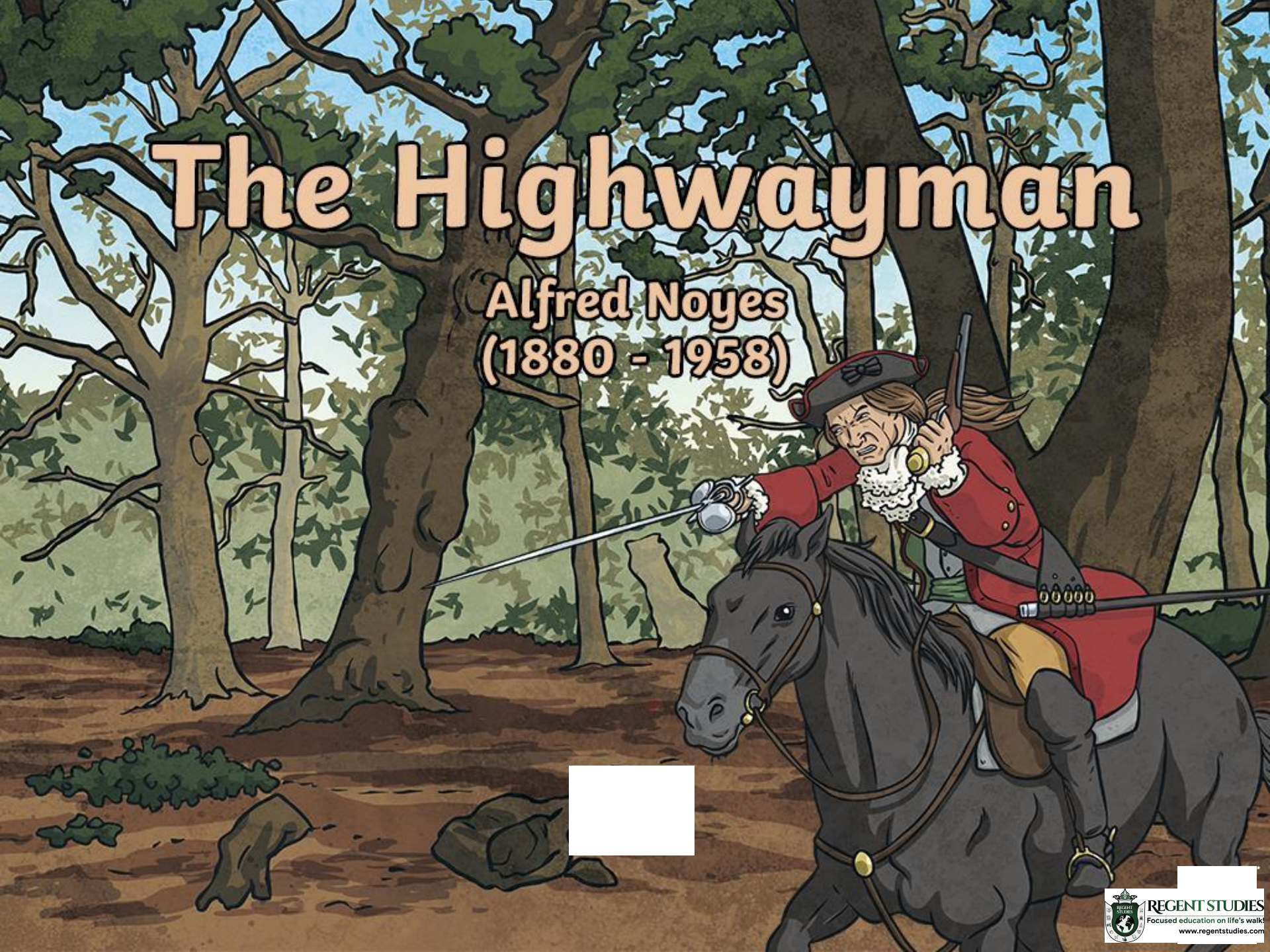
