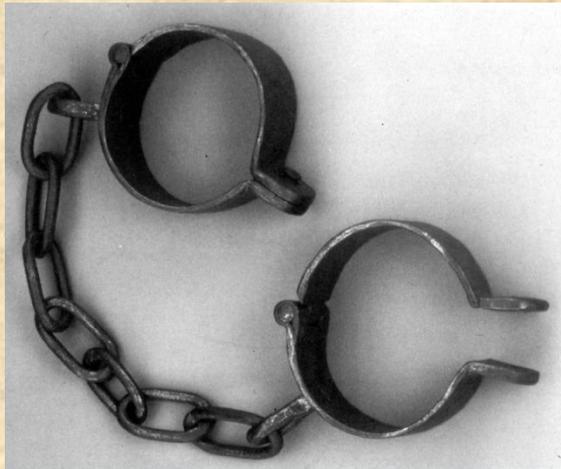


Paul Revere's Ride
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
An Enrichment Activity using 21st century skills

Objectives



- To recognize symbolism in poetry.
- To critically evaluate the work of a historian.



Directions



- 1. Read Longfellow's poem, "Paul Revere's Ride".

<http://poetry.eserver.org/paul-revere.html>

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- 2. Read this article in the NY Times

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/19/opinion/19Lepore.html>

By JILL LEPORE

Published: December 18, 2010

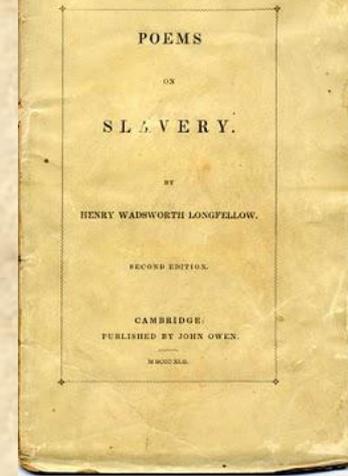
- 3. Post your response to the article--at least a paragraph.

What is the connection between this poem and the slavery issue? What evidence is there to support the author of the column Jill Lepore's claim?

- 4. Post your response to two other students.

- 5. Submit as a blank assessment with the date of YOUR ORIGINAL post and the names the TWO STUDENTS that you responded to for 100 enrichment points.

Student Samples



- Wow. This poem sweeps you off of your feet, despite its horstical inaccuracy. This poem's significance actually caught me off guard. It has a very strong meaning that is hidden, and I did not even suspect the meaning until I read the article.
While reading the poem I was saying to myself, "Oh! I remember all this!" I never thought that it was historically incorrect. It did not even occur to me that the poem had a greater meaning; that this poem was about abolition and the rallying of Northerners.
The article captivated me. Over time the poem has lost its meaning. This was my first time reading this poem and it is painfully clear how much significance the poem has lost. It saddens me when I think of how much our society has lost, because time has morphed meanings, words, etc.
- Posted by [Eliezer](#) Wed Jan 5 17:54:38 2011.
- Message: Same here about the hidden meaning. When I finally understood it, I was like blown away. I also agree about society's lost meanings and such. Over the years, the messages become distorted and the new generations get inaccurate interpretations. Talking about inaccuracy, I honestly did not know the poem was inaccurate because I never really paid attention to the history of Paul Revere.
- Posted by [Dudley](#) Wed Jan 5 17:07:26 2011.
- Message: I agree, the historical inaccuracies of the poem are far outweighed by the poem's deeper message against slavery. It really is a pity that most people who have read it see only the superficial message of Paul Revere's ride and don't delve any deeper into it.

