

American Studies Analysis and Discussion
Transition to Contextual Analysis of Longfellow's
"Paul Revere's Ride"
Required Documents

This document packet contains the resources that accompany the instructions in the .pdf "American Studies Analysis and Discussion." The instructions can be downloaded separately. (The section letters and numbers listed here correspond to the section headings in the instructions.)

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A brief biographical sketch of Paul Revere
adapted from *Paul Revere's Ride* by David Hackett Fischer,
Oxford University Press, c1994.

We recommend this very readable and informative biography as a valuable source of information that would be useful to share with your students.

In 1715, when Paul Revere's father, Apollos Rivoire, was thirteen, his uncle put him on a ship headed for America because he was a French Huguenot, or Protestant, living in a Catholic France that would not tolerate religious differences. Arriving in Boston, he indentured himself to a goldsmith and learned his craft so well that he was able to buy his freedom when his master died. Rivoire was very talented and after changing his name to the more American name of Revere, his business prospered. In 1729 he married a fourth-generation Puritan, Deborah Hitchborn and from this union Paul Revere was born in 1734, one of only four of eleven children from this union that survived to adulthood.

Boston was a very city different then. Fifteen thousand people lived on a peninsula that became an island when the isthmus called Boston Neck was covered with water at high tide. Young Paul had a typical childhood wandering around the narrow streets and wooden houses that were filled with family and friends; he even showed an early interest in church bells as part of a boys' bell ringing group.

Paul's father died in 1754 and at the age of nineteen, Paul became head of his family. Having been trained as his father's apprentice, he took over the family business and learned to make everything from miniature portrait frames to copper engraving plates and even false teeth. His personality was revealed while working as a silversmith; the routine work that bored him was sloppily done, while challenging pieces that interested him were skillfully executed.

During his life, Revere had two wives. The first, Sarah Orne, died in 1773 after bearing eight children. Soon after her death, he married Rachel Walker who also had eight children. Of these sixteen children, only six survived to be adults.

From early on, Paul assumed a wide variety of civic roles, from helping to arrange the installation of the city's first streetlights to helping found the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanic Association to help the poor. His first military service was in the militia in 1755 when he fought in the French and Indian Wars. Ten years later, he joined the Sons of Liberty. Becoming deeply involved in the movement to resistance British control, he began making copper engravings of important events like the stationing of the British Regulars in Boston and the Boston Massacre. He even was a leader at the Boston Tea Party. From 1773 to 1775, Paul made many trips between Boston and other colonial cities on behalf of the Committee of Correspondence carrying information back and forth, helping to tie the revolutionaries in the colonies together. He was an active and social man, what we would call "a doer." Most importantly, he was known as a trustworthy man of his word.

“The Midnight Ride of William Dawes”
by Helen F. Moore

The poem below is a parody to Longfellow's "Paul Revere's Ride." It was written by Helen F. Moore, and published in the *Century Magazine* in 1896.

I am a wandering, bitter shade,
Never of me was a hero made;
Poets have never sung my praise,
Nobody crowned my brow with bays;
And if you ask me the fatal cause, 5
I answer only, "My name was Dawes"

'Tis all very well for the children to hear
Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere;
But why should my name be quite forgot,
Who rode as boldly and well, God wot? 10
Why should I ask? The reason is clear --
My name was Dawes and his Revere.

When the lights from the old North Church flashed out,
Paul Revere was waiting about,
But I was already on my way. 15
The shadows of night fell cold and gray
As I rode, with never a break or a pause;
But what was the use, when my name was Dawes!

History rings with his silvery name;
Closed to me are the portals of fame. 20
Had he been Dawes and I Revere,
No one had heard of him, I fear.
No one has heard of me because
He was Revere and I was Dawes.

General Peleg Wadsworth: Revolutionary War Hero

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow grew up hearing true-life tales of the American Revolution. Young Henry spent much time with his maternal grandfather, General Peleg Wadsworth, an acclaimed hero of Revolution. After the Revolution, this prosperous hero built the first brick house in Portland, Maine (1785-86) and soon after Henry was born he turned the house over to Henry's parents and moved to a 7000 acre estate in nearby Hiram. Long after styles had changed, Peleg Wadsworth continued to wear the fashion we still associate with Revolutionary times: a 3-cornered hat, powdered wig, long coat and knee breeches. We learn from Charles Calhoun's new biography of Longfellow that the first written mention of little Henry was in a letter from his mother to his father describing the 7-month-old's delight at being sung to and bounced upon his grandfather's knee. We can well imagine that as Henry grew up stories of Grandfather Peleg's exploits in the Revolution replaced the singing.

