



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

## Paul Revere's Ride

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow  
1860

*Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882) was an American poet. This piece, written nearly a century after the events occurred, tells the story of Paul Revere, whose ride through greater Boston one night in 1775 helped spark the American Revolution. While not entirely historically accurate, the poem popularized the tale most Americans know today. Told from the perspective of an innkeeper, the poem recounts Revere's midnight ride as he warns colonists of approaching British soldiers. Written in 1860 when America was on the verge of Civil War, Longfellow intended for the poem to be a call to action, reminding supporters of the northern Union that history favors the courageous. As you read, consider the similarities between the urgency of Revere's ride and the problem of slavery, and take notes on how Longfellow's use of imagery contributes to the mood and spirit of the piece.*

- [1] Listen, my children, and you shall hear  
Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere,  
On the eighteenth of April, in Seventy-Five:<sup>1</sup>  
Hardly a man is now alive  
[5] 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<sup>2</sup>  
Of the North-Church-tower,<sup>3</sup> as a signal-light, —  
[10] 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<sup>4</sup> village and farm,  
For the country-folk to be up and to arm."<sup>5</sup>



*"Boston - North End: Paul Revere" by Wally Gobetz is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.*

- [15] Then he said "Good night!" and with muffled oar<sup>6</sup>  
Silently rowed to the Charlestown<sup>7</sup> shore,  
Just as the moon rose over the bay,  
Where swinging wide at her moorings<sup>8</sup> lay  
The Somerset,<sup>9</sup> British man-of-war:  
[20] A phantom ship, with each mast and spar<sup>10</sup>  
Across the moon, like a prison-bar,  
And a huge black hulk, that was magnified  
By its own reflection in the tide.

1. referring to 1775
2. a bell tower
3. The North Church is the oldest standing church in Boston and is now considered a National Landmark.
4. Middlesex county in Massachusetts.
5. "To arms" means to ready their guns (arms) for battle.
6. a paddle used for rowing a boat
7. Charlestown is the oldest neighborhood in Boston, north of the Charles River.
8. The place where a boat or a ship is secured in water while it is not in use.

Meanwhile, his friend,<sup>11</sup> through alley and street  
[25] Wanders and watches with eager ears,  
Till in the silence around him he hears  
The muster of men at the barrack<sup>12</sup> door,  
The sound of arms, and the tramp of feet,  
And the measured tread<sup>13</sup> of the grenadiers<sup>14</sup>  
[30] Marching down to their boats on the shore.

Then he climbed to the tower of the church,  
Up the wooden stairs, with stealthy tread,  
To the belfry-chamber overhead,  
And startled the pigeons from their perch  
[35] On the sombre<sup>15</sup> 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  
[40] 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  
[45] That he could hear, like a sentinel's<sup>16</sup> 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  
[50] 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, —  
[55] A line of black, that bends and floats  
On the rising tide, like a bridge of boats.

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9. The HMS Somerset was a ship in the British Royal Navy.

10. the rigging of a sailing ship

11. an unnamed friend of Revere back in Boston

12. a place where soldiers are housed

13. **Tread (verb):** to walk or step

14. Here, grenadier refers to the British soldiers.

15. **Somber (adjective):** grave or serious in mood; gloomy

16. a guard or watchman

Meanwhile, impatient to mount and ride,  
Booted and spurred, with a heavy stride,  
On the opposite shore walked Paul Revere.

- [60] Now he patted his horse's side,  
Now gazed on the landscape far and near,  
Then impetuous<sup>17</sup> stamped the earth,  
And turned and tightened his saddle-girth;<sup>18</sup>  
But mostly he watched with eager search  
[65] The belfry-tower of the old North Church,  
As it rose above the graves on the hill,  
Lonely and spectral<sup>19</sup> and sombre and still.  
And lo! as he looks, on the belfry's height,  
A glimmer, and then a gleam of light!  
[70] 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,  
[75] And beneath from the pebbles, in passing, a spark  
Struck out by a steed<sup>20</sup> that flies fearless and fleet:<sup>21</sup>  
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,  
[80] Kindled the land into flame with its heat.

- He has left the village and mounted the steep,  
And beneath him, tranquil<sup>22</sup> and broad and deep,  
Is the Mystic,<sup>23</sup> meeting the ocean tides;  
And under the alders,<sup>24</sup> that skirt its edge,  
[85] 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,  
[90] And the barking of the farmer's dog,  
And felt the damp of the river-fog,  
That rises when the sun goes down.