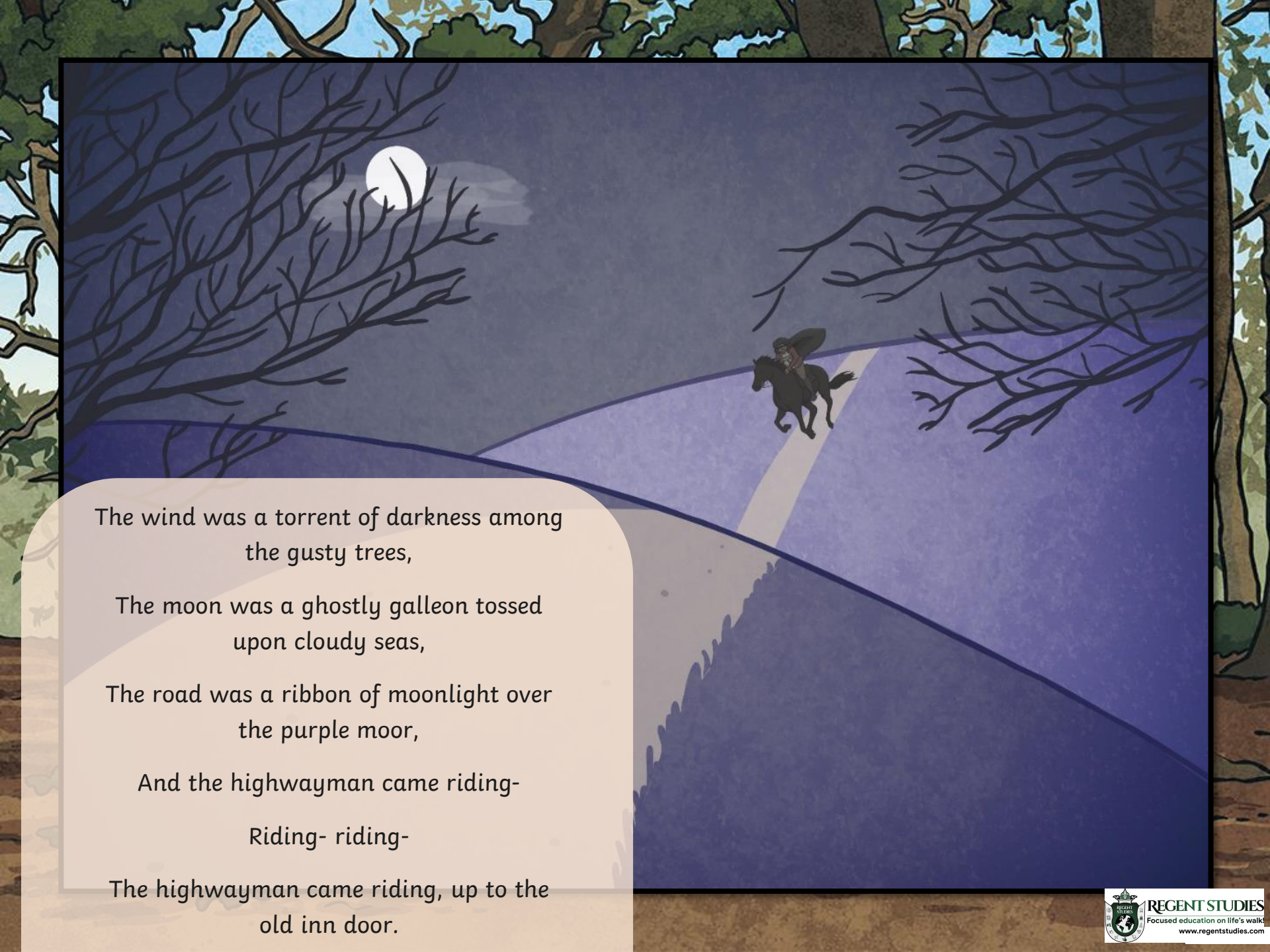


