

Lesson Name : 43

Lesson Title : The Ballad of Casey Jones

Course Name : English 2 Part 3 [Honors]

Task Id : 57713685

Course Id : 15021



Essential Instruction



Please read ["The Ballad of Casey Jones."](#)

Use your digital notebook to keep notes about new vocabulary and definitions that you may need to reference later.

Understanding Folk Songs

You can't discuss the concept of folktales without mentioning the concept of the **folk song**: a simple, traditional song that tells a story about a folk hero. "The Ballad of Casey Jones" is one such example, because it tells the story of a real man, Casey Jones, who became a legend.

Casey Jones was a railroad engineer who worked for the Illinois Central Railroad. On the morning of April 30, 1900, he was killed while trying to stop his passenger train from crashing into a freight train. He slowed the train down enough to save every single life except his own, and he became a legend as railroad workers made up songs about his bravery and sacrifice.

As you read the song's lyrics, can you identify the elements of a folktale, such as humor, folksy language and exaggeration? Well, this is a tragic story, so we wouldn't necessarily call it humorous. But we do have folksy language, such as "Come all you rounders if you want to hear ..."

What about exaggeration? It's not as obvious here as it is in, say, the folktales about Paul Bunyan. Instead, the exaggeration is more subtle: The song depicts Jones as somewhat larger than life, the "greatest of all heroes of a railroad man."

Other famous American **folk songs** include "I've Been Working on the Railroad," "John Brown's Body" and "Yankee Doodle." In simpler times, **folk songs** were a memorable way to pass down stories from one generation to the next. They could also serve as propaganda! For example, the song "John Brown's Body," about a brave anti-slavery activist, helped spread the message about the need to end slavery in America.

Idioms

Like most folk songs, "The Ballad of Casey Jones" uses simple language. So, rather than focusing on specific vocabulary words today, let's talk about the concept of **idioms**.

An **idiom** is figurative language whose meaning can't be determined based on the words alone. For example, when we say that someone has "kicked the bucket," we're not talking about actually kicking a bucket. Instead, the phrase is an **idiom** that means "died." As you might imagine, **idioms** cause lots of problems for translators and people who are learning a new language!

Because folk songs and folktales are rooted in the tradition of oral storytelling, **idioms** crop up frequently in these tales. For example, in “The Ballad of Casey Jones,” we find idioms such as “journey to the Promised Land” (death) and “on the dot” (on time). Do you notice any others?



[Open Video in New Tab](#)