The facts of Peleg Wadsworth's heroism are as follows. Early in the war, he was involved in the siege of Boston, and then played a central role in the Penobscot Expedition of 1779, an attempt by the colonists to dislodge British from the entrance to the Penobscot River (present day Castine, Maine). Although the enterprise was poorly planned and led to destruction of the American fleet, Wadsworth was seen as a hero--the only one who kept his head in the retreat.

It was probably the story of Grandfather Wadsworth's capture by the British and his daring escape in 1780 that really caught the attention of young Henry, however. As a reward for his earlier bravery, Peleg Wadsworth was put in command of the District of Maine and he and his family moved to Thomaston, Maine, where the American troops were headquartered. British forces dominated this whole area of the Penobscot Valley, and Wadsworth had neither financial nor troop support from Boston.

One fateful night the British surrounded the house as the family slept, shot General Wadsworth in the shoulder, and seized and imprisoned him at Fort George (one can still see ruins of this from Castine).

Although his arm healed quickly, and as a prisoner of high rank he was well treated, General Wadsworth learned that he was going to be sent off to England for the rest of the war (where he would face hanging as rebel if Great Britain won). He and another prisoner carefully planned their escape. They studied plans and sentry schedules. They sawed each night through a plank in the ceiling of the cell, filling holes up with chewed bread to disguise them during the day. On the night of big thunderstorm, they crawled into attic, along rafters and outside where they scaled an embankment, and made their way through sharp pickets, across mudflats and back to Thomaston.

George Washington /Craigie House Background

As a young professor at Harvard in 1837, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow rented rooms in a gracious old house in Cambridge, Massachusetts known as the Craigie House. Years later, in 1843, when he married his second wife, Fanny Appleton, her father Nathan Appleton, purchased the home for them. Longfellow lived there until his death in 1882. For Longfellow, the house had a very important past. It had been built in 1759 by John Vassal, a loyalist who abandoned his home quickly when the Revolution began. In July 1775, the new Commander-in-Chief of Continental Army, George Washington, set up headquarters in the house and lived there with his wife Martha for nine months during the siege of Boston. During that relatively brief time many important decisions were made and many important guests like John and Abigail Adams and Ben Franklin met with the new leader.

Reverence for George Washington as a national hero was still powerful during Longfellow's time. An article in the *Longfellow House Bulletin* of June 2000 relates that even after Longfellow became famous, folks would knock on the door of Craigie House asking to see "Washington's Headquarters." The same article quotes Longfellow's letter to a German friend who was planning a visit to the U.S.: "Do not think for a moment of going to New York. The roof under which you sleep in America must be Washington's (and mine)."

For Longfellow, who had grown up on his grandfather's tales of the Revolution, living in a house that had seen such history, where Washington had also lived and worked, had an impact that is hard for us to imagine. The room Longfellow used as his study had been Washington's private room and he was said to have kept the arrangement of the room the same as it had been in Washington's time. Statues and portraits of Washington were displayed in prominent places throughout the house.



From www.mainememory.net, item 11144, courtesy Maine Historical Society

Biography of Charles Sumner

Charles Sumner was born in Boston, Massachusetts, and graduated from Harvard in 1830. He edited a law review, the *American Jurist*, and served as a reporter for the United States Circuit Court, from which he published three volumes of Judge Joseph Story's decisions under the title *Sumner's Reports*. Sumner lectured on constitutional and international law at Harvard's law school for three winter terms. In 1837, he began traveling throughout continental Europe, followed by a year of residence in England. Returning to Boston in 1840, he published a 20-volume annotated edition of Vesey's *Reports* (1841-1846).

Sumner first entered the political arena in 1845 as American-Mexican hostilities were on the horizon. In an Independence Day speech before city officials in Boston, he denounced the use of war for settling international disputes and promoted arbitration in its place. The publicity from that oration made him into a much sought-after speaker on public affairs. He opposed the annexation of Texas and criticized the institution of slavery. In 1848, he abandoned the Whig party to support Martin Van Buren's (unsuccessful) Free-Soil candidacy for President. In 1851, a Democratic-Free-Soil coalition in the Massachusetts legislature chose Sumner to fill the vacated U.S. Senate seat of Daniel Webster, who had resigned to become Secretary of State.

