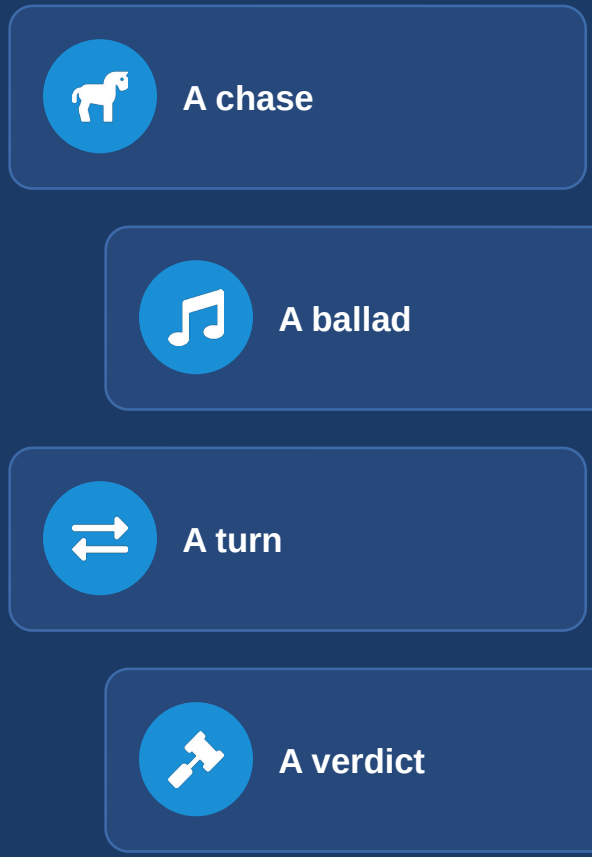
NBE3U Writing Back, Lesson 3

The Ballad Turned

Form and point of view in “The Cattle Thief”



Today's goals

We are learning…

- To analyse how a writer uses and changes a familiar form.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of a text with evidence.

I can…

- Identify features of a ballad and their effects.
- Make inferences about the shift in point of view.
- Explain how two headlines frame one event.
- Evaluate the ending with evidence.

Today's plan

Time	What we're doing	You will…
0–8 min	**Hook**	Discuss
8–22 min	**Read**	Listen
22–40 min	**Form**	Chart
40–55 min	**Headlines**	Write
55–75 min	**Evaluate**	Argue

Warm-up



Think of an old Western movie, song or game. Who is the hero? Who is the outlaw? How do you know before anyone speaks?

Sentence starters

“You can tell the hero because…”

“The outlaw is always shown…”

“The music or rhythm makes you…”

How it works

- Pairs: 3 minutes.

Big idea

Frontier ballads made settlers the heroes and Indigenous people the villains. In “The Cattle Thief,” Johnson borrows that galloping form and its point of view, then turns both inside out. The form is the trap: by the time readers notice whose side the poem is on, they have already been carried along.

The frontier ballad

ballad	A song-like poem that tells a story. *Outlaw ballads made legends of raiders.*
point of view	Whose eyes and values tell the story. *“those desperate English settlers.”*
framing	Choosing words that decide who is hero or villain. *“terror” vs “starved.”*
reversal	A turn that flips the reader's sympathy. *The outlaw is an old, hungry man.*

The ride

They were coming across the prairie, they were galloping hard and fast;
For the eyes of those desperate riders had sighted their man at last—
Sighted him off to Eastward, where the Cree encampment lay,
Where the cotton woods fringed the river, miles and miles away.
Mistake him? Never! Mistake him? the famous Eagle Chief!
That terror to all the settlers, that desperate Cattle Thief—
That monstrous, fearless Indian, who lorded it over the plain,
Who thieved and raided, and scouted, who rode like a hurricane!
But they've tracked him across the prairie; they've followed him hard and fast;
For those desperate English settlers have sighted their man at last.

E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake), "The Cattle Thief," Flint and Feather (1912). Public domain.

Chart the ballad

On page 1, in pairs:

1. Find an example of each ballad feature.
2. Name its effect on a reader in 1895.
3. Mark whose point of view each stanza uses.
4. Find the line where the ballad stops working.

