



## LEARNING ABOUT LONGFELLOW

### Introduction

By the time of his death in 1882, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was one of the world's most celebrated and beloved writers. He remains one of America's most famous poets.

Before studying Longfellow's poetry, it is helpful for students to understand something about the man. This lesson provides students with an opportunity to learn about Longfellow's life.

### Intended Learning Outcomes (Understandings)

1. Students will understand that Longfellow was one of America's most famous and well-read poets, and that his poems were known throughout the world.
2. Students will understand that although Longfellow lived more than one hundred years ago, his poetry is still widely known and read today.
3. Students will understand that Longfellow wrote poems inspired by his own feelings and experiences, and that he also wrote poems that told stories.
4. Students will learn other basic biographical information about Longfellow.

### Intended Learning Outcomes (Skills)

1. Students will be able to extract and discuss essential biographical information about Longfellow from a biographical essay and follow-up discussion.
2. Students will be able to complete either a crossword puzzle or word match puzzle using their knowledge of Longfellow's biography.

### Lesson Length

45 – 60 minutes

### Teacher Preparation

1. Review and be familiar with the essential biographical information in *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: A Biography* and *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: Biographical Highlights*.

2. Select either the *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Crossword* OR the *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Word Match* for your students to complete.

## **Materials**

1. *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: A Biography* (page 11 – 12) OR *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: Biographical Highlights* (page 13).
2. Chalk board, white board, or flip-chart with writing implements
3. Copies of the *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Crossword* (page 14) OR the *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Word Match* (page 16) for each student.

## **Activities**

- I. Explain to the class that they will be learning about the famous poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.
- II. Read (or have students read) aloud *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: Biographical Highlights* or *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: A Biography*.
- III. Discussion
  - A. Begin a discussion about Longfellow's life and work by asking students what important things they remember about Longfellow from the read-aloud.
  - B. Ask questions that will help students recall what they heard. Encourage questions and discussion.
  - C. List what students remember about Longfellow on the chalk board, white board, or flip-chart.
- IV. Puzzle
  - A. Distribute copies of the puzzle of your choice (crossword or word match) to the class.
  - B. Instruct students to use what they have learned about Longfellow to complete the puzzle.

## **Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks Standards**

### *English Language Arts*

- Language Strand/ Standard 2: Questioning, Listening, and Contributing  
Students will pose questions, listen to the ideas of others, and contribute their own information or ideas in group discussions and interviews in order to acquire new knowledge.
- Reading and Literature Strand/ Standard 8: Understanding Text  
Students will identify the basic facts and main ideas in a text and use them as the basis for interpretation.
- Longfellow is included in Appendix A: A Suggested List of Authors, Illustrators, or Works Reflecting Our Common Literary and Cultural Heritage, for grades 5-8.



# Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: A Biography

## Early Years

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was born in Portland, Maine on February 27, 1807. His mother, the former Zilpah Wadsworth, was the daughter of General Peleg Wadsworth of Revolutionary War fame and a descendent of passengers on the Mayflower. His father, Stephen, was a noted Portland lawyer who served in the Massachusetts State Legislature and United States Congress.

Second in a family of eight children, Henry enjoyed a happy and active boyhood. He was enrolled at age three in a traditional “dame” school and later attended the Portland Academy and Bowdoin College in Maine where his classmates included Nathaniel Hawthorne and Franklin Pierce.

## Career and Marriage

Recognizing his fine academic record, the Bowdoin trustees offered Longfellow a professorship in Modern Languages upon graduation in 1825. The position required travel abroad to prepare for his duties. Longfellow studied in France, Spain, Italy, and Germany. In 1829, he returned to Bowdoin where he spent six successful and productive years teaching, publishing textbooks, and writing articles for popular literary reviews.

In 1831, Longfellow married Mary Storer Potter. The two lived in Maine for several years until Longfellow was offered a position as head of the Modern Language Department at Harvard College in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Once again, he journeyed to Europe to study. Mary got sick and died in Rotterdam, Netherlands in November, 1835.

Suffering great sorrow at his loss, Longfellow plunged into study and spent the following winter and spring in Heidelberg perfecting his German. He met the Appletons of Boston’s fashionable Beacon Hill in 1836 while summering in Switzerland. Nathan Appleton was a prominent banker, manufacturer, and politician who made his fortune in the textile industry. His daughter, Frances Elizabeth (Fanny), captivated Longfellow’s attentions, but her interest in him was not immediately returned. The young professor left soon after for America and his duties at Harvard.