- Posted by [Mrs. Shauna Liverotti](#) Mon Dec 20 13:50:07 2010.
- Message: This is an interesting approach to Longfellow's poem. Growing up in the Boston area, I always knew the story of Paul Revere was a bit of a historical myth no truer than Molly Pitcher's existence or Washington chopping down a cherry tree. However, I never really made the connection of the symbolism used by Longfellow to evoke a sense of nationalism in effort to draw the nation closer together on the cause of abolitionism on the eve of The Civil War. As a Mainer his approach to the subject does not surprise me much as contemporaries such as Throraeu were also writing on this hot topic of the day. Sadly, I think that this poem has lost it's meaning in contemporary American society as it lends itself to a historical myth in creating a false image of the great Patriot Paul Revere rather than a rally cry for civil rights. Certainly, it is one for further study.
- Posted by [Hannah](#) Tue Dec 21 09:39:22 2010.
- Message: I agree with you, Mrs. Liverotti. This true purpose of the poem really surprised me! :)

I've always drawn my knowledge of Paul Revere from this poem. In fact, before I read this article, I still thought the poem accurate. So, of course, I never suspected it to really be about abolition and Northern fighting morale.

I found the article overwhelmingly interesting. It is sad that the true meaning of the poem has been lost in the waves of time. The symbolism, once you realize the poem's true purpose, it mighty powerful.

Someday, I hope all of society realizes the true intent of this poem and understands the true story of Paul Revere.

- Posted by Ciara Tue Dec 21 21:52:31 2010.
- Message: The poem has always bothered me a little with its inaccuracy. I'm a stickler for historical accuracy, whether it's in books & literature. However, I always thought Longfellow's work had a deeper meaning. Also due to my extensive studies on the war, and with the exact time the poem was written, I believed it had a message associated with the war. I fully agree with Jill Lepore, and plan to study this further.
- Posted by Dallas Tue Dec 21 23:27:08 2010.
- Message: I understand the disappointment in the loss of meaning of the poem in contemporary American society, but I believe that after reading such an emotional poem, one can't help but to be certain that there is a deeper meaning. Society just has to dig deeper to find that meaning. I never really knew about all of the shortcomings of the story and poem myself because as a homeschooled child I was read to very often. And being young I couldn't discern between truth and fiction, so all of these stories were blended in my mind. But had I known at that time I still would not have been sure of what exactly was being hinted by Longfellow. It is a shame the way that time twists things, minds, words, and much more.
- Posted by [Jordan](#) Mon Dec 27 08:40:09 2010.
- Message: I agree with you Mrs. Liverotti. However, this is the first time I have read this poem so I have not had the privilege of analyzing this poem and having time bring me my take on the poem. I did not make the connection either. I have lived in the south all of my life, therefore my studies were more focused on southern history. Of course northern history was a part of the curriculum, but the south was more of the focus. I also agree that the poem has lost its meaning; this was my first time seeing and reading the poem, and even I noticed the loss of meaning. This should continue to be analyzed by both young and old. Maybe one day society will once again place the meaning back in works of art.

- Who would've thought "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere" was written in hopes of promoting slave abolition? This poem connects with slavery in the way it calls for Northern action. Longfellow, the author of this famous poem, feared the union would split soon, so he crafted this poem that would inspire the North to fight. He was a fierce abolitionist, calling for the freeing of slaves in a variety of his poems. This poem is no different.

As the author of "Paul Revere's Ride Against Slavery," Lepore explores the connection, and her evidence lies in her explanations. Firstly, she opens her article highlighting Longfellow's abolitionist ideals. Then, she explores multiple lines and describes how they relate to slavery and the Civil War. For example, in "Beneath, in the churchyard, lay the dead,/ In their night encampment on the hill," the dead are the Northerners. Longfellow is explaining that the North has been laying, undisturbed, and waiting to fight for justice. He demonstrates that the separating of the union will resurrect the sleeping North. The dead can also symbolize the slaves, whose freedom has been killed by years of racial injustice.

