

THE MIDNIGHT RIDE OF
Paul Revere
STUDY GUIDE

About the Play:

TheatreworksUSA is staging a new musical, *The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere*, a tale of the provocations which led to the American Revolution. The play brings to life some of the conflicts between patriotism and freedom and the consequences of lack of communication.

Note:

Please inform your students that because this is a “play,” the playwright, director and actors will be using artistic freedom to “play” with history. This allows the audience to come “face to face” with important characters – real and imagined – during the short time of the play – who inspired events of historical proportions that forever changed the face of our nation. There is humor in the depiction of Sam Adams and King George III for theatrical purposes. While the king and Samuel Adams were not, in real life, silly people, the King actually did suffer from mental problems.



Synopsis:

The play is set in the colony of Massachusetts Bay. Paul Revere has finished his apprenticeship at the local silver store and is ready to open his own shop. He is full of deserved confidence and sees himself as the finest of silversmiths. In the course of the day’s business, one by one, we meet a colorful group of characters, including Dr. Joseph Warren, who credits himself with the latest medical cures: leeching, bleeding and extractions.

There is a shift in location between London, where we meet King George III and Lord North as they scheme to raise taxes in order to relieve the colonists of their earnings – and Boston, which begins to bristle at the unfairness of the King’s actions. The bristling results in the forming of a group, led by Samuel Adams, called “The Sons of Liberty,” and Paul Revere is asked to join them.

King George, with the help of Lord North, creates more taxes to levy for every day products. The citizens in Boston protest and the result is that more troops arrive from London to maintain order in the city. The citizens send petitions to King George, who sends more troops and raises the taxes even more. Conflicts between soldiers and citizens become more intense, resulting in the Boston Massacre.

As the tension is heightened, a new proclamation arrives from the King – the Tea Act, granting exclusive license to the East India Company to see tea to colonies. This is devastating to the artisans of Boston. What is then being brewed is the infamous “Boston Tea Party.” Soldiers close down the Port of Boston. Meanwhile, the Sons of Liberty have been stockpiling arms for the event of a military battle. The soldiers are threatening the citizens that their arms will be seized. The Sons of Liberty develop a plan to have spies inform them when troops are on the way to seize the citizens’ weapons. At a minute’s notice, someone, a Minute Man, will mount his horse and warn the surrounding citizens of the oncoming danger. It is here where Paul Revere is given his assignment, and we learn of the midnight ride of Paul Revere. The play ends with the formal beginning of the American Revolution.

Background:

The American Revolution was a revolution that ended two centuries of rule of the Thirteen Colonies by the British Empire and created the modern United States of America. The Revolutionary era was both exhilarating and disturbing – a time of progress for some, dislocation for others. The American Revolution is the series of ideas and changes that resulted in the revolution and ensuing political separation of the thirteen colonies in North America from the British Empire and the creation of the United States of America with a new political system. The American War of Independence which lasted from 1775 to 1783, was one part of the revolution, the revolution by the Americans began before the first shot was fired at Lexington and Concord and continued after the British Surrender at Yorktown in 1781. Years later, John Adams wrote: “The Revolution was effected before the war commenced” and “The revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people.”

Historians usually agree that the revolutionary era began in 1763 as Britain defeated France in the French and Indian War, and the military threat to the colonies from France ended. The end of the period is usually marked by as Treaty of Paris in 1783. However, references to the “revolutionary era” sometimes stretched to 1789, when a new government under George Washington began operating.

Other points of view:

Interpretations about the effect of the revolution vary. At one end of the spectrum is the older view that the American Revolution was not “revolutionary” at all, that it did not radically transform colonial society, but simply replaced a distant government with a local one. The more recent view pioneered by historians such as Bernard Bailyn, Gordon Wood and Edmund Morgan is that the American Revolution was a unique and radical even based on a new ideology of “republicanism” which produced deep changes that had a profound impact on world history.