The Highwayman

Alfred Noyes
(1880 - 1958)





The wind was a torrent of darkness among
the gusty trees,

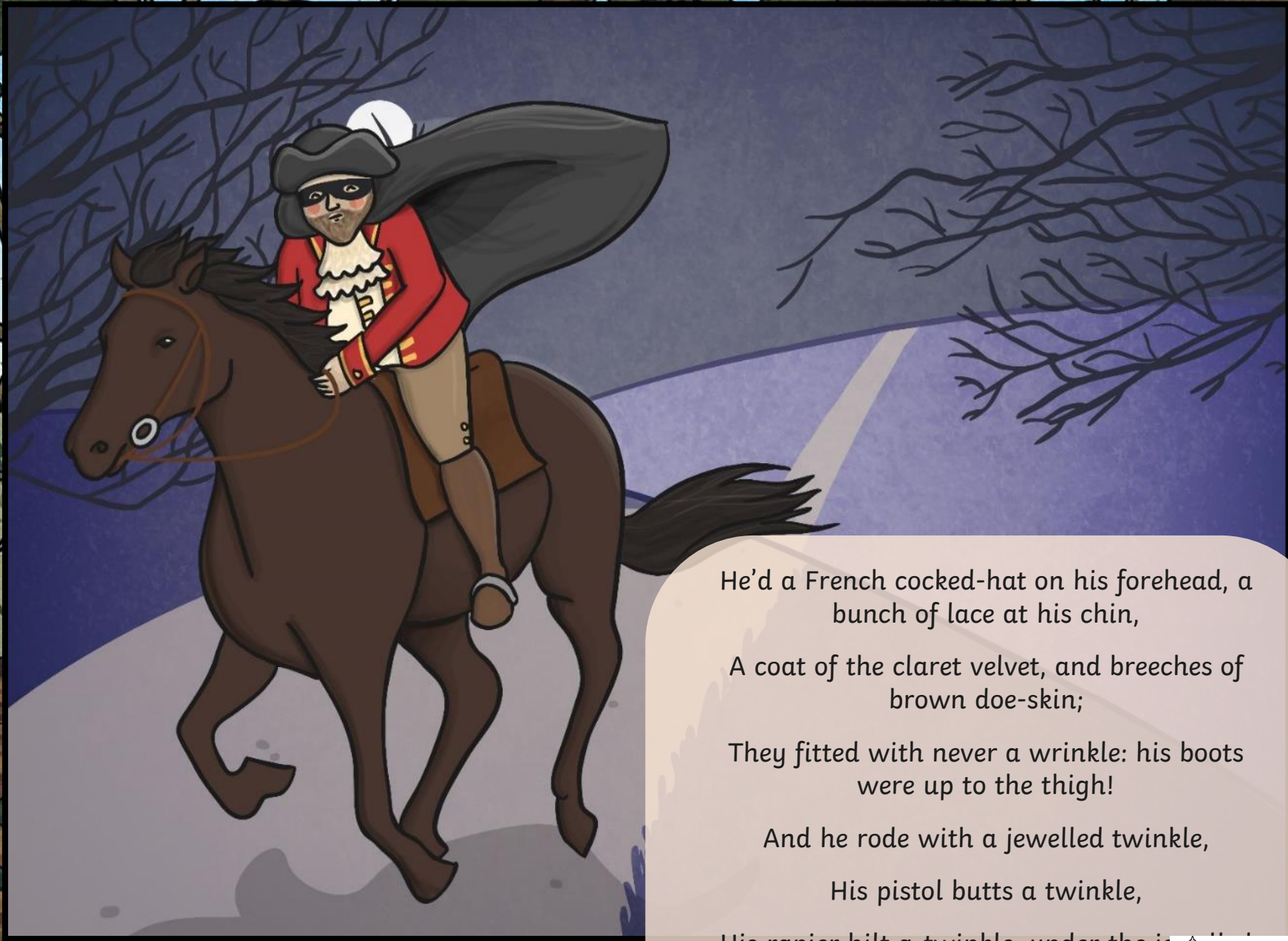
The moon was a ghostly galleon tossed
upon cloudy seas,

The road was a ribbon of moonlight over
the purple moor,


And the highwayman came riding-

Riding- riding-

The highwayman came riding, up to the
old inn door.



He'd a French cocked-hat on his forehead, a
bunch of lace at his chin,
A coat of the claret velvet, and breeches of
brown doe-skin;
They fitted with never a wrinkle: his boots
were up to the thigh!
And he rode with a jewelled twinkle,
His pistol butts a twinkle,
His rapier hilt a-twinkle, under the jewelled
sky.

An illustration of a man in a red coat and black hood riding a brown horse. He is looking towards a window where a woman with long black hair and a purple dress is looking out. The scene is set in an inn-yard with a large wooden door and a window with shutters. The background shows trees and a blue sky.

Over the cobbles he clattered and clashed in the
dark inn-yard,

And he tapped with his whip on the shutters, but
all was locked and barred;

He whistled a tune to the window, and who
should be waiting there

But the landlord's black-eyed daughter,

Bess, the landlord's daughter,

Plaiting a dark red love-knot into her long black
hair.



