At length the judge did me address,
Which filled with pain my aching breast:
“To Botany Bay you will be conveyed,
For seven years a Convict Maid.”

For seven long years! Oh, how I sighed,
While my poor mother loudly cried.
My lover wept, and thus he said:
“May God be with my Convict Maid.”

To you that hear my mournful tale,
I cannot half my grief reveal.
No sorrow yet has been portrayed
Like that of the poor Convict Maid.

Far from my friends and home so dear,
My punishment is most severe.
My woe is great and I’m afraid
That I shall die a Convict Maid.

Botany Bay: the place the first fleet of convict ships landed
seven years: The most common sentences were seven, fourteen and twenty years.

I toll each day in grief and pain,
And sleepless through the night remain.
My constant toils are unrepaid,
And wretched is the Convict Maid.

Oh, could I but once more be free,
I’d never again a captive be,
But I would seek some honest trade,
And never become a Convict Maid.

Ballads like “The Convict Maid” told stories of mournful convicts who regnated their crimes. These ballads had a strong moral message, and were probably meant to deter people from committing crimes. Many real convicts were defiant about their harsh sentences, though. There is a record of one Irish woman shouting, “Hurray for Sydney and the sky above her!” when she was sentenced to transportation.

Strategy to Skill
1. (Literal comprehension) Why did the British government decide to send convicts to Australia?
2. (Making inferences – fact and opinion) Which word about the purpose of convict ballads suggests it might be the author’s opinion?
3. (Making inferences – problem and solution) What does the Convict Maid see as a solution to her problem?
4. (Making inferences – cause and effect) What were two reasons for sending convicts to Australia?
5. (Making inferences – main points and bigger idea) Why do you think the convicts were forced to watch the hanging of fellow convicts?
6. (Making inferences – visual elements) Why do you think the soldiers guarding the convicts in the illustration on page 2 have weapons?
7. (Response) How do you feel about the penalties that were inflicted on the convicts in relation to the crimes they committed?