



# OLD IRONSIDES

Oliver Wendell Holmes

Ay, tear her tattered ensign<sup>1</sup> down!  
Long has it waved on high,  
And many an eye has danced to see  
That banner in the sky;  
5 Beneath it rung the battle shout,  
And burst the cannon's roar;—  
The meteor of the ocean air  
Shall sweep the clouds no more.

Her deck, once red with heroes' blood,  
10 Where knelt the vanquished foe,  
When winds were hurrying o'er the flood,  
And waves were white below,  
No more shall feel the victor's tread,  
Or know the conquered knee;—  
15 The harpies<sup>2</sup> of the shore shall pluck  
The eagle of the sea! **C**

Oh, better that her shattered hulk  
Should sink beneath the wave;  
Her thunders shook the mighty deep,  
20 And there should be her grave;  
Nail to the mast her holy flag,  
Set every threadbare sail,  
And give her to the god of storms,  
The lightning and the gale! **D**

1. **ensign**: flag.

2. **harpies**: evil monsters from Greek mythology that are half woman and half bird.

## ANALYZE VISUALS

What mood is suggested by this image of the *USS Constitution* ("Old Ironsides") in the mist in Boston Harbor?

## **C** METER

What is the basic meter of this poem? Notice which lines are longer and which are shorter.

## **D** MAKE INFERENCES

Reread the third stanza. Based on what has been said in previous stanzas about the ship's gloried past, do you think the speaker is being sincere or *ironic* about the fate of Old Ironsides? Explain.