The man they hunted

“Never!” and up from the cotton woods rang the voice of Eagle Chief;
And right out into the open stepped, unarmed, the Cattle Thief.
Was that the game they had coveted? Scarce fifty years had rolled
Over that fleshless, hungry frame, starved to the bone and old;
Over that wrinkled, tawny skin, unfed by the warmth of blood.
Over those hungry, hollow eyes that glared for the sight of food.

E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake), “The Cattle Thief,” Flint and Feather (1912). Public domain.

A new voice

And out into the open, with a courage past belief,
She dashed, and spread her blanket o'er the corpse of the Cattle Thief;
And the words outleapt from her shrunken lips in the language of the Cree,
"If you mean to touch that body, you must cut your way through me."
And that band of cursing settlers dropped backward one by one,
For they knew that an Indian woman roused, was a woman to let alone.

E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake), "The Cattle Thief," Flint and Feather (1912). Public domain.

One event, two newspapers

On page 1:

1. Write the headline the settlers' newspaper would print.
2. Write the headline a Cree community's newspaper would print.
3. Underline the words that do the framing.
4. Explain each choice in one sentence.

Robbed first

“Stand back, stand back, you white-skins, touch that dead man to your shame;
You have stolen my father’s spirit, but his body I only claim.
You have killed him, but you shall not dare to touch him now he’s dead.
You have cursed, and called him a Cattle Thief, though you robbed him first of bread—
Robbed him and robbed my people—look there, at that shrunken face,
Starved with a hollow hunger, we owe to you and your race.
What have you left to us of land, what have you left of game,
What have you brought but evil, and curses since you came?
How have you paid us for our game? how paid us for our land?
By a book, to save our souls from the sins you brought in your other hand.

E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake), “The Cattle Thief,” Flint and Feather (1912). Public domain.

The verdict

Go back with your new religion, we never have understood
Your robbing an Indian's body, and mocking his soul with food.
Go back with your new religion, and find—if find you can—
The honest man you have ever made from out a starving man.
You say your cattle are not ours, your meat is not our meat;
When you pay for the land you live in, we'll pay for the meat we eat.
Give back our land and our country, give back our herds of game;
Give back the furs and the forests that were ours before you came;
Give back the peace and the plenty. Then come with your new belief,
And blame, if you dare, the hunger that drove him to be a thief."

E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake), "The Cattle Thief," Flint and Feather (1912). Public domain.

Model: an evaluation

Task: How effectively does the ending make the poem's argument?

The ending is highly effective because it answers the title. The settlers have called the old man a thief, and the daughter turns that word around: “When you pay for the land you live in, we'll pay for the meat we eat.” Her logic is simple enough for any reader to follow, and it uses the settlers' own idea of payment against them. One limitation is that a reader in 1895 could dismiss her as “raving,” the poem's own word, but that word now exposes the narrator's bias rather than hers.

Why it works

Clear judgment first.

Evidence from the text.

Weighs a limitation.

Your evaluation

On page 2:

1. Rate the ending's effectiveness.
2. Give two points with quotations.
3. Add one limitation or counter-point.
4. Write your overall judgment.

Exit ticket

1. The line where the ballad turns.

2. One headline and the word that frames it.

3. Your verdict on the ending, in one sentence.

Next class: Christie's Argument.

Teacher reveal

The ballad turned: key points

Ballad features: Long galloping lines, a chase, a named hero or outlaw, repetition (“hard and fast,” “sighted their man at last”).

Borrowed point of view: The first stanza sounds like the settlers' own ballad: “That terror to all the settlers.”

The turn: The feared raider steps out unarmed: “starved to the bone and old.”

Second voice: His daughter speaks “in the language of the Cree” and takes over the poem.

Headlines: “Notorious Cattle Thief Shot” vs “Starving Elder Killed on Open Plain”: framing chooses the hero.

Evaluation: The ending works because it turns the settlers' language of theft back on them: “When you pay for the land you live in, we'll pay for the meat we eat.”