

The Birth of an American Hero: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s “Paul Revere’s Ride”

Lesson Plan

A resource developed through the *Longfellow and the Forging of American Identity* program

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Suggested Grade Level: 9-12

Subject Area: English Language Arts, Humanities, American History

Learning Results Targeted:

This lesson incorporates the following learning results. The focus of the project may be altered as needed to address different learning results.

English Language Arts

Process of Reading: A3, A4, A5

Informational Texts: D1, D2, D3

Research-Related Writing and Speaking: H1, H2, H3, H4, H9, H10, H11, H12

Time Required:

2–5 class periods

Materials and Resources Required:

All of the following documents are included in this lesson packet:

- Teacher instructions
- Teacher’s Guide for analyzing Joseph Campbell’s “Stages of the Hero” and Longfellow’s poem “Paul Revere’s Ride”
- Additional resources/works cited

The following documents are available as .pdf downloads from the lesson plan page at www.mainememory.net:

- Joseph Campbell’s “Stages of the Hero”
- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s “Paul Revere’s Ride”

Learning Objectives:

Students will understand the heroic archetype and apply it to the history of Paul Revere’s Ride and to Longfellow’s poem “Paul Revere’s Ride”.

Overview:

The period of American history just prior to the Civil War required a mythology that would celebrate the strength of the individual, while fostering a sense of Nationalism. Longfellow saw Nationalism as a driving force, particularly important during this period and set out in his poem, “Paul Revere’s Ride” to arm the people with the necessary ideology to face the oncoming hardships. “Paul Revere’s Ride” was perfectly suited for such an age and is responsible for embedding in the American consciousness a sense of the cultural identity that was born during this defining period in American History.

It is Longfellow's interpretation and not the actual event that became what Dana Gioia terms "a timeless emblem of American courage and independence."

Gioia credits the poem's perseverance to the ease of the poem's presentation and subject matter. "Paul Revere's Ride" takes a complicated historical incident embedded in the politics of Revolutionary America and retells it with narrative clarity, emotional power, and masterful pacing,"(2).

Although there have been several movements to debunk "Paul Revere's Ride," due to its lack of historical accuracy, the poem has remained very much alive in our national consciousness. Warren Harding, president during the fashionable reign of debunk criticism, perhaps said it best when he remarked, "An iconoclastic American said there never was a ride by Paul Revere. Somebody made the ride, and stirred the minutemen in the colonies to fight the battle of Lexington, which was the beginning of independence in the new Republic of America. I love the story of Paul Revere, whether he rode or not" (Fischer 337). Thus, "despite every well-intentioned effort to correct it historically, Revere's story is for all practical purposes the one Longfellow created for him," (Calhoun 261). It was what Paul Revere's Ride came to symbolize that was important, not the actual details of the ride itself.

Instructions:

Step One:

Have students discuss the differences between perception and reality as they relate to history and historical fiction.

Step Two:

Have students list heroes they can remember from history. Identify common qualities. Discuss archetypes.

Step Three:

Have students read and discuss Joseph Campbell's "Stages of the Hero."

Step Four:

Have students apply Campbell's heroic archetype to the character of Paul Revere as he appears in history and in Longfellow's poem "Paul Revere's Ride." Have students analyze the similarities and differences.

Teacher’s Guide for analyzing Joseph Campbell’s Stages of the Hero and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s “The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere”

I. **Call to Adventure:** The Hero begins the adventure in some way or another.

The History:

C) Volunteers: On September 21, 1774, amidst brewing contentions with King George and the British authorities acting on his behalf in the colonies, a convention met to suggest certain precautionary measures. One such measure was the establishment of a system of express riders organized to alarm the countryside in the event of the mobilization of British forces. A Committee of Safety was instituted and Paul Revere and many others volunteered their services. Henceforth, Paul Revere would make several rides to warn the people of British ‘intentions,’ and movements.

The Poem:

C) Volunteers: Although Longfellow does not make particular mention in his poem that Paul Revere volunteered to make the fateful ride, there is ample evidence that he was a willing participant. “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 to arm.”

II. **Test/Obstacles to Overcome:** The Hero must go through a series of tests, ordeals, or obstacles during the adventure.

The History:

A) Monster/Enemy/Battle: Although Paul Revere did not engage in combat on the night of April 18, 1775, he did confront several British officers and was captured by them.

B) Rescue: “Paul Revere’s primary mission was not to alarm the countryside. His specific purpose was to warn Samuel Adams and John Hancock, who were thought to be the objects of the expedition,” (Fischer, 97). Paul Revere was successful in alarming the two patriots and was also responsible for rescuing a trunk they had left behind in an upstairs room at the Buckman Tavern. It was reported that the trunk contained important papers of the Whig cause, (Fischer 179).