- The following replies have been posted:
- Posted by [Ciara](#) Tue Dec 21 21:55:42 2010.
- Message: Due to my extensive studies on the Civil War, and with the exact time the poem was written, I believed it had a message associated with the war. I fully agree with Jill Lepore, and plan to study this further. I also hope that in the future, children will be educated on not only the surface definition of the poem, but also the man behind it, the truth about the man portrayed in it, and its underlying message.
- Posted by [Dallas](#) Tue Dec 21 23:15:35 2010.
- Message: I agree with you and I hope future studies will be conducted accurately. I also hope the truth behind the poem will be brought to light to all of those left out. When you said, "the separating of the union will resurrect the sleeping North" I realized that, yes it was referring to the North, but it was also referring to the slaves and their plight. I hope schools everywhere will realize the importance and the deeper meaning of this poem, and that they will continue to educate students on this subject with more in-depth knowledge thanks to this poem.

- Posted by [Hanna](#) Wed Dec 22 10:42:08 2010.
- Message: When you described Longfellow as a "fierce abolitionist," I at first disagreed a little, remembering that Longfellow's ways in endorsing abolition were called "a gentler soul" by Lepore, who noted that his ways in fighting slavery were more delicate than others. However, when I reread that sentence, it made me think about the different ways that someone could have been a "fierce abolitionist," and I realized that it could even be by sending subtle messages in literature like Longfellow did. Now I agree with your description!
- Posted by Branden Mon Dec 27 14:33:19 2010.
- Message: I agree with your view. Although, I do think describing him as "fierce" abolitionist may be a bit far. Lepore definitely stated that he was a quiet and reserved man. I also think that your idea that the dead represents slaves is well-founded.
- Posted by [Carlos](#) Wed Dec 29 13:34:36 2010.
- Message: Very well written response. Through my research of the American Civil War and of Longfellow, I conclude that the poem itself was more concerned about the issue of slavery than the deterioration of the Union. Popular opinion in the North felt that the issue dealing with slavery was far more imperative. It wasn't until the secession of South Carolina, and other states following in suite, that the crisis of the Union coming apart was all too real.
- Posted by [Ciara](#) Tue Dec 21 21:52.58 2010.
- Due to my extensive studies on the Civil War, and with the exact time the poem was written, I believed it had a message associated with the war. I fully agree with Jill Lepore, and plan to study this further. I also hope that in the future, children will be educated on not only the surface definition of the poem, but also the man behind it, the truth about the man portrayed in it, and its underlying message. .
- Posted by Sun Jan 2 13:59:51 2011
Thread: I also agree with Jill Lepore in the sense that this poem was written as an abolitionist poem. I also believe that the essence behind the poem is necessary in order to comprehend it.

- Paul Revere: A man glorified and respected for his role in the beginnings of the American Revolution. Perhaps the most familiar, though highly inaccurate depiction of Revere is found in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere*. The poem, written exactly 150 years ago, is a staple in any American literature book. However, it is possible the poem has a hidden message- one of an abolitionist's mind. In a recent article by Jill Lepore for the *New York Times*, evidence is brought to light of the poem's underlying meaning. During vital events in the fight against slavery, such as the Dred Scott decision and John Brown's hanging, Longfellow was deeply saddened, and wrote that the upcoming revolution was "quite as needed as the old one." Upon careful analysis of *The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere*, one can instantly detect the symbolism within its lines. The dead represented in the poem are both the people of the North, "awakened" to the call for action, and African Americans, buried in the ancient institution of slavery.
- Posted by [CRYSTAL](#) Tue Jan 4 13:49:47 2011.
- Message: I completely agree with you. It is sad that half of the people that read this poem do not know the real meaning to it. Also, I concur with you in the sense that one has to do a careful observation because if not, one will not understand the true meaning. Like you stated, the poem has a hidden message the one of an abolitionist mind, since Paul Revere wanted to abolish slavery in the north. In addition to, you brought to my attention the fact that the awakened are the people of the North, being called for action. In the end I learned from my classmates response and from Lepore's claim.

