

'PAUL REVERE'S MIDNIGHT RIDE'

BY HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

(POEM)

Listen my children and you shall hear
Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere,
On the eighteenth of April, in Seventy-five;
Hardly a man is now alive
Who remembers that famous day and year.

He said to his friend, "If the British march
By land or sea from the town to-night,
Hang a lantern aloft in the belfry arch
Of the North Church tower as a signal light,—
One if by land, and two if by sea;
And I on the opposite shore will be,
Ready to ride and spread the alarm
Through every Middlesex village and farm,
For the country folk to be up and to arm."

Then he said "Good-night!" and with muffled oar
Silently rowed to the Charlestown shore,
Just as the moon rose over the bay,
Where swinging wide at her moorings lay
The Somerset, British man-of-war;
A phantom ship, with each mast and spar
Across the moon like a prison bar,
And a huge black hulk, that was magnified
By its own reflection in the tide.

Meanwhile, his friend through alley and street
Wanders and watches, with eager ears,
Till in the silence around him he hears
The muster of men at the barrack door,

The sound of arms, and the tramp of feet,
And the measured tread of the grenadiers,
Marching down to their boats on the shore.

Then he climbed the tower of the Old North Church,
By the wooden stairs, with stealthy tread,
To the belfry chamber overhead,
And startled the pigeons from their perch
On the sombre rafters, that round him made
Masses and moving shapes of shade,—
By the trembling ladder, steep and tall,
To the highest window in the wall,
Where he paused to listen and look down
A moment on the roofs of the town
And the moonlight flowing over all.

Beneath, in the churchyard, lay the dead,
In their night encampment on the hill,
Wrapped in silence so deep and still
That he could hear, like a sentinel's tread,
The watchful night-wind, as it went
Creeping along from tent to tent,
And seeming to whisper, "All is well!"
A moment only he feels the spell
Of the place and the hour, and the secret dread
Of the lonely belfry and the dead;
For suddenly all his thoughts are bent
On a shadowy something far away,
Where the river widens to meet the bay,—
A line of black that bends and floats
On the rising tide like a bridge of boats.

Meanwhile, impatient to mount and ride,
Booted and spurred, with a heavy stride
On the opposite shore walked Paul Revere.
Now he patted his horse's side,
Now he gazed at the landscape far and near,
Then, impetuous, stamped the earth,

And turned and tightened his saddle girth;
But mostly he watched with eager search
The belfry tower of the Old North Church,
As it rose above the graves on the hill,
Lonely and spectral and sombre and still.
And lo! as he looks, on the belfry's height
A glimmer, and then a gleam of light!
He springs to the saddle, the bridle he turns,
But lingers and gazes, till full on his sight
A second lamp in the belfry burns.

A hurry of hoofs in a village street,
A shape in the moonlight, a bulk in the dark,
And beneath, from the pebbles, in passing, a spark
Struck out by a steed flying fearless and fleet;
That was all! And yet, through the gloom and the light,
The fate of a nation was riding that night;
And the spark struck out by that steed, in his flight,
Kindled the land into flame with its heat.
He has left the village and mounted the steep,
And beneath him, tranquil and broad and deep,
Is the Mystic, meeting the ocean tides;
And under the alders that skirt its edge,
Now soft on the sand, now loud on the ledge,
Is heard the tramp of his steed as he rides.

It was twelve by the village clock
When he crossed the bridge into Medford town.
He heard the crowing of the cock,
And the barking of the farmer's dog,
And felt the damp of the river fog,
That rises after the sun goes down.

It was one by the village clock,
When he galloped into Lexington.
He saw the gilded weathercock
Swim in the moonlight as he passed,
And the meeting-house windows, black and bare,
Gaze at him with a spectral glare,
As if they already stood aghast
At the bloody work they would look upon.

It was two by the village clock,
When he came to the bridge in Concord town.
He heard the bleating of the flock,
And the twitter of birds among the trees,
And felt the breath of the morning breeze
Blowing over the meadow brown.
And one was safe and asleep in his bed
Who at the bridge would be first to fall,
Who that day would be lying dead,
Pierced by a British musket ball.

You know the rest. In the books you have read
How the British Regulars fired and fled,—
How the farmers gave them ball for ball,
From behind each fence and farmyard wall,
Chasing the redcoats down the lane,
Then crossing the fields to emerge again

Under the trees at the turn of the road,
And only pausing to fire and load.

So through the night rode Paul Revere;
And so through the night went his cry of alarm
To every Middlesex village and farm,—
A cry of defiance, and not of fear,
A voice in the darkness, a knock at the door,
And a word that shall echo for evermore!
For, borne on the night-wind of the Past,
Through all our history, to the last,
In the hour of darkness and peril and need,
The people will waken and listen to hear
The hurrying hoof-beats of that steed,
And the midnight message of Paul Revere.

Source: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow © 1861

Questions for "Paul Revere's Midnight Ride" by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

LEVEL 1

General Understanding

- What was the purpose of Paul Revere's ride?
- Who are the people involved in this poem?
- Was Paul Revere successful given his purpose? How do you know?
- What time period is Longfellow referring to?
- What was life like back in 1775?

Key Details

- What were the modes of transportation used by people of this time?
- How was war fought in 1775?
- Who was America at battle with in 1775? Why?
- How did Paul Revere and his friend communicate given the distance between them?
- What was the friend's mission?
- How is the cemetery described? What imagery is Longfellow creating by describing it this way?
- Using evidence from the text, describe Paul Revere and his friend's actions and emotions although they are across the river from one another.
- Describe Paul Revere's friend's response when he goes to the belfry. How does Longfellow describe his actions and ultimately, his emotions?

LEVEL 2

Vocabulary

- Where does the author refer to death? Why is this repeated throughout the poem?
- Who is the "spark" that Longfellow writes of?
- What is the Mystic?
- Some could say the moon is its own character in the poem. What role does the moon have in this event? How is the moon described?

Structure

- How does Longfellow's use of foreshadowing influence the tone of the poem?
- How does foreshadowing affect your understanding of the events of the poem?
- How does the use of rhyme influence you as a reader?

- Describe the passage of time in the poem. How much time has passed from the beginning of the poem to the end?
- How would you describe the tone of the poem?

Author's Craft

- Which poetic devices does Longfellow use in this poem? Explain their effectiveness.
- What roles do light and darkness have in this poem?
- Where in the poem does Longfellow speak directly to the reader? How does this influence you as the reader?

LEVEL 3

Author's Purpose

- Who is the intended audience of this poem? Why do you think that?
- Longfellow writes, "The fate of a nation was riding that night." What does this mean? What might have happened had the Americans not been notified of the British coming?

Intertextual Connections

- What was Paul Revere's message in the text? What was Longfellow's message to the reader in writing this poem?
- Longfellow writes, "And a word that shall echo for evermore!" What word is he referring to?
- Compare this poem to the actual events of Paul Revere's ride. A short comparison text for this purpose can be found at *The Paul Revere House* website: <http://www.paulreverehouse.org/ride/real.html>.

LEVEL 4

Opinion With Evidence or Argument

- How does Longfellow's poem compare to the actual events of the night of April 18, 1775?
- Does Longfellow accurately portray Paul Revere and his actions? Why or why not?
- Why did Longfellow intentionally choose to write an inaccurate poem?
- Longfellow writes, "A cry of defiance, and not of fear." How is this reflected in modern-day rebellion and or war?