

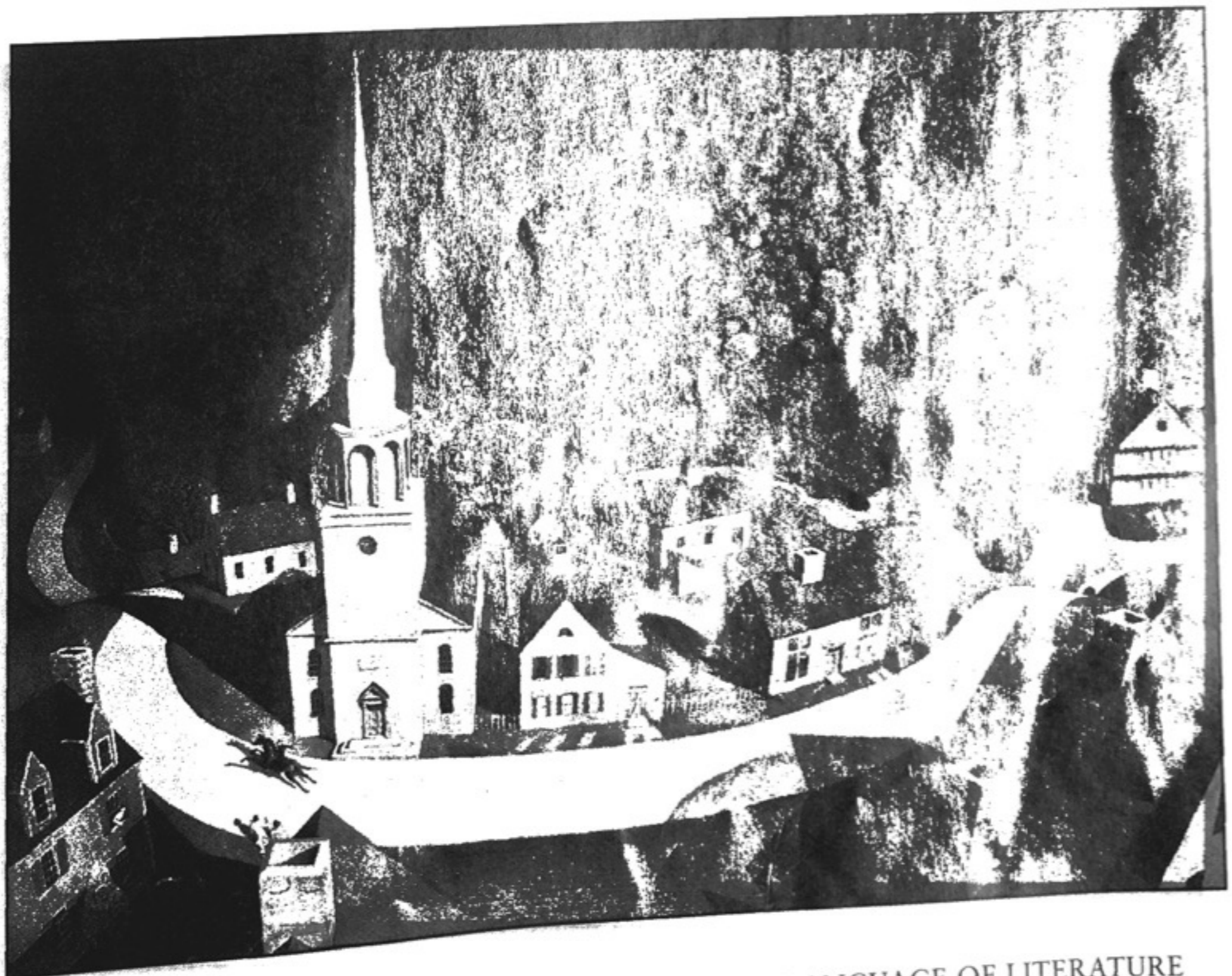
Reading History Through Literature

History teaches everything, even the future.

—Alphonse de Lamartine

Have you ever imagined what it might have been like to live in North America before the Europeans arrived, or during the Revolutionary War? These times and places can be explored in a variety of **historical writings**. History is a subject not only for textbooks and nonfiction but for fiction, poetry, and drama as well.

Informative nonfiction about history provides factual accounts of past events, places, and people. **Historical fiction**, however, combines fact and fiction in a story set in the past. Like historical fiction, **poetry** and **drama** may also tell a historical event in a fictional story. Using these genres, a writer can present a new perspective on an event or person. Through the various types of historical writings, you can learn a great deal about a time in history.



From "Paul Revere's Ride"

History in Informative Nonfiction

Informative nonfiction about history presents factual information about past events, places, and people. The writer may have actually lived at that time or may live in the present and is explaining a past event or era. Informative nonfiction includes essays, articles, reference books, and autobiographical and biographical accounts. The example to the right provides factual details about its subject, President Lincoln.

History in Fiction, Poetry, and Drama

In historical fiction, poetry, and drama, the writer may use both real and fictional characters, dialogue, and events. A historical event may be the focus of the story. The setting is particularly important because it gives you clues about when and where the story takes place.

Historical fiction and **drama** include all the story elements of fiction: plot, character, setting, and theme. The author researches the historical period in order to provide accurate details of the events, people, and places.

History may also be written in poetry. **Narrative poetry** is a form that tells a story and includes a setting, plot, and characters. Narrative poetry can be used to tell a historic event or the deeds of a heroic historical figure.

YOUR TURN What do you learn about a historical event in this passage from "Paul Revere's Ride"?

Sources

For all types of historical writing, writers use sources to research the era, events, and people. A **primary source** is a firsthand account of an event or place. Diaries, autobiographies, interviews, and letters are all primary sources. A **secondary source** is an account of an event or place that is based on other sources. Biographies, textbooks, and historical fiction are types of secondary sources.

Lincoln had been in
abduction and assa
was first elected. T
arrived in the mail
filed them away in
marked ASSASSINA

HIST

He said to his fri
By land or sea fr
Hang a lantern a
Of the North Chu
One if by land, a
And I on the opp
Ready to ride and
Through every M
For the country f

Paraphrasing

Have you ever listened to someone speak, known that his or her message hadn't quite been understood, and said, "What he or she meant was . . ." If so, you were paraphrasing. Paraphrasing is restating a writer's ideas in your own words. You include the writer's most important ideas and leave out the unimportant ones. A paraphrase will generally be about the same length as the original. Rewriting the information will help you understand what you've read and may provide ideas for further research. As you read, use the strategies on this page to help you paraphrase.

How to Apply the Skill

To **paraphrase**, an active reader will:

- **Question** the main idea and supporting details
- **Clarify** the information
- Restate ideas in his or her own words
- Look for supporting evidence

Try It Now!

Read and paraphrase the excerpt below.

Jefferson assumed that, although the Sioux were said to be the fiercest and greatest of the tribes, they were "very desirous of being on the most friendly terms with us." That bit of wishful thinking led to Jefferson's direct order to Lewis. "On that nation," he commanded, referring to the Sioux, "we wish most particularly to make a favorable impression."

—Stephen E. Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*