And dark in the old inn-yard a stable-wicket
creaked

Where Tim the ostler listened; his face was
white and peaked;

His eyes were hollows of madness, his hair like
mouldy hay,

But he loved the landlord's daughter,

The landlord's red-lipped daughter,

Dumb as a dog he listened, and he heeded
robber say.



“One kiss, my bonny sweetheart, I’m after a
prize to-night,
But I shall be back with the yellow gold before
the morning light;
Yet, if they press me sharply, and harry me
through the day,
Then look for me by moonlight,
Watch for me by moonlight,
I’ll come to thee by moonlight, though hell
should bar the way.”



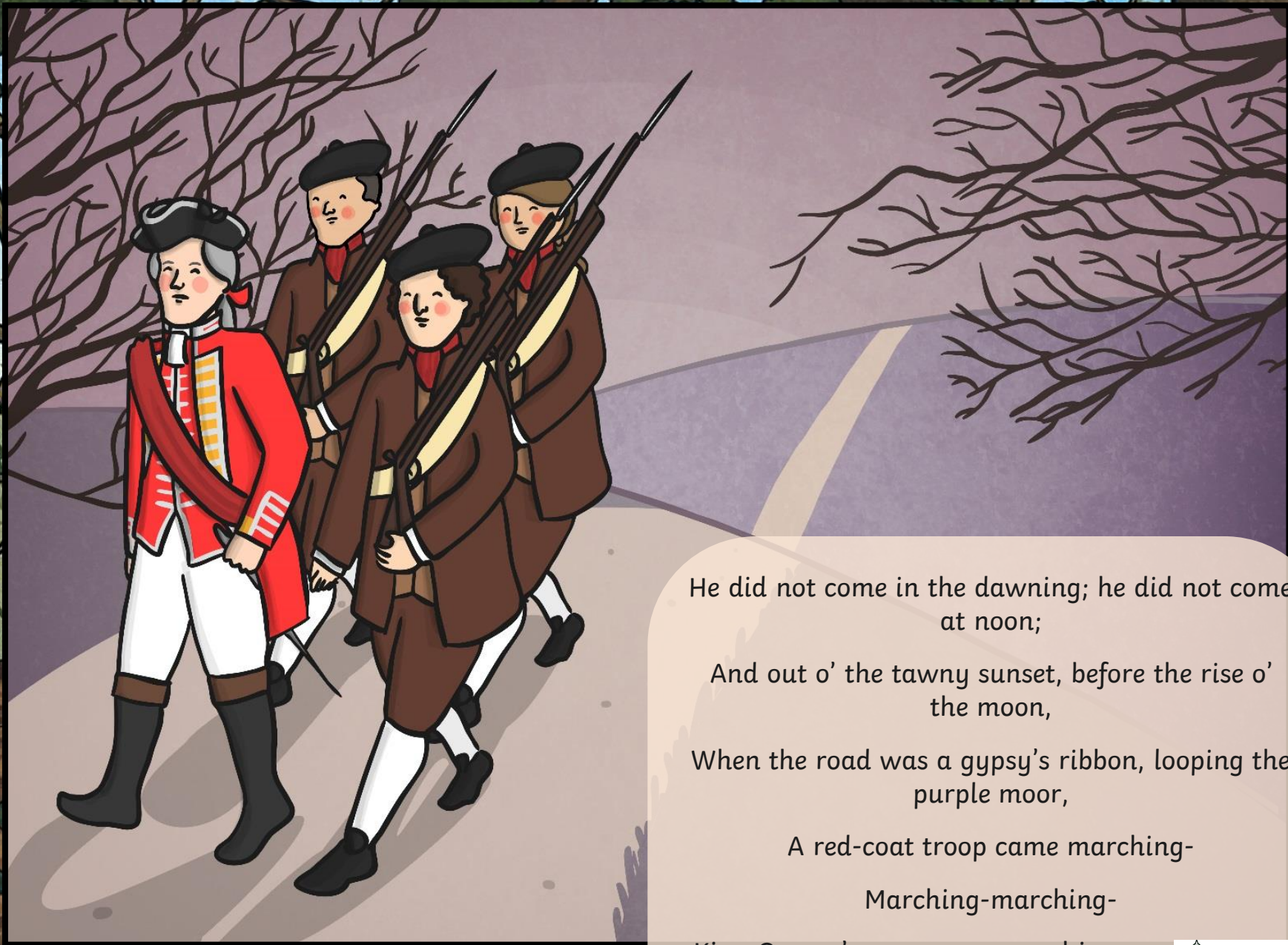
He rose upright in the stirrups; he scarce
could reach her hand,

But she loosened her hair i' the casement! His
face burnt like a brand

As the black cascade of perfume came
tumbling over his breast;

And he kissed its waves in the moonlight,
(Oh, sweet black waves in the moonlight!)

