“The Cross of Snow”  
by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

In the long, sleepless watches of the night,  
A gentle face--the face of one long dead--  
Looks at me from the wall, where round its head  
The night-lamp casts a halo of pale light.  
Here in this room she died; and soul more white  
Never through martyrdom of fire was led  
To its repose; nor can in books be read  
The legend of a life more benedight.  
There is a mountain in the distant West  
That, sun-defying, in its deep ravines  
Displays a cross of snow upon its side.  
Such is the cross I wear upon my breast  
These eighteen years, through all the changing scenes  
And seasons, changeless since the day she died.

Enrichment Links:

Taking pictures on the battlefield as recreation in the Civil War:  
http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/gettex/photo1.htm

January 7, 1892 letter, from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, referencing “after the children’s hour”  
http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/magbell:@field(DOCID+@lit(magbell03800206))
Central guiding questions:

1. What part(s) of this poem reflect Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s attempt to define American identity?

2. What is Longfellow’s message in his poem and is this message still relevant today?

3. Looking at his message, what qualities and values as a person do you think HWL lived by?

4. Describe Longfellow’s voice in this poem and how does it reflect his message?

5. Which images in the poem strengthen/illuminate Longfellow’s message?

6. What traditional poetic conventions (i.e. rhyme, simile, meter, etc.) can you identify in this poem? Do they enhance your appreciation for the poem?