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17. **Impetuous** (*adjective*): acting quickly or thoughtlessly

18. A saddle-girth is a piece of equipment used to keep a horse's saddle in place.

19. **Spectral** (*adjective*): of or like a ghost; otherworldly

20. a riding horse

21. **Fleet** (*adjective*): fast and nimble in movement

22. **Tranquil** (*adjective*): calm or peaceful

23. the Mystic River in Massachusetts

24. Alders refers to a type of deciduous tree.

It was one by the village clock,  
When he galloped into Lexington.  
[95] He saw the gilded weathercock<sup>25</sup>  
Swim in the moonlight as he passed,  
And the meeting-house windows, blank and bare,  
Gaze at him with a spectral glare,  
As if they already stood aghast<sup>26</sup>  
[100] 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<sup>27</sup> of the flock,  
And the twitter of birds among the trees,  
[105] And felt the breath of the morning breeze  
Blowing over the meadows brown.  
And one<sup>28</sup> was safe and asleep in his bed  
Who at the bridge would be first to fall,  
Who that day would be lying dead,  
[110] Pierced by a British musket-ball.<sup>29</sup>

You know the rest. In the books you have read,  
How the British Regulars<sup>30</sup> fired and fled, —  
How the farmers gave them ball for ball,  
From behind each fence and farmyard-wall,  
[115] Chasing the red-coats 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;  
[120] And so through the night went his cry of alarm<sup>31</sup>  
To every Middlesex village and farm, —  
A cry of defiance,<sup>32</sup> and not of fear,  
A voice in the darkness, a knock at the door,  
And a word that shall echo forevermore!  
[125] For, borne on the night-wind of the Past,  
Through all our history, to the last,  
In the hour of darkness and peril<sup>33</sup> and need,  
The people will waken and listen to hear  
The hurrying hoof-beats of that steed,  
[130] And the midnight message of Paul Revere.

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25. a weathervane with a rooster on it

26. **Aghast** (*adjective*): filled with horror or shock

27. Bleating is the sound made by a sheep, goat, or calf.

28. a reference to the man who would be the first to die in battle on the following day

29. A musket-ball is a type of bullet.

30. The British Regulars is another term for the British Red-coats, or the British soldiers fighting the American militia.

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31. This is a reference to the legend that Revere shouted "The British are coming!" throughout his midnight run as a warning to the militia. Contrary to popular belief, Revere did not actually shout these words, as the operation was planned to be as discreet as possible so as not to attract attention.
  32. **Defiance** (*noun*): open resistance or bold disobedience
  33. **Peril** (*noun*): serious and immediate danger

## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: To whom is the narrator speaking in the poem, and how does this serve the author's purpose?
  - A. The narrator is speaking to children, telling them the story of Paul Revere, thus serving the author's purpose of teaching this historical lesson.
  - B. The narrator is speaking to children, telling them the story of Paul Revere, thus serving the author's purpose of instilling a sense of American pride and courage.
  - C. The narrator is speaking to a general audience, serving the author's purpose of bringing awareness to this historical event.
  - D. The narrator is speaking to the British soldiers, serving the author's purpose of criticizing Great Britain for its attempt to control the American colonists.
  
2. PART B: Which of the following stanzas best supports the answer to Part A?
  - A. Stanza 1
  - B. Stanza 2
  - C. Stanza 13
  - D. Stanza 14
  
3. PART A: What does the word "muffled" most closely mean as it is used in line 15?
  - A. Urgent
  - B. Trembling
  - C. Proud
  - D. Quiet
  
4. PART B: Which phrase from the same stanza best supports the answer to Part A?
  - A. "Good night!"
  - B. "silently rowed"
  - C. "as the moon rose"
  - D. "swinging wide"
  
5. PART A: What mood does the description of the Somerset ship evoke in lines 20-23?
  - A. Gloomy
  - B. Menacing
  - C. Awestruck
  - D. Sympathetic
  
6. PART B: Which of the following quotes best supports the answer to Part A?
  - A. "A phantom ship"
  - B. "Across the moon"
  - C. "a huge black hulk"
  - D. "magnified"

7. How do the behaviors of Paul Revere and his friend waiting for news differ?
- A. Revere is impatient for news, while his friend observes the tense silence of the night.
  - B. Both are impatient for news.
  - C. Both look to the cemetery to observe its stillness and solemn reminder of what is to come.
  - D. His friend is paralyzed by the tension while Revere is energized by it.

8. In stanza 8, the narrator describes a spark coming from the horse's hooves hitting the street. What is meant by the lines: "And the spark struck out by that steed, in his flight, / Kindled the land into flame with its heat"?

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9. Which of the following statements best describes how the poem's form contributes to the overall tone?
- A. The poem uses mainly slant rhyme, keeping the tone light but not too melodic.
  - B. The poem uses alliteration, contributing to the speech-making tone.
  - C. The poem utilizes end rhyme to make it sound like a nursery song.
  - D. The poem utilizes end rhyme, giving it a lyric style, which contributes to the celebratory yet instructive tone.

10. What effect does Paul Revere's message have on the American people, according to the last stanza?

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