- Posted by [Trevor](#) Thu Dec 23 21:35:21 2010.
- Message: The poem, "Paul Revere's Ride", connects to slavery in saying that the North's eyes were finally opened to the evil that is slavery, and opened enough to do something about it. The evidence to support the author of the column Jill Lepore's claim is, "In the hour of darkness and peril and need,
The people will waken and listen to hear
The hurrying hoofbeats of that steed,
And the midnight message of Paul Revere." and "It was read as a rallying cry for the Union. It is a poem about waking the sleeping, and waking the dead: "Beneath, in the churchyard, lay the dead,/ In their night encampment on the hill." The dead are Northerners, awakened, at last aroused. But the dead are also the enslaved, entombed in slavery — an image that was, at the time, a common conceit: Douglass called his escape "a resurrection from the dark and pestiferous tomb of slavery."
- Posted by [Ali](#) Sun Jan 2 13:55:09 2011.
- Message: Longfellow's poem "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere" relates to the issue of slavery because Longfellow's intentions for writing this poem was to open the eyes of the North. He knew that the country was at the eve of war and for this reason, he brought up the American Revolution to indirectly argue against the institution of slavery. By talking about Paul Revere's ride, Longfellow claims that the North is finally doing something about slavery. Evidence to support Jill Lepore's claim includes lines such as
In the hour of darkness and peril and need,

The people will waken and listen to hear

The hurrying hoofbeats of that steed,

And the midnight message of Paul Revere

In these lines, Longfellow is referring to slavery that causes the hour of darkness and peril and when he says that "people will waken and listen", he refers to the North finally trying to resolve the issue of slavery. Lines such as this confirm the notion that Paul Revere's ride was written as an abolitionist poem.

- The poem Paul Revere's Ride by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow is an enchanting poem that can sweep the reader off into that exact moment, true or not. Although it is laden with mystery and is hiding a deeper meaning it still evokes certain emotions that would make it seem as if time had stood still for that brief moment. Longfellow demonstrates his abhorrence for slavery in this touching and dramatic poem. He uses certain analogies to demonstrate the relationships between pain, affliction, slaves, Northerners, and Southerners. Northerners and the slaves are represented by the dead while the British could represent pain, affliction, and possibly the Southerners. Jill Lepore is accurate in his assertion that the meaning is lost in the poem and that we need to rediscover its meaning for our own good. It is a statement that can be learned from to be sure.
- The following replies have been posted:
- Posted by [Hanna](#) Wed Dec 22 10:29:58 2010.
- Message: It is very interesting how you bring up the emotions in the poem. They're something that I didn't focus on very much when I first read the poem but they now seem to be a contributing factor to the message about slavery. They really help make a connection between the two subjects that I didn't see before, but now I am starting to understand it more.
- Posted by [Trevor](#) Thu Dec 23 21:47:17 2010.
- Message: I find the insight taken from the poem and article by Dallas quite amazing. The first time I read the poem I found it very descriptive, so descriptive, in fact, that I felt as though I was Paul Revere, riding into Lexington and Concord, warning each town of the impending doom.
- Posted by [Jordan](#) Mon Dec 27 07:58:19 2010.
- Message: You have a take on this poem that I just skimmed over; emotions. It did not occur to me how emotional this poem was. Emotion is an important factor in every poem, including historical poems. Your analysis helped me understand the poem better.

- Many pieces of literature from a certain time period can be related to the main issues of that era, whether through an obvious or subtle common thread. The poem “The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere” (written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in 1860) can be connected to the slavery issue through the common thread of sending people a message, and, as Jill Lepore says in her article in the New York Times, “waking the sleeping” (rising the resistance against slavery). Longfellow was relating the waking of the people to fight the British to the message that people needed to be awakened to fight against slavery. In addition, the Revolution was fought because Americans were feeling oppressed and thus felt the need to fight for freedom while similarly, in the Civil War, abolitionists saw the oppression of the slaves and fought a war partially for their freedom.