Then he tugged at his rein in the moonlight,
and galloped away to the west.



He did not come in the dawning; he did not come
at noon;

And out o' the tawny sunset, before the rise o'
the moon,

When the road was a gypsy's ribbon, looping the
purple moor,

A red-coat troop came marching-

Marching-marching-

King George's men came marching, up
inn-door.



They said no word to the landlord,
they drank his ale instead,

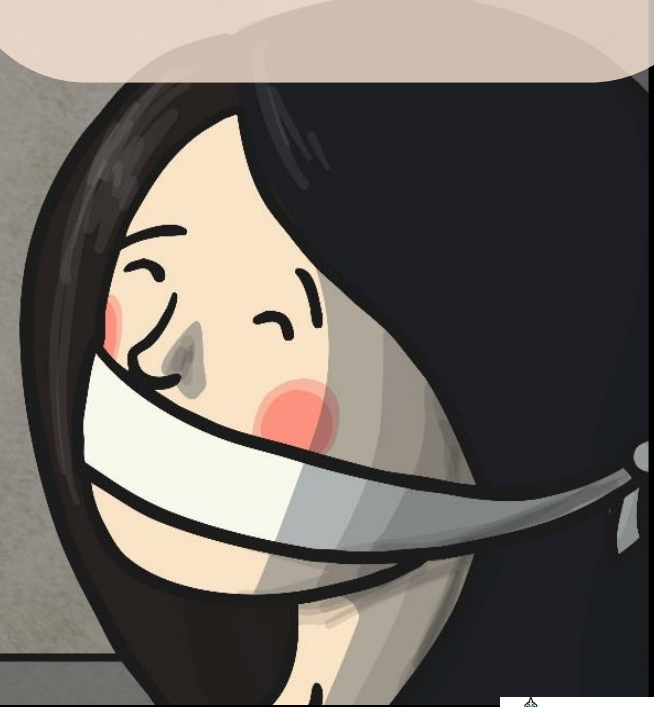
But they gagged his daughter and
bound her to the foot of her narrow
bed;

Two of them knelt at her casement,
with muskets at their side!

There was death at every window;

And hell at one dark window;

For Bess could see, through the
casement, the road that he would ride.





They had tied her up to attention, with
many a sniggering jest;

They bound a musket beside her, with
muzzle beneath her breast!

“Now keep good watch!” and they
kissed her.

