

Paul Revere's Ride

by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

This poem is about how American patriot Paul Revere rode through the countryside to warn the colonists of an attack by the British during the American Revolution. This passage is the beginning of the 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 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
On the sombre rafters, that round him made
Masses and moving shapes of shade,—
Up 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 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!

Questions

1. What did one light mean, and what did two lights mean?
2. How many lights did the friend light in the tower?
3. What was Paul Revere's plan if he saw any lights?
4. What does the poem say was the date of Paul Revere's ride?

Vocabulary List

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. belfry
2. muffled
3. moorings
4. muster
5. tread
6. grenadiers
7. impetuous
8. spectral

Context Clues

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1) "in the **belfry** arch/Of the North Church tower"

- a. brick b. steeple c. dome or roof d. old; ancient

2) "with **muffled** oar/Silently rowed"

- a. hushed or muted b. wooden c. broken or damaged d. strong; powerful

3) "swinging wide at her **moorings** lay/The Somerset, British man-of-war"

- a. sailors; seamen b. sails c. small boats d. place where a ship is tied; dock

4) "The **muster** of men at the barrack door"

- a. character b. leader; officer c. a group of troops; an assembly d. guns; rifles

5) "the measured **tread**of the grenadiers,"

- a. step or pace b. gold braid c. song d. gallop or run

6) "the measured tread of the **grenadiers**,"

- a. army horses b. military band c. special troops; soldiers d. old sailors

7) "Then, **impetuous**, stamped the earth"

- a. thirsty; parched b. tired; exhausted c. gentle or quiet d. eager; restless

8) "Lonely and **spectral** and sombre and still"

- a. lovely; wonderful b. eerie; ghostly c. sad or unhappy d. bright; well lit