Sumner became a leader of the anti-slavery forces in the Senate. During the debates on slavery in Kansas in May 1856, he delivered a two-day oration—"The Crime against Kansas"—that vehemently condemned Southern advocacy of the expansion of slavery. Congressman Preston Brooks of South Carolina believed that Sumner had insulted his uncle, Senator Andrew Butler. In retaliation, Brooks used his cane to beat Sumner, who was seated at his desk on the Senate floor, to unconsciousness. The caning of Sumner became a symbol in the North of Southern brutality. Meanwhile, Brooks became a hero in the South for defending Southern honor, and was subsequently reelected by his constituency. Besides his battle against slavery, Sumner led the fight for racial integration of Boston public schools in the 1850s.

During the Civil War, Sumner pushed for the emancipation of the slaves and introduced the 13th Amendment to the Senate in 1864. He also nominated a black lawyer, John Rock, to practice before the U.S. Supreme Court, introduced the bill that created the Freedmen's Bureau, and proposed a civil service reform bill in 1864.

During Reconstruction, Sumner supported the policies of the Radical Republicans and introduced the bill that eventually became (after his death) the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which outlawed racial discrimination in public places until the Supreme Court overturned the law in 1883. He was a strident critic of President Johnson's Reconstruction policies and became an early and constant exponent of his impeachment. After the Senate acquitted Johnson, the Massachusetts Senator was one of the few true-believers who proposed impeaching the President again.

Given his interest in international relations, Sumner sat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He stringently backed American financial claims against Britain for providing the Confederacy with ships during the Civil War (often called the Alabama Claims). His opposition to President Grant's plan to annex Santo Domingo led to Sumner's removal as chair of the Foreign Relations Committee in 1870. Thereafter, he dissociated himself from the Republican party, supporting the Liberal Republican-Democratic presidential nominee, Horace Greeley, in 1872. In that same year, he was nominated for governor of Massachusetts by a Liberal Republican-Democratic coalition, but he was in Britain for health reasons, so declined the offer. Two years later, he died in Washington, D. C.

Robert C. Kennedy, HarpWeek

Sources consulted: Harper's Weekly Encyclopedia of United States History; Melvin Urofsky, A March of Liberty: A Constitutional History of the United States; and Harper's Weekly.

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To view entire website go to <http://www.impeach-andrewjohnson.com/default.htm>

“The Slave's Dream”
by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Beside the ungathered rice he lay,
 His sickle in his hand;
His breast was bare, his matted hair
 Was buried in the sand.
Again, in the mist and shadow of sleep,
 He saw his Native Land.

Wide through the landscape of his dreams
 The lordly Niger flowed;
Beneath the palm-trees on the plain
 Once more a king he strode;
And heard the tinkling caravans
 Descend the mountain-road.

He saw once more his dark-eyed queen
 Among her children stand;
They clasped his neck, they kissed his cheeks,
 They held him by the hand! -
A tear burst from the sleeper's lids
 And fell into the sand.

And then at furious speed he rode
 Along the Niger's bank;
His bridle-reins were golden chains,
 And, with a martial clank,
At each leap he could feel his scabbard of steel
 Smiting his stallion's flank.

Before him, like a blood-red flag,
 The bright flamingoes flew;
From morn till night he followed their flight,
 O'er plains where the tamarind grew,
Till he saw the roofs of Caffre huts,
 And the ocean rose to view.

At night he heard the lion roar,
 And the hyena scream,
And the river-horse, as he crushed the reeds
 Beside some hidden stream;
And it passed, like a glorious roll of drums,
 Through the triumph of his dream.

The forests, with their myriad tongues,
 Shouted of liberty;

And the Blast of the Desert cried aloud,
 With a voice so wild and free,
That he started in his sleep and smiled
 At their tempestuous glee.

He did not feel the driver's whip
 Nor the burning heat of day;
For Death had illumined the Land of Sleep,
 And his lifeless body lay
A worn-out fetter, that the soul
 Had broken and thrown away!

Sumner's Request for slavery poetry
excerpted from Charles Calhoun's *Longfellow: a rediscovered life*

From Chapter Seven – “The Water Cure” page 155

Written when Longfellow was returning from a health treatment at a spa in Marienberg, Germany.