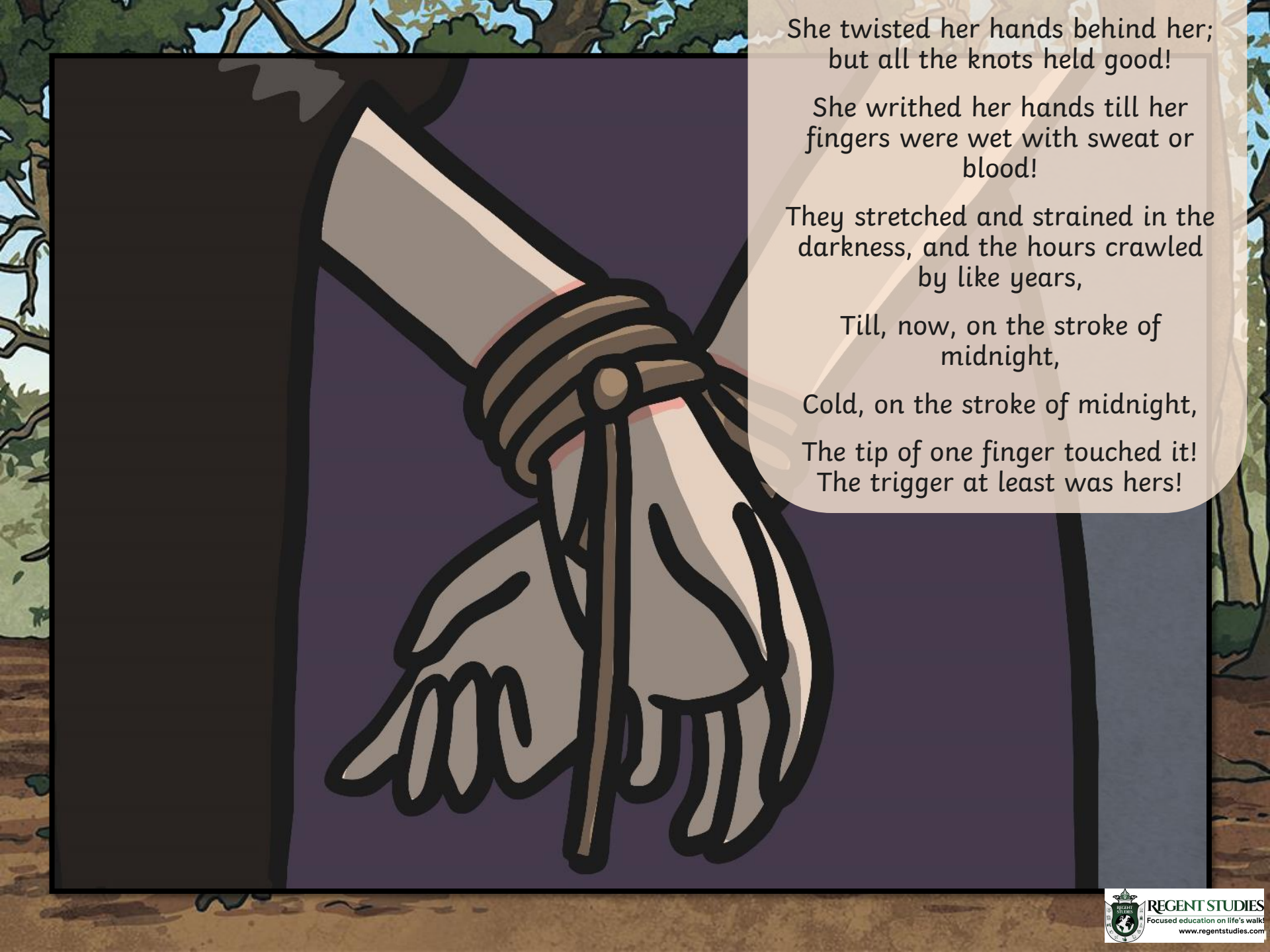
She heard the dead man say-

Look for me by moonlight;

Watch for me by moonlight;

I’ll come to thee by moonlight, though
hell should bar the way!



An illustration of a hand tied to a tree trunk. The hand is light-skinned and is bound to a dark brown tree trunk with several thick, brown, horizontal bands of rope or fabric. A thin, light-brown wooden stick is pushed through the palm of the hand, held in place by the binding. The background is a dark purple, suggesting a night scene. The top and bottom edges of the image show green foliage and a brown ground surface.

She twisted her hands behind her;
but all the knots held good!


She writhed her hands till her
fingers were wet with sweat or
blood!

They stretched and strained in the
darkness, and the hours crawled
by like years,

Till, now, on the stroke of
midnight,

Cold, on the stroke of midnight,

The tip of one finger touched it!
The trigger at least was hers!



The tip of one finger touched it; she strove
no more for the rest!


Up, she stood up to attention, with the
muzzle beneath her breast,

She would not risk their hearing; she
would not strive again;