To support her claim that the poem was more about slavery than it was about the Revolutionary war, Lepore uses the proof that Longfellow wrote the poem on the day that South Carolina seceded from the Union and started the war over slavery. She also argues that since Longfellow was a strong abolitionist (as shown by other writings by Longfellow such as “Poems on Slavery”, which he wrote for Charles Sumner), he would’ve made a connection between the “waking” message that Paul Revere received and delivered and the message of the need for the Northerners to rise up against slavery.

In summation, I’m glad to have read Lepore’s article and seen a side of “The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere” that I most likely would never have seen on my own.

- The following replies have been posted:

- **NEW!** Posted by [CRYSTAL](#) Tue Jan 4 13:57:59 2011.

- Message: I agree with you since you answered both of the questions correctly. You proved to me that you analyzed the information appropriately. I noticed you picked up on the relationship between the waking of the people to fight the British with the message that people needed to be awakened to fight against slavery. In addition to, you noticed the similarity between the Revolution and the Civil War.

- **NEW!** Posted by [Dudley](#) Wed Jan 5 17:02:53 2011.

- Message: I completely agree with both your analysis, and your stance on the validity of Jill Lepore's article. Revere's ride in Longfellow's poem is quite clearly a message to the people to wake up and fight against the oppression of slavery.

Crystal—Miami-Dade VLL (Native language Spanish)

- The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere was a poem that I didn't hear about since the sixth grade. Just like Jill Lepore commented, the poem has become childish and schoolchildren are the ones that learn this poem but don't know the true meaning. Based on what I read about this poem, its true meaning was to annihilate slavery in the north. Jill Lepore's conclusion has foundation, since the death that is talked about in the poem can represent the liberty that has been taken away from the slaves. Also, since Revere is announcing the attack, this attack can represent the upcoming civil war

Dudley-Miami-Dade VLL (Native language Spanish)

- If given only a cursory glance, the poem Paul Revere's Ride by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow may seem to be merely a poet's glorification of Revere's legendary ride to alarm the townspeople of the upcoming raid by the British. However, to any reader familiar with Longfellow and the political climate in which he wrote it, it becomes clear that this poem has a much different underlying message. In the poem, the attack which Paul Revere so fervently attempts to warn the townspeople about is clearly an allegory for the upcoming civil war. Longfellow's analogies reflect the times he lived in, his disgust at the institute of slavery and the pain and suffering brought on by it. In Jill Lepore's New York Times article Paul Revere's Ride Against Slavery, Lepore accurately sums up this concept. Lepore accurately points out the double meaning of Revere's ride in Longfellow's poem and of the impending battle referenced in the last line.

Eliezer—Hillsborough homeschooled

(Native language Spanish)

- Longfellow was a very political poet and passionate abolitionist. Paul Revere's ride, although not obviously, has a connection to slavery, from the introduction to the outlawing of slavery. For example, in the poem he describes "a phantom ship...across the moon like a prison bar," just as the slave ships. Also, a "huge black hulk" came over the skies as that time the nation was beginning to be in a state of gloominess and Paul Revere was one to rise up and alarm citizens about the invasion. Longfellow makes many references to the North, such as the North church, and the many people dead, such as slaves and soldiers.

Jill Lepore makes the claim that Henry Longfellow really wrote "Paul Revere's Ride" about slavery, rather than the actual event of Paul Revere. Longfellow used to write many abolitionist poems and this one about Revere could not be any different. Lepore claims that this poem was read as a rallying cry for the Union. She may be correct as there is evidence in the lines:

"In the hour of darkness and peril and need,
The people will waken and listen to hear
The hurrying hoofbeats of that steed,
And the midnight message of Paul Revere."

The hour of darkness and slavery came and the Northerners awoke and heard the message of freedom.

Just wanted to share—I think that students did a great job with this enrichment activity!