Sumner for some time had urged him to take up the topic. In a letter to Marienberg, he had asked:

“What red-hot staves has your mind thrown up? What ideas have been started by the voyage? A poem on the sea? Oh! I long for those verses on slavery. Write some stirring words that shall move the whole land. Send them home and we'll publish them. Let us know how you occupy yourself with that heavenly gift of invention.”

As Longfellow later wrote ... it had been a boisterous passage. “I was not out of my berth more than twelve hours for the first twelve days. I was in the forward part of the vessel, where all the great waves struck and broke with voices of thunder.” Confined to his cabin, he wrote seven poems on slavery. “I meditated upon them in the stormy, sleepless nights, and wrote them down with a pencil in the morning.”

Slavery Poems of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

The following poems on slavery were written at sea in the latter part of October, 1842

“The Warning”

by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Beware! The Israelite of old, who tore
The lion in his path,--when, poor and blind,
He saw the blessed light of heaven no more,
Shorn of his noble strength and forced to grind
In prison, and at last led forth to be 5
A pander to Philistine revelry,--

Upon the pillars of the temple laid
His desperate hands, and in its overthrow
Destroyed himself, and with him those who made
A cruel mockery of his sightless woe; 10
The poor, blind Slave, the scoff and jest of all,
Expired, and thousands perished in the fall!

There is a poor, blind Samson in this land,
Shorn of his strength and bound in bonds of steel,
Who may, in some grim revel, raise his hand, 15
And shake the pillars of this Commonweal,
Till the vast Temple of our liberties.
A shapeless mass of wreck and rubbish lies.

“The Quadroon Girl”
by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

The Slaver in the broad lagoon
Lay moored with idle sail;
He waited for the rising moon,
And for the evening gale.

Under the shore his boat was tied, 5
And all her listless crew
Watched the gray alligator slide
Into the still bayou.

Odors of orange-flowers, and spice,
Reached them from time to time, 10
Like airs that breathe from Paradise
Upon a world of crime.

The Planter, under his roof of thatch,
Smoked thoughtfully and slow;
The Slaver's thumb was on the latch, 15
He seemed in haste to go.

He said, "My ship at anchor rides
In yonder broad lagoon;
I only wait the evening tides,
And the rising of the moon. 20

Before them, with her face upraised,
In timid attitude,
Like one half curious, half amazed,
A Quadroon maiden stood.

Her eyes were large, and full of light, 25
Her arms and neck were bare;
No garment she wore save a kirtle bright,
And her own long, raven hair.

And on her lips there played a smile
As holy, meek, and faint, 30
As lights in some cathedral aisle
The features of a saint.

"The soil is barren,--the farm is old";
The thoughtful planter said;
Then looked upon the Slaver's gold, 35
And then upon the maid.

His heart within him was at strife
With such accursed gains:
For he knew whose passions gave her life,
Whose blood ran in her veins. 40

But the voice of nature was too weak;
He took the glittering gold!
Then pale as death grew the maiden's cheek,
Her hands as icy cold.

The Slaver led her from the door, 45
He led her by the hand,
To be his slave and paramour
In a strange and distant land!

“The Witnesses”
by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

In Ocean's wide domains,
Half buried in the sands,
Lie skeletons in chains,
With shackled feet and hands.

Beyond the fall of dews, 5
Deeper than plummet lies,
Float ships, with all their crews,
No more to sink nor rise.

There the black Slave-ship swims, 10
Freighted with human forms,
Whose fettered, fleshless limbs
Are not the sport of storms.

These are the bones of Slaves;
They gleam from the abyss;
They cry, from yawning waves, 15
"We are the Witnesses!"

Within Earth's wide domains
Are markets for men's lives;
Their necks are galled with chains,
Their wrists are cramped with gyves. 20

Dead bodies, that the kite
In deserts makes its prey;
Murders, that with affright
Scare school-boys from their play!

All evil thoughts and deeds; 25
Anger, and lust, and pride;
The foulest, rankest weeds,
That choke Life's groaning tide!

These are the woes of Slaves;
They glare from the abyss; 30
They cry, from unknown graves,
"We are the Witnesses!"