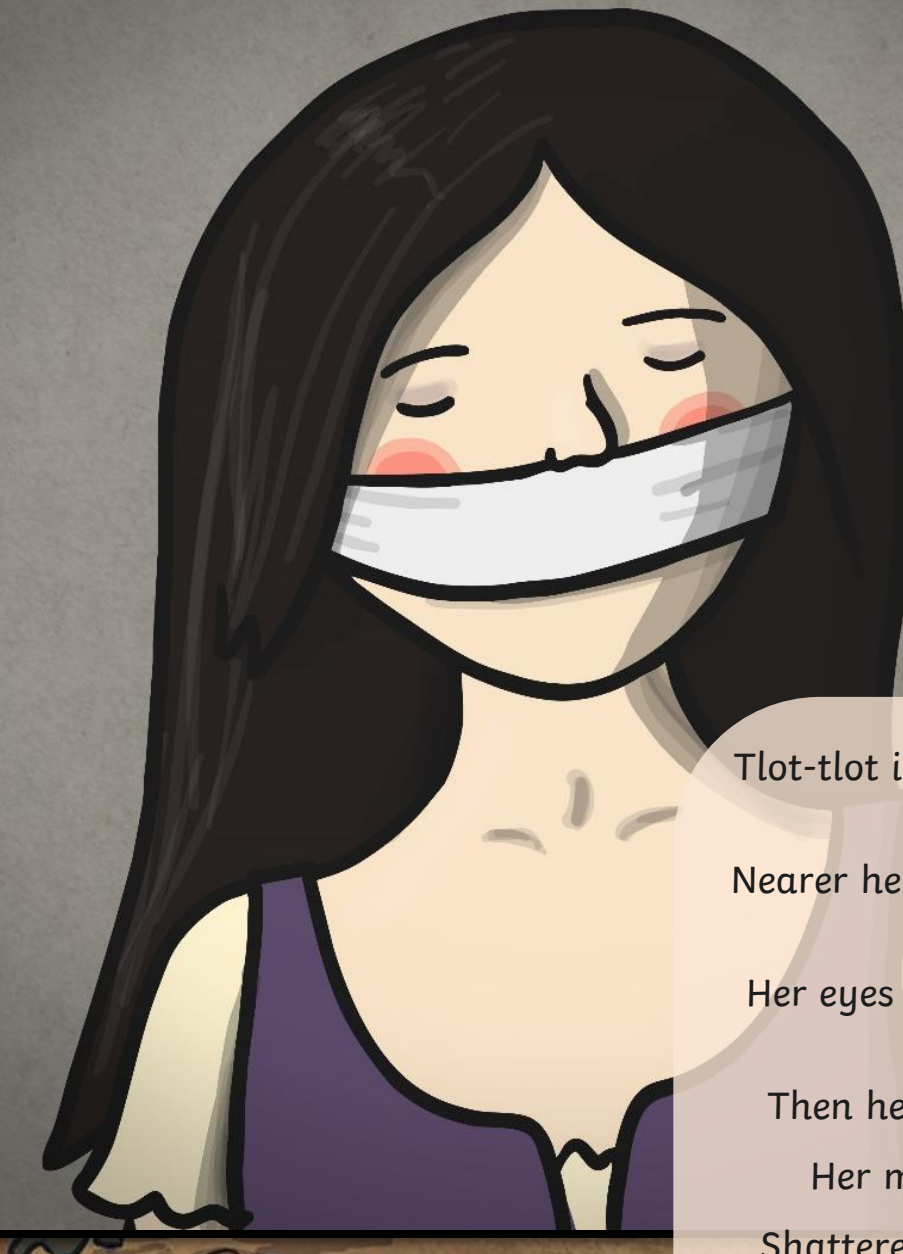
For the road lay bare in the moonlight;

Blank and bare in the moonlight;

And the blood of her veins in the moonlight
throbbed to her love's refrain.



Plot-plot; tlot-tlot! Had they heard it? The horse-
hoofs ringing clear;
Tlot-tlot, tlot-tlot, in the distance? Were they deaf
that they did not hear?
Down the ribbon of moonlight, over the brow of
the hill,
The highwayman came riding,
Riding, riding!
The red-coats looked to their priming! She stood
up straight and still!



Plot-plot in the frosty silence! Plot-plot, in the
echoing night!

Nearer he came and nearer! Her face was like
a light!

Her eyes grew wide for a moment; she drew
one last deep breath,

Then her fingers moved in the moonlight,

Her musket shattered the moonlight,

Shattered her breast in the moonlight
warned him with her death.



He turned; he spurred to the west; he did not
know who stood

Bowed, with her head o'er the musket, drenched
with her own red blood!

Not till the dawn he heard it, his face grew grey
to hear

How Bess, the landlord's daughter,
The landlord's black-eyed daughter,

Had watched for her love in the moon!
died in the darkness there.

Back, he spurred like a madman,
shrieking a curse to the sky,

With the white road smoking behind
him and his rapier brandished high!