About Paul Revere:

Paul Revere was born in Boston to Apollos Rivoire and Deborah Hichborn. He apprenticed under his father, learning gold and silversmithing. Paul took over the family business following his father’s death in 1754. In 1756, Revere volunteered to fight the French in the Crow Point

expedition. On August 17, 1757, he married Sarah Orne. Revere also added engraving, political cartoons, seals, bookplates, coats-of-arms and dental work to his silversmithing.

On May 3, 1773, Sarah died and on October 10, 1773, Paul Revere married Rachel Walker. He helped and participated in the Boston Tea Party. In 1774, he began serving as courier for the Massachusetts Committee of Correspondence. It was in this capacity that he gained notoriety for his Midnight Ride on April 18-19, 1775. Following the war, he was a successful businessman. On May 10, 1818, Paul Revere died of natural causes at the age of eighty-three.

Vocabulary:

Artisan	A skilled manual worker or craftsman
Bleeding	Drawing blood surgically, formerly used as a treatment for certain illnesses
Boston Massacre	On March 5, 1770, British troops, as a result of rising tensions in Boston, fired into a mob and killed five
Boston Tea Party	American colonists (believed to be Sons of Liberty) dressed up like Indians and threw crates of tea from East India Company ships into the Boston Harbor
Coffers	Large strongbox for valuables, treasury or store of funds
Colony	A group of settlers or settlement in a new country, or partly subject to a mother country
Commission	Authority to perform a task or certain duties, person or group entrusted with such an authority, instruction or duty given
Diligent	Hardworking, showing care and effort
Dr. Joseph Warren	Graduated from the Harvard medical college and became a leading doctor and surgeon, and was a foremost leader in the cause of liberty
Extraction	Removal, uprooting
Inventory	A complete list of goods
John Hancock	One of the most popular names in American history for signing the Declaration of Independence with the most flamboyant and recognizable style out of all the rest of the signatures, was elected to the Continental Congress and eventually became the President of the Continental Congress
King George III	King of England from 1760-1811, had a maddening disease called porphyria, died blind, deaf and mad
Leeching	Bloodsucking worm formerly used medically
Levy	Impose or collect payment, collecting of a tax
Minute Men	Men who would be ready at a moment's notice to spread the word that the British were coming
Musket Balls	Ammunition for gun cannons
Parliament	Legislature of various countries, such as the United Kingdom
Pioneer	Initiator of a new enterprise, inventor, explorer or settler or colonist
Proclamation	An announcement of declaration made publicly or officially
Samuel Adams	Adams, Samuel (1722-1803) was an American patriot and politician who stirred opposition to British rule in the American Colonies. However, Adams attempted to make people work for their right peacefully through committees and other meetings. He was willing to justify violent opposition to Britain only if all else failed.

Silversmith	A worker in silver, manufacturer of silver articles
Sons of Liberty	Secret society of American rebels
Spread the Word	The phrase Paul Revere created to communicate about his business, about the dangers ahead.
Trinkets	A trifling ornament or piece of jewelry

For further information about the American Revolution and specifically some of the names mentioned here, the Internet is a treasury of facts and figured. Many of the characters met in *The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere* can be found under their own names.

Activities:

1. Research medical science in the 18th Century.
2. Research the history of taxes in early America. What does the reference "taxation without representation" mean?
3. Students can help design a map of Boston and outline the path of Paul Revere's ride as described in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem, available on-line here: <http://poetry.eserver.org/paul-revere.html> (also on the back two pages of this study guide).
4. Revere's most famous engraving, "The Boston Massacre," is reproduced on the last page of this study guide. Have your students write an essay about it.
5. Students can design newspaper headlines for each of the increase in taxes on the colonists.
6. Design a map of the thirteen colonies and pinpoint Boston Harbor where the "tea party" took place.
7. Enact a favorite scene from the play and have the class divided into British soldiers and American colonists.
8. Create the language of a petition to King George III, asking for some consideration with regard to the taxes.
9. Essay: Should the American Revolution be thought of as a true revolution or merely as a civil war where there was a change in power?

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The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere

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.

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 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.

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 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.



Paul Revere's engraving of the Boston Massacre