

# HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW AND THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

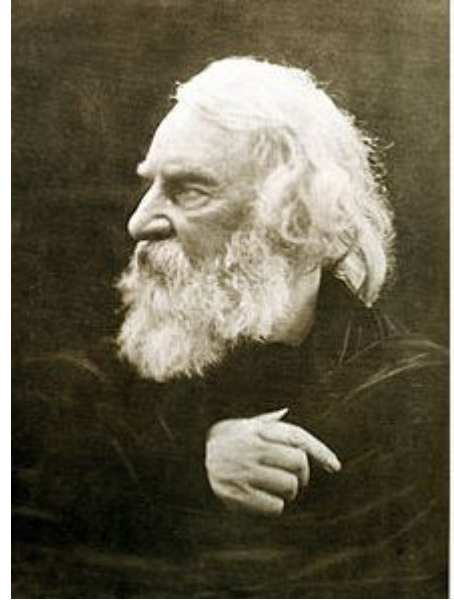
**Week 2 – W2HONORS**

WHY MIGHT PEOPLE WRITE POETRY?

WHAT POWER IS AFFORDED TO POETS AND THEIR WORDS THAT MAY  
NOT EXIST IN REGULAR PROSE?

# WHO IS HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW?

- BORN 1807 - DIED 1882
- AMERICAN POET AND EDUCATOR, MOST FAMOUS FOR WRITING "PAUL REVERE'S RIDE"
- LIVED ON THE EAST COAST; TRANSLATED TEXTS AFTER POETRY WRITING
- CLOSELY ALIGNED WITH FEDERALISM (ECONOMIC GROWTH, FRIENDLY RELATIONS WITH BRITISH, 1790S - 1810)
- PUBLISHED *POEMS ON SLAVERY* IN 1842 - FIERCE ABOLITIONIST (THINK SPEAKER & PURPOSE!)



# PAUL REVERE'S RIDE - BACKGROUND

- WRITTEN BY LONGFELLOW IN 1860 IN *THE ATLANTIC* MAGAZINE
  - SIGNIFICANT INACCURACIES AND DRAMATIZATION
  - WHAT IS GOING ON POLITICALLY DURING THIS TIME? (THINK OCCASION!)
  - SAME TIME SOUTH CAROLINA BECAME FIRST STATE TO SECEDE FROM US
- MEANT TO APPEAL TO NORTHERNER'S SENSE OF URGENCY AND, AS A CALL FOR ACTION, NOTED THAT HISTORY FAVORS THE COURAGEOUS (THINK PURPOSE!)
- ALTHOUGH LONGFELLOW FICTIONALLY RECOUNTS EVENTS FROM 1775, THE MESSAGE AND PURPOSE IS APPLICABLE TO THE TIME OF ITS PUBLISHING
  - (OCCASION + PURPOSE + SPEAKER + AUDIENCE!)

# PAUL REVERE'S RIDE - BACKGROUND

- ORIGINAL TITLE - "PAUL REVERE'S RIDE", RETITLED "THE LANDLORD'S TALE"
  - THE POEM IS SPOKEN BY THE LANDLORD OF THE WAYSIDE INN
    - IS THIS THE "SPEAKER"? CONSIDER WHOSE VOICE IS ACTUALLY HEARD
    - WHY MIGHT LONGFELLOW CHOOSE THIS METHOD TO CONVEY HIS POINT?
- REVERE, AN "EXPRESS", TELLS A FRIEND TO PREPARE SIGNAL LANTERNS TO INFORM HIM IF THE BRITISH PLAN TO ATTACK.
  - HOW IS LANGUAGE USED HERE? WHAT LIMITATIONS ON COMMUNICATION EXISTED DURING THE 1770S?

# PAUL REVERE'S RIDE - BACKGROUND

- AFTER BEING WARNED BY HIS FRIEND, REVERE CONDUCTS HIS RIDE THROUGH MEDFORD, LEXINGTON, AND CONCORD TO WARN THE PATRIOTS THAT THE BRITISH ARE COMING.
  - HOW IS REVERE ABLE TO USE LANGUAGE TO SPUR A REVOLUTION?
- WHILE THERE ARE INACCURACIES, THEY MAY HAVE BEEN DELIBERATE AND FOR POETIC EFFECT
  - IS IT OKAY TO SENSATIONALIZE AN EVENT OR IDEA AND CALL IT "POETIC LICENSE"?  
HOW IS THIS DIFFERENT THAN FABRICATING DATA OR "TRUTH"?
  - WHAT IS LONGFELLOW TRYING TO "DO" TO PAUL REVERE? DOES IT WORK? HOW DOES THIS ACTION APPEAL TO ETHOS AND PATHOS FOR HIS CURRENT (1860) CAUSE?

# INACCURACIES

- SIGNAL: ORIGINALLY *FROM* REVERE, NOT *FOR* REVERE.
- ROWING: DID NOT ROW HIS OWN BOAT
- TRIP: THE LENGTH OF TIME EXAGGERATED, AND REVERE DID NOT MAKE IT TO CONCORD
- CREDIT - LONGFELLOW CONTRIBUTES MUCH OF THE "SUCCESS" TO REVERE
  - WHY? WHY DON'T WE KNOW ABOUT PRESCOTT, DAWES, OR ANY OF THE MILITIAMEN?
  - HOW IS THIS SITUATION LIKENED TO OTHER HISTORICAL EVENTS, WHERE ONE PERSON TAKES THE SPOTLIGHT, REPRESENTING GROUPS OF OTHERS?

## SOOO... MS. WILKIE WHY DO WE CARE?

- WHEN PAUL REVERE DIED, THERE WAS NOTHING ABOUT HIS FAMOUS RIDE ON HIS TOMBSTONE. WHY NOT?
  - WHAT POWER DOES LONGFELLOW HAVE? SHOULD HE HAVE THIS POWER?
- HISTORIANS (AND TEXTBOOK WRITERS) USED LONGFELLOW'S POEM AS A PRIMARY SOURCE AND HISTORICAL EVIDENCE.
  - WHY IS THIS PROBLEMATIC?



# PAUL REVERE'S RIDE

TO CONSIDER...

- HOW MIGHT THE USE OF A FAMILIAR EVENT, LIKE PAUL REVERE'S RIDE (REMEMBER, IT ONLY HAPPENED <100 YEARS PRIOR) HELP APPEAL TO WADSWORTH'S AUDIENCE? WHAT RHETORICAL APPEAL IS HE USING?
- WHAT FEELINGS FROM REVERE'S RIDE COULD BE CONNECTED TO LONGFELLOW'S CURRENT CAUSE? HOW IS THIS REFLECTED IN THE TEXT? (WHAT WORDS ARE USED/IMAGES CREATED?)
- HOW CAN LANGUAGE, OR MORE SPECIFICALLY, POETRY, LEAD TO FREEDOM?