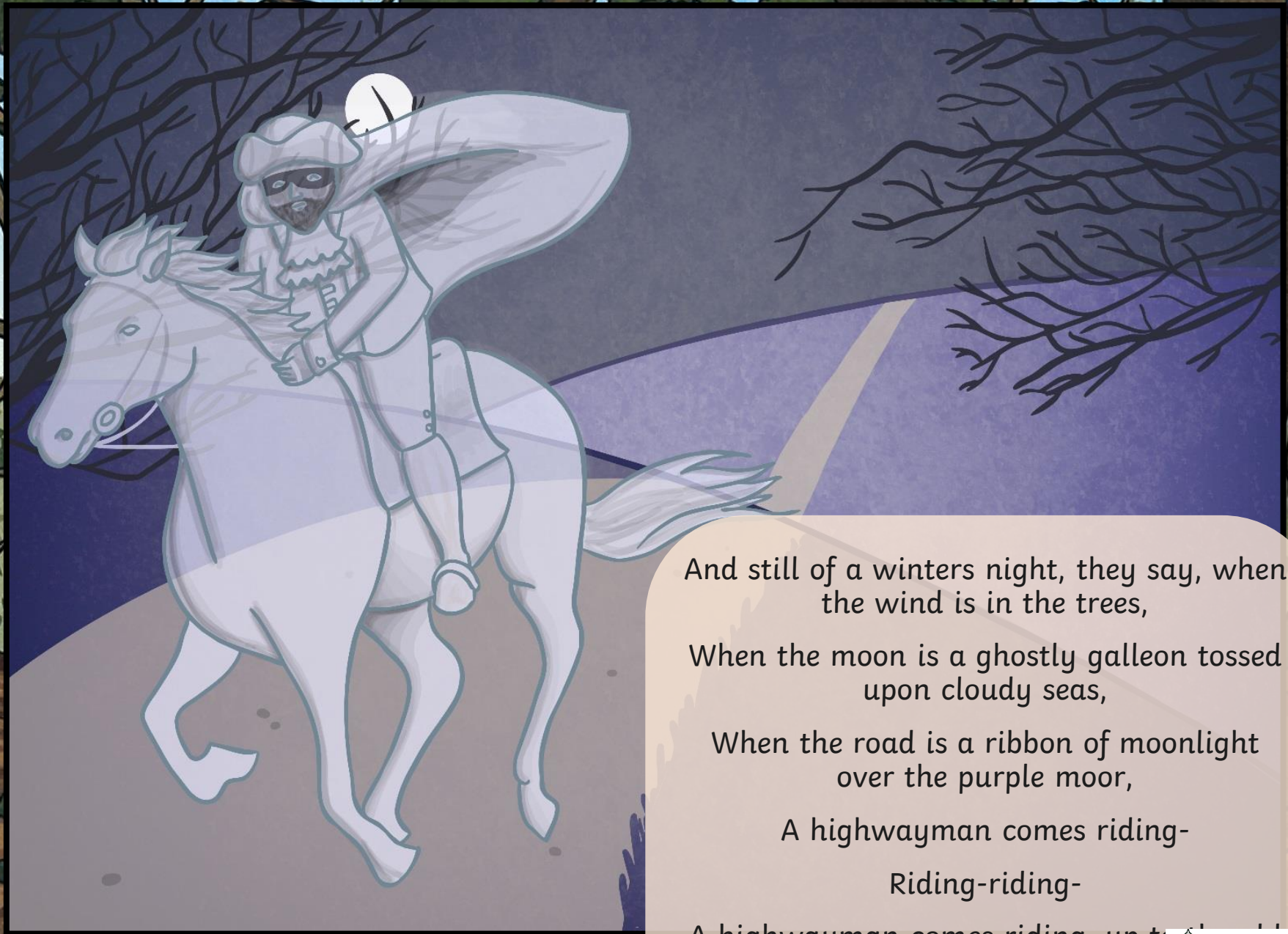
Blood-red were his spurs i' the golden
noon; wine-red was his velvet coat,

When they shot him down on the
highway,

Down like a dog on the highway,

And he lay in his blood on the
highway, with the bunch of lace at his
throat.





And still of a winters night, they say, when
the wind is in the trees,


When the moon is a ghostly galleon tossed
upon cloudy seas,

When the road is a ribbon of moonlight
over the purple moor,

A highwayman comes riding-

Riding-riding-

A highwayman comes riding, up to the
inn-door.

An illustration of a man in a white tunic and a black hood riding a white horse. He is looking towards a woman with long black hair and a red braid who is leaning out of a window with brown shutters. The scene is set in an inn-yard with trees and a stone wall in the background.

Over the cobbles he clatters and clangs in the
dark inn-yard,

And he taps with his whip on the shutters, but all
is locked and barred;

He whistles a tune to the window, and who
should be waiting there

But the landlord's black-eyed daughter,

Bess, the landlord's daughter,

Plaiting a dark red love-knot into her long black
hair.

