Paul Revere was a famous American patriot during the Colonial Period. He was a silversmith by profession, and many people from far and near commissioned him to create works of art in silver. We still remember him today with our Revereware pots and pans and Revere silverware.

However, Paul Revere is remembered far more for his famous “Midnight Ride” to warn the Colonists of the approaching British attack. He was also an express rider and would ride his horse at all hours of the day and night to deliver secret messages.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s 1860 poetic account embellished the event 85 years later. Read the following and answer the questions based on your knowledge of the historical events and Longfellow’s interpretation of these events.

Paul Revere’s Ride, by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

I

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.

II

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."

III

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
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.

V

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
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
And the moonlight flowing over all.

VI

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.

VII

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 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,
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.

VIII

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  
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.  
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,  
Is heard the tramp of his steed as he rides.

IX

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,  
And felt the damp of the river fog,  
That rises after the sun goes down.

X

It was one by the village clock  
When he galloped into Lexington.  
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.

XI

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 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.

XII

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,
Then crossing the fields to emerge again
Under the trees at the turn of the road,
And only pausing to fire and load.

XIII

So through the night rode Paul Revere;
And so through the night went his cry of alarm
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,
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.

1. The poet starts by saying, “Listen my children and you shall hear.” Who are these children?
2. What was the exact date of this famous ride?
3. Why does the poet say, “Hardly a man is now alive…..?”
4. Is he referring to us in the XXI Century?
5. In Stanza II, the poet talks about the famous signal of the British arrival. What was that signal?
6. Why did they have to send that kind of signal?
7. From where would the signal be given?
8. What would Paul Revere do once the signal was given?
9. What would all the people on his journey do?
10. In Stanza III we learn of the initial part of Revere’s journey. How did he get to the “opposite shore”?
11. What was the Somerset?
12. How would Paul Revere be able to see the British arrival?
13. Did the British arrive by land or by sea?
(The two possible routes would have been by land over Boston, and NW to Concord; and across the Charles River to Cambridge, Massachusetts. Concord was important because it was the temporary home of the Provincial Congress and a storehouse for militia arms and supplies.)

14. Why did Longfellow use the words “a phantom ship”?

15. Who is waiting for the signal on the other side?

16. What does he hear?

17. Where are they going?

18. What were they going to do?

19. Stanza V sets the scene for the signal. From where does the signal emanate?

20. What kind of night was it? (weather)

21. “He climbed … the wooden stairs, with stealthy tread” implies what?

22. Why did he startle the pigeons?

23. Why was the ladder trembling?

24. Why did he go to the “highest window in the wall”?

25. In Stanza VI, to what does Longfellow compare the churchyard?

26. To what does “wrapped in silence so deep and still” refer?

27. To what does “The watchful wind, as it went Creeping along from tent to tent” refer? What are the “tents”?

28. What is the “shadowy something far away”?

29. Stanza VI describes Paul Revere on the other side of the Charles River. How would you describe the patriot at this moment?

30. What was he waiting for?

31. Where was the focus of his attention?

32. How did Longfellow describe the Old North Church?

33. To what does “A second lamp in the belfry burns” refer?

34. From where are the British going to attack?

35. Stanza VIII describes Revere’s actual journey. To what does “…. And the spark struck out by that steed flying fearless and fleet” refer?

36. Why does Longfellow say, “The fate of the nation was riding that night”?

37. What do lines 7-14 in Stanza VIII describe?

38. Revere’s message and cry was “The British are coming! The British are coming!” (not the same as with the Beatles in the 60s!!!) Why were the British coming and what were they planning on doing?

39. Lines 10-11 “… tranquil and broad and deep, Is the Mystic, meeting the ocean tides.” What is the Mystic?

40. Stanza IX mentions his “crossing the bridge of the Medford town.” Why is this significant?

41. This stanza also provides images that appeal to the senses. What are the three examples mentioned?

42. How long did it take Paul Revere to ride from Medford to Lexington some five miles away?
43. What does “He saw the gilded weathercock swim in the moonlight” imply?
44. To what is the “bloody work they would look upon” refer in the last line of Stanza X?
45. How long was Revere’s ride from Lexington to Concord?
46. Look at the imagery in Stanza XI. What senses are affected?
47. To what does “Pierced by a British musket ball” refer?
48. What does “How the farmers give them ball for ball” signify?
49. What does “chasing the redcoats down the lane” signify?
50. What does “And only turning to fire and load” mean?
51. Who won the battle that day?
52. What does “A cry of defiance, and not of fear” say about the Colonists?
53. Why were the Colonists defiant?
54. What is the “word that shall echo for evermore” from line 6 in the last stanza?
55. How does this poem summarize the “spirit of the times”?
56. How did the Colonists react to the news of the British arrival?
57. With names like Concord, Lexington, Middlesex, Medford, and Mystic, in what state did Paul Revere’s famous ride take place?