“The Slave in the Dismal Swamp”
by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

In dark fens of the Dismal Swamp
The hunted Negro lay;
He saw the fire of the midnight camp,
And heard at times a horse's tramp
And a bloodhound's distant bay. 5

Where will-o'-the-wisps and glow-worms shine,
In bulrush and in brake;
Where waving mosses shroud the pine,
And the cedar grows, and the poisonous vine
Is spotted like the snake; 10

Where hardly a human foot could pass,
Or a human heart would dare,
On the quaking turf of the green morass
He crouched in the rank and tangled grass,
Like a wild beast in his lair. 15

A poor old slave, infirm and lame;
Great scars deformed his face;
On his forehead he bore the brand of shame,
And the rags, that hid his mangled frame,
Were the livery of disgrace. 20

All things above were bright and fair,
All things were glad and free;
Lithe squirrels darted here and there,
And wild birds filled the echoing air
With songs of Liberty! 25

On him alone was the doom of pain,
From the morning of his birth;
On him alone the curse of Cain
Fell, like a flail on the garnered grain,
And struck him to the earth!

“Paul Revere's Ride”
by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

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. 5

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; 10
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 15
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 20
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, 25
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. 30

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 35
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 40
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, 45
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 50
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 55
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, 60
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, 65

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, 70
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 75
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. 80

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, 85
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, 90
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. 95
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. 100

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 105
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. 110

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, 115
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 120

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, 125
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. 130

“Christmas Bells”

by **Henry Wadsworth Longfellow**

December 24, 1863

I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along
The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Till ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime,
A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Then from each black, accursed mouth
The cannon thundered in the South,
And with the sound
The carols drowned
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent,
And made forlorn
The households born
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said;
"For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The Wrong shall fail,
The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men."

Civil War Casualties

Although historians look back on 1863 and the bloody days of Gettysburg as a turning point in the war, casualties that year were high and few families, North or South, were left untouched by the war. Share with your students some of the statistics of the Civil War. An estimated 618,000 soldiers, 2% of the American population, died – the equivalent of 5 million casualties in a war today. Based on the 1860 census, 8% of all males between the ages of 13 and 43 died. [The following image of Charley Longfellow in uniform mirrors countless other photographs of young enlistees.](#)

(Suggestion: Jim Murphy, *The Boy's War*, Clarion Books, 1990, has incredible images and information about young boys who enlisted in the war.)

Charley's Civil War experiences **excerpted from Charles Calhoun's *Longfellow : A Rediscovered Life***

Pages 222-224

Meanwhile in the motherless family at the Craigie House, there was a more immediate difficulty: what to do about Charley. The restlessness he had shown as a child had not diminished in late adolescence, and he showed little interest in his Harvard studies or in pursuing an Appleton-like career in State Street. He loved to sail, to shoot, to roam the countryside or the riverbanks. He seemed accident-prone; at age eleven at nearby Fresh Pond, his hunting rifle had misfired, blowing off his left thumb. Longfellow had a good reason to fear that he would volunteer for the army, as so many of his Beacon Hill contemporaries were doing. The exposure of his eldest child to mortal danger so soon after the family's tragedy was more than Longfellow could bear. An opportunity presented itself in 1862 to give the boy a glimpse of the excitement of the war, from a safe distance, in the hopes perhaps of getting it out of his system. (This was still a time when well-informed people on both sides assumed the war would soon be over.) In March, Charley sailed on a supply vessel, the *Parliament*, owned by their friend William Fay, for Ship Island, the Gulf Coast staging point for the Union Army's planned attack on New Orleans. As it turned out, Ship Island was a wind-swept, disease-ridden sandbar, but Longfellow did not know this and hoped that Charley might be satisfied at least to hear the noise of presumably distant guns. Charley, a splendid sailor, found the whole trip a wonderful lark. He sent back vivid descriptions of the crew, the duck shooting, the inefficiencies of military life, and the occasional sighting of a "secesher" or Confederate. As he was to prove on other occasions, he was better at reportage than his father the writer. After one venture ashore on Ship Island, he sketched this scene of the commanding general's wife:

We were then introduced to Mrs. [Benjamin] Butler in her little ten foot house which is furnished with rebel furniture captured on its way to New Orleans, the floor is covered with sand and the room is chock full of flies and there Mrs. B sits in her glory and black silk dress languidly fanning herself and making rather flat remarks.

Aboard another vessel, he met another northern female far from home. As he wrote back to Craigie House, "we were introduced to a real live woman and it was very pleasant to se[sic] one after a month's voyage I feel half in love with her although she is married as she is very pretty and only 19, her history is this, she enlisted as a private in the 15 Maine with her husband she was not discovered until she had nearly got here when they did find her out they made her put on her own clothes and took her into the cabin where she is now staying."