## Cambridge Life

Seeking residence in Cambridge, Longfellow persuaded Elizabeth Craige to accept him as a lodger at her comfortable home on Brattle Street with its views of the Charles River. His first writings were published during these years: *Hyperion*, *A Romance*, and *Voices of the Night*.

Fanny Appleton, experiencing a change of mind and heart after several years of courtship, married Henry Longfellow on July 13, 1843. Her father purchased the Craige house later that year and presented it and the surrounding grounds to the Longfellows as a wedding gift. Thus began eighteen years of devoted marriage during which time two sons and four daughters were born.

Well- educated and traveled, Fanny was a perceptive critic of art and literature who happily shared her husband's pursuits. The couple was seldom apart. Once, while reluctantly attending a ball without his wife, Longfellow lamented that "the light seemed dimmer, the music softer, the flowers fewer, and the women less fair."

## Poet and Friend

In 1854, Longfellow resigned from Harvard and devoted himself to writing. *Evangeline*, *The Song of Hiawatha*, and *Courtship of Miles Standish* – all published between 1847 and 1858 – brought him great popularity and fame. He also spent many hours entertaining notable friends such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Charles Sumner, and Cornelius Felton, who later became president of Harvard.

Success, tranquility, and happiness were shattered in 1861 when Fanny Appleton Longfellow suffered fatal burns while sealing packets of her children's locks of hair for keepsakes. She was buried in Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge on the eighteenth anniversary of their wedding day.

## Later Years

In the years following Fanny's death, Longfellow gradually put his life back together again. He continued to reside in the house they had shared and served as both father and mother to the children. His remaining years brought forth such popular and esteemed works as *Tales of the Wayside Inn* with its "Paul Revere's Ride." The poet also made his last trip to Europe where he was honored by the Queen of England, received honorary degrees from Oxford and Cambridge, and visited Charles Dickens and Alfred Lord Tennyson.

Often an unusual mix of despair and encouragement, Longfellow's poetry struck a responsive chord in the nation's collective heart and mind. His was a full and admired life, the legacy of which continues to prompt an enthusiasm for America's people and past. Revered by his contemporaries and touted as "the people's poet," it is important to remember his simplicity of spirit. In 1879, three years before his death in 1882, Longfellow received a gift from the children of Cambridge: a chair made of wood from the "spreading chestnut tree" immortalized in his poem *The Village Blacksmith*. It was a gesture returning to the poet a bit of the love he had given to his own and other children.

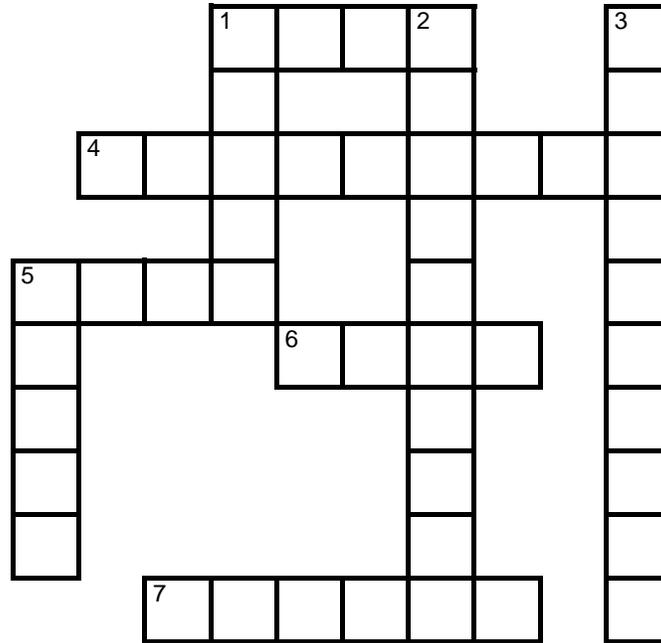
*Ah? What would the world be to us  
If the children were no more?  
We should dread the desert behind us  
Worse than the dark before.*

## HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW: BIOGRAPHICAL HIGHLIGHTS

- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, one of America's most famous and best loved poets, lived more than one hundred years ago (1807- 1882).
- Longfellow was born in 1807. He grew up in Maine and went to Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine.
- In 1831, Longfellow married Mary Potter. She died four years later. Longfellow was grief-stricken over her death, and wrote poems that reflected his feelings.
- In 1836, Longfellow moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts to teach foreign languages at Harvard College. He spoke at least eight languages well and could read and write four others.
- Longfellow composed his first famous poem, "Psalm of Life," in 1838.
- Longfellow married Frances Appleton in 1843. Her father purchased the Cambridge house in which Longfellow was renting rooms as a wedding gift for them. The house had been a Revolutionary War headquarters for General George Washington.
- *Evangeline* (1847), a very popular narrative poem, brought Longfellow a great deal of attention. By the time he was 47, his success enabled him to retire from teaching and devote himself to writing poetry.
- Longfellow wrote many famous poems, including "Paul Revere's Ride" (1860) and *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855). He wrote poetry about his feelings and experiences, and also wrote epic poems that told stories.
- Frances (known as Fanny) and Henry had six children, five of whom lived to be adults. Longfellow was very close to his family and enjoyed spending time with his children. His family life and experiences inspired many of his poems.
- In 1861, Fanny Longfellow tragically died from burns she received when the sleeve of her dress caught fire in the study.
- Strangers often came to Longfellow's home hoping to catch a glimpse of him. He frequently invited them in and spent hours visiting with them.
- By the time of his death (1882), Longfellow's poems were known and celebrated around the world.

## HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow lived more than one hundred years ago, from 1807 to 1882. He still is one of America's most famous and best loved poets. Use what you have learned about Longfellow to complete this crossword puzzle.



### Across

1. Number of Longfellow children that lived to be adults
4. Longfellow spoke many \_\_\_\_\_
5. Longfellow's first wife who died young, \_\_\_\_\_ Potter
6. Longfellow was a famous \_\_\_\_\_
7. Fanny's \_\_\_\_\_ purchased the Cambridge house as a wedding gift

### Down

1. Longfellow's second wife, \_\_\_\_\_ Appleton
2. Longfellow's very popular narrative poem
3. During the American Revolution, he had his headquarters in the Cambridge house that would later become home to Longfellow.
5. The state where Longfellow grew up

## CROSSWORD PUZZLE SOLUTION

                  F I V E          W  
                  A          V          A  
          L A N G U A G E S  
                  N          N          H  
M A R Y          G          I  
A                  P O E T          N  
I                          L          G  
N                          I          T  
E                          N          O  
                  F A T H E R          N

### Across

1. Number of Longfellow children that lived to be adults
4. Longfellow spoke many
5. Longfellow's first wife who died young, \_\_\_\_\_Potter
6. Longfellow was a famous \_\_\_\_\_
7. Fanny's \_\_\_\_\_ purchased the Cambridge house as a wedding gift

### Down

1. Longfellow's second wife, \_\_\_\_\_Appleton
2. Longfellow's very popular narrative poem
3. During the American Revolution, he had his headquarters in the Cambridge house that would later become home to Longfellow.
5. The state where Longfellow grew up

# HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

## WORD MATCH

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow lived more than one hundred years ago, from 1807 to 1882. He still is one of American's most famous and best loved poets. Use what you have learned about Longfellow's life to complete this word match. Draw a line from the Question to the correct Answer.

### Questions

Where did Longfellow grow up?

Where did he move when he went to work at Harvard College?

Who was his first wife?

Who was his second wife?

How many Longfellow children lived to be adults?

What is Longfellow famous for?

What was Longfellow's very popular narrative poem?

What is another of his famous poems that tells a story?

Who gave the Longfellows their Cambridge house?

Who used the Cambridge house for headquarters during the Revolutionary War?

How many foreign languages did Longfellow speak?

### Answers

General George Washington

Five

Eight

*Evangeline*

Mary Potter

Frances (Fanny) Appleton

Fanny's father

His poems

*Paul Revere's Ride*

Maine

Cambridge, MA

# HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

## WORD MATCH - SOLUTION

The word list in the Answers column has been reordered to provide correct answers to questions in the Question column.

### **Questions**

Where did Longfellow grow up?

Where did he move when he went to work at Harvard College?

Who was his first wife?

Who was his second wife?

How many Longfellow children lived to be adults?

What is Longfellow famous for?

What was Longfellow's very popular narrative poem?

What is another of his famous poems that tells a story?

Who gave the Longfellows their Cambridge house?

Who used the Cambridge house for headquarters during the Revolutionary War?

How many foreign languages did Longfellow speak?

### **Answers**

Maine

Cambridge, MA

Mary Potter

Frances (Fanny) Appleton

Five

His poems

*Evangeline*

*Paul Revere's Ride*

Fanny's father

General George Washington

Eight