C) Journey of Peril: The first potential threat to Revere was getting from Boston Harbor to the ferry landing at Charlestown. Looming in his direct path was the HMS Somerset, a 64 gun British warship charged with interrupting the traffic between Boston and Charlestown. Thanks to Revere’s skilled boatmen and a lunar anomaly, Revere was able to pass safely by (Fischer 105). The next threat came in the form of British “officers of the ministerial army, mounted on good

horses, and armed, going toward Concord,” (Fischer 106). It is recorded that two such officers gave chase to Revere along the Lexington road, but he managed to elude them. After warning Samuel Adams and John Hancock in Lexington, Revere set out once again, this time to warn the men of Concord. Near the boundary between Lincoln and Lexington, Revere was detected by British Regulars and captured. Revere was later released and he returned to his duty of alerting the countryside.” Once Paul Revere was captured by the British forces, he was interrogated by the officers who begged to know his person and intent. Revere cunningly informs them of his purpose and by doing so lures them away from Lexington. “...all of his words and acts were consistent with the single purpose of trying to move the British patrol away from Lexington, and to protect Hancock and Adams, which was the primary purpose of Revere’s mission that night. Far from betraying the American cause, as the debunkers have suggested, Revere was serving it with skill and courage, “ (Fischer 392).

The Poem:

A) Monster/Enemy/Battle: Longfellow does not include the confrontation between Paul Revere and the British Regulars in his poem. He does however reflect upon the clash between the rebels and British Regulars at Concord Bridge.

“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 sage 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.”

B) Rescue: Longfellow’s poem does not mention the warnings given by him to John Hancock and John Adams. It does however mention Revere’s secondary mission to alarm the countryside. “ So through the night rode Paul Revere:/ And so through the night went his cry of alarm/To every Middlesex village and farm, - --“

C) Journey of Peril: Longfellow does not make specific mention of the many British troops Revere eluded on the night of April 18, 1775. He does however, mention the British warship The Somerset.

“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.”

IV. The Return/Reward: The last part is a return home or a re-emergence into the living during which the hero usually gains a reward of some type.

The History: Return

B) A Safe Return: Paul Revere was released soon after being captured. This was due to the information he so willingly gave them during his interrogation. “At last the officers began to feel the full import of what Paul Revere had been telling them. His words of warning took on stronger meaning when punctuated by gunfire. The sound of a single shot suggested to them that surprise was lost...As they came closer to the Common they began to hear Lexington’s town bell clanging rapidly...They decided that they must gallop back to warn the commanders of the marching column. To travel faster, they resolved to release their captives,” (Fischer 136).

The Poem: Return

Longfellow does not mention Revere’s capture and subsequent release.

The History: Reward

Paul Revere never received any rewards for his services on the night of April 18, nor would he consider himself worthy of any. Nonetheless, history has honored him in a variety of ways; songs, poems, films and artwork have all commemorated his ride; several streets in cities and towns throughout Massachusetts bear his name. But, perhaps the most endearing tribute to Paul Revere is the passing down from generation to generation of the symbolic meaning of his epic ride. Each year on the 19th day of April the memory of Paul Revere’s ride resounds throughout the countryside as the town’s bell is sounded. “The people of the town awaken suddenly in their beds, and listen, and remember. It is an ancient tradition in the town that the ringers should include the children, so that the rising generation will remember too. The bell itself was made by Paul Revere. Still it carries his message across the countryside,” (Fischer 295).

“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.”

The Poem: Reward

Longfellow does not mention Revere’s fate after the war.

Additional Resources

Works Cited

Calhoun, Charles C.. *Longfellow: A Rediscovered Life*.
Beacon Press Books, 2004.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*.
Princeton University Press, 1973.

Fischer, David Hackett. *Paul Revere's Ride*.
Oxford University Press, 1994.

Gioia, Dana. *Poetry for Students, Volume 2*.
Gale, 1998.

Web Resources

<http://www.paulreverehouse.org/ride/> Complete details of the midnight ride with maps and images as well.

<http://www.americanrevolution.org/revere.html> Read Paul Revere's account of the ride.

http://www.cvesd.k12.ca.us/finney/paulvm/h1_ent.html Lesson plans.

<http://www.patriotresource.com/events/revere> Much information regarding the ride.

http://earlyamerica.com/paul_revere.htm Flash presentation of ride.

<http://www.udel.edu/sine/students/revere> Lesson plans.

http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=393 Great lesson on Revere's ride.

http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=394 Lesson plans.

<http://www.danagioia.net/essays/elongfellow.htm> Great essays.

<http://www.multied.com/documents/PaulRevere.html> Letter to Belknap.

<http://www.masshist.org/cabinet/april2002/reverep1.htm> Original documents.

<http://crpuzzles.com/logic/logic0131.html> Logic puzzle.

http://www.phschool.com/atschool/literature/silver_7e/Student_Area/LIT8_7e_SU3_AQ6.html Lesson plans.

http://www.jamesshuggins.com/h/oth1/revere_dawes.htm William Dawes' ride.

<http://www.glc.k12.ga.us/BuilderV03/LPTools/LPShared/lpdisplay.asp?LPID=45578> Lesson plans.

http://www.education-world.com/a_tsl/archives/02-1/lesson019.shtml Lesson plans.

http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=220 Lesson plans.

<http://www.americanrevolution.com/MidnightRideofPaulRevere.htm> Basic information

http://www3.newberry.org/k12maps/module_13/resources.html Information, and images.

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/17/g35/landsea.html> Lesson plans.

<http://www2.visalia.k12.ca.us/library/collaboration/revolution.htm> General information about Revolutionary War.

<http://www.thesolutionsite.com/lpnew/lesson/872/kanawhacityelB5.htm> Lesson plans.