Back home in late spring, Charley was soon packed off with his friend Willy Fay for a European tour, which his father doubtless hoped would outlast the war. It did not, and by fall he was again in Cambridge, feeling more restless and striving to be more independent than ever. On March 14, 1863, Longfellow received a letter postmarked in Portland. Its contents did not surprise him – the postmark was a ruse – but they distressed

him perhaps more severely than anything that had occurred since Fanny's death twenty months earlier.

Dear Pap,

You know for how long a time I have been wanting to go to war I have tried hard to resist the temptation of going without your leave but I cannot any longer, I feel it to be my first duty to do what I can for my country and I would willingly lay down my life for it if it would be of any good God bless you all.

Yours affectionately,
Charley

The immediate task was to find the eighteen-year-old and persuade him to come home.

My dear Charley,

Your letter this morning did not surprise me very much, as I thought it probable you had gone on some such mad-cap expedition. Still you have done very wrong; and I hope you will so see it and come home again at once.

Your motive is a noble one; but you are too precipitate. I have always thought you, and still think you, too young to go into the army. It can be no reproach to you, and no disgrace, to wait a little longer; though I can very well understand your impatience.

As soon as you receive this, lett me know where you are, and what you have done, and are doing.

All join in much love to you....

Ever affectionately
HWL

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Judging by his enthusiastic letters home, Charley loved being in the artillery battery, where mingling with the ranks seemed to gratify his urge to escape the gentility of Boston and Cambridge, but thanks to his family's pull, he soon found himself a lieutenant in the First Massachusetts Cavalry.

...

Life as a cavalry officer proved even more agreeable to Charley, whose jaunty letters home were welcome in one sense but did little to ally his father's fears that the boy was reckless, even foolhardy. To the family's relief, his unit missed the great Union defeat at Chancellorsville, but by June disaster of another sort had struck. While on a visit to the girls at their Aunt Anne in Portland, Longfellow learned that Charley had a severe case of "camp fever" – a tern that covered a range of infectious disease, from the curable to the quickly lethal. Fortunately- and again the family's influence seems to have eased Charley's way – he was sent to a convalesce not in a crowded hospital but in the Washington home of a member of the Sanitary Commission who was a friend of

Longfellow's brother Samuel. Longfellow rushed to his bedside and nursed him through his fever for several weeks with beef tea, blancmange, and ice cream.

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By August, the leave was over, and a grimmer stage of Charley's Civil War began. Although in his absence the North had won the Battle of Gettysburg, the war dragged on. Charley had still not seen a major battle, though he had frequently been under enemy fire in the course of patrols and skirmished in the rolling countryside around Culpepper, Virginia. On November 27, riding out of a thicket at New Hope Church, he was stuck in the back by a bullet that nicked his spine before exiting on the other side. The bullet just missed his heart and lungs, but he was bleeding profusely by the time he had been carried into the church and laid on the altar. He survived.

On December 1, the telegram reached the Craigie House, where Longfellow had just sat down to dinner. The report was inaccurate, but alarming, and Longfellow and eighteen-year-old Ernest quickly packed and spent an uncomfortable night on the Fall River steamer to New York. After aggravating delays, they reached Willard's Hotel in Washington the next night, and moved the next day to the Ebbit House, only three doors from Sumner. What followed was the closest Longfellow came to the wartime experiences of his fellow poet Walt Whitman among the wounded and dying. Communications with the army were always erratic and unreliable, so Longfellow and his son went again and again to the train station in expectation of finding Charley among those being unloaded from the foul hospital cars. On December 5, much the worse for wear but in good spirits, Charley emerged. He was whisked off to the hotel, where every high-ranking surgeon in the army seemed to want to examine him. Once again, word of Longfellow's presence in the capital had spread.

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On December 8, the Longfellow party left on the evening train for New York, and Charley's eventful nine months in the Army of the Potomac came to a safe and comfortable end. He completed his convalescence at home and would always have a room there, but the cord had been broken.

“Christmas Bells”
by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

I HEARD the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along
The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Till ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime,
A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Then from each black, accursed mouth
The cannon thundered in the South,
And with the sound
The carols drowned
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent,
And made forlorn
The households born
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said;
"For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The Wrong shall fail,
The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men."

Peace

Despair

Hope

Closing discussion of importance of the American Studies approach:

How is the meaning of the poem changed for you?

Do you think you will read poetry differently now that you have seen how the message can be changed?

Are there literary pieces you have read this year that you now might be wondering about the author's inspiration?