

# Reading Questions: Prompt Sheet

## The Highwayman by Alfred Noyes

### Reading Questions and Answers

#### Is Tim an important character?

- Yes. We can assume that Tim is responsible for betraying Bess and the highwayman to the authorities. His untold actions are central to the entire poem.

#### Why does he feature in only one stanza?

- Tim only features in one stanza because his actions here, and the events we can infer happen because of his actions, are sufficiently communicated in this one stanza. It also represents that, although his actions lead the events that unfold, he is on the sidelines and unimportant to Bess and the highwayman. The poem is their love story.

#### What words/phrases are used to describe Tim? What impression does this create of the character?

- Tim is described as having a 'white and peaked' face and eyes that are 'hollows of madness'. This creates an alarming image of a man who is crazy looking. His hair is 'like mouldy hay' which suggests he is unkempt and dirty. We get the impression that Tim is a lowly character, prone to skulking around in the inn-yard spying on Bess.

#### Why would Tim betray Bess to the red-coats if he loved her?

- As Tim is seemingly quite mad and unstable he may not have fully thought through the potential consequences of his actions. He may have believed that the highwayman would be captured, leaving Bess free for himself.

#### Do you think Tim intended the outcome that occurred?

- It is not likely that Tim intended for Bess to be hurt or killed. His aim was more likely to rid himself of the highwayman so that Bess might then notice him.

#### What do you think Bess thought of Tim?

- It is likely that Bess barely noticed or acknowledged Tim's existence. She may well have regarded him as the lowly stable-hand and not thought much of him at all. Her attentions lay elsewhere.

#### What do Bess's actions tell us about her character?

- Her actions throughout show us the strength of love she felt for the highwayman. She reveals herself to be selfless and brave when she sacrifices her own life in an attempt to save his.

#### Who do you think is to blame for what happened?

- It can be argued that Tim is to blame. If he had not informed the red-coats about Bess's highwayman, the lovers may not have lost their lives.

#### Who do you think the different characters feel are to blame for what happened?

- Tim may feel that the highwayman is to blame as he should not be so brazen as to visit Bess and put her at risk. Bess may blame Tim if she knew of his feelings and actions. She might feel that he should mind his own business and leave her alone. The highwayman might blame the red-coats as they are always harassing him and looking for an opportunity to capture and kill him.

## Deeper Reading

### If the characters could rewind time how do you think they might have behaved differently?

- Tim might have decided to confront Bess and try to lure her away from the highwayman. Bess might have decided to take a horse and leave the inn to try and find the highwayman herself. The highwayman might have threatened or disposed of Tim so he could not betray him to the red-coats.

