

Background

In 1775 unrest bubbled through the American Colonies. Britain had severely restricted Massachusetts through the Intolerable Acts; towns were voting to boycott British goods, and British soldiers were becoming a common sight in the American Colonies. In this lesson you will explore a famous speech by Patrick Henry (1736–1799), member of the Second Virginia Convention.

The American Colonies were attempting to negotiate with British in 1775, and many of Henry’s fellow delegates wanted to wait until these negotiations were completed before taking action. But Henry felt that delay would be a major mistake. On March 23, 1775, he asked the Virginia Convention to take a defensive stance immediately against Great Britain by raising an armed company in every Virginia county — an action considered by many to be open treason. His speech reflected language and actions far more radical than his fellow delegates were willing to go in public, but Henry based his request upon the assumption that even more aggressive military actions by the British would soon follow. Twenty-seven days after this speech was delivered, the Battles of Lexington and Concord proved Henry correct.

In this lesson you will look at Patrick Henry’s speech and analyze his methods for convincing his fellow members of the Virginia Convention to take a military stance against the British. These delegates were wealthy and powerful and they had much to lose; Henry’s request was a big decision that many of them were reluctant to make. Henry used not only rhetorical devices but also the strategies of classical argument, making a potentially confusing situation simple and straightforward as he attempted to move all his fellow delegates toward the same result. His recommendations were accepted by the Convention.

Analyzing Patrick Henry’s Persuasive Rhetoric in “Speech in the Virginia Convention” — pg. 260-261

Patrick Henry is most remembered for his powerful **persuasive oratory**. While other orators preached patience, Henry urged fighting against the British with both logical and emotional appeals.

- o With **logical appeals (logos)**, Henry persuaded the audience members to understand his point of view through common sense, specific evidence, and reasonable explanations.
- o With **emotional appeals (pathos)**, Henry persuaded the audience members to understand his point of view through suggestive imagery and diction, idealized explanations, and a powerful personal connection to the audience.
- o With **ethical appeals (ethos)**, Henry appealed to his audiences’ sense of right, justice and virtue.

Henry’s speeches were made more powerful through the use of **specific rhetorical and persuasive techniques**. **Rhetoric** is the art of communicating ideas. In his rhetoric, Henry made extensive use of:

- o Repetition—repeating a point tells the audience that it is especially important
- o Allusion—indirect reference to a person, place, event or literary work with which the author believes the reader will be familiar.
- o Rhetorical Questions—questions that don’t require answers
- o Parallel Structure —when a speaker or writer expresses ideas of EQUAL worth with the same grammatical form.

On an AP Exam, you would be asked a question like this:

After reading Patrick Henry's incendiary speech, analyze the rhetorical strategies he uses to incite listeners to action against Britain.

So how would you go about this?

You would do a paragraph by paragraph analysis of the rhetorical devices and figurative language used in the speech.

What would your analysis look like? Here's my sample introduction. Beyond the introduction, you then would analyze the elements in each paragraph.

In 1775, Patrick Henry introduced a resolution to the Virginia Convention to form the local militia to be prepared to fight the British. The resolution passed by five votes. His **audience** was the members of the Virginia convention. In his **call to action**, Henry calls on the patriots of Virginia to arm themselves in order to be prepared to fight the British if they do not yield to some of their demands. (**Thesis statement**) Patrick Henry utilizes a variety of rhetorical devices and an urgent, pleading tone that grows increasingly inflammatory until he delivers his ringing declaration: "Give me liberty or give me death!" exclamation.

Paragraph	Direct Quotation	Analysis: Which appeal and/or rhetorical device is being used? What is the effect?
Paragraph #1	<p>MR. PRESIDENT: No man thinks more highly than I do of the patriotism, as well as abilities, of the very worthy gentlemen who have just addressed the House. But different men often see the same subject in different lights; and, therefore, I hope it will not be thought disrespectful to those gentlemen if, entertaining as I do, opinions of a character very opposite to theirs,</p> <p>Flattery</p>	<p>This may be flattery to take the opposition off guard. His audience is the house of Burgesses and he is addressing the men who have spoken before him who do not want to go to war with England. We know it is effective because they went to war one month later and the vote that night was to go to war.</p> <p>He literally means that men see the same subject in different ways, but he uses the word "light" to introduce the idea that light represents truth and spiritual illumination, ideas which he continues to develop in the speech. In doing this, he is aligning his view of the need to fight with God's purpose.</p> <p>Ethos is being used to appeal to the character of the men.</p>
paragraph #1	<p>"I consider it as nothing less than a question of freedom or slavery."</p> <p>powerful comparison</p>	<p>By "it" Henry is referring to the need to fight for their freedom. He uses it to create an appeal to pathos because he is trying to convince them that there is only ONE alternative to fighting and that is slavery or British rule. The idea of slavery would create fear and anger in the minds of the colonists.</p>

paragraph 2	<p>Mr. President, it is natural to man to indulge in the illusions of hope. We are apt to shut our eyes against a painful truth, and listen to the song of that siren till she transforms us into beasts.</p> <p>Allusion to Greek Mythology—Homer’s Odyssey. The sirens’ seductive song lured sailors to their deaths. The goddess Circe lured men to her island and then magically transformed them into pigs. Henry compares “the illusions of hope” to these dangerous mythical creatures.</p>	<p>This allusion is useful because it brings about the idea of weak men who are susceptible to the “songs” of those who would enslave them or cause their deaths. England is the “siren.”</p> <p>This is ethos because it speaks to character.</p> <p>powerful imagery=shut our eyes against a painful truth</p>
paragraph 2	“Is this the part of wise men, engaged in a great and arduous struggle for liberty?”	Rhetorical question
paragraph 2	“Are we disposed to be of the number of those who, having eyes, see not, and, having ears, hear not, the things which so nearly concern their temporal salvation?”	Henry is using an Allusion to Ezekiel 12:2 here to create an appeal to authority (ethos) and an appeal to pathos. The Bible verse says that those who can’t see and can’t hear the truth about God will lose their spiritual salvation. Here he is comparing the colonists who can’t see or hear the truth about what the British are doing to those in the Bible who lost their spiritual salvation because they couldn’t see or hear.
paragraph 2	“I am willing to know the whole truth; to know the worst, and to provide for it.”	Parallel structure
paragraph 3	“I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided, and that is the lamp of experience.”	Metaphor. In metaphorically calling experience a lamp, he is saying that experience will show or “light” the way for the future. There is also a Biblical allusion here to the scripture that says that God’s word is a “lamp unto they feet and a light unto thy path.” There is an appeal to ethos because it shows Henry as a spiritual person.
paragraph 3	“I know of no way of judging of the future but by the past.”	Appeal to logos (logic)
paragraph 3	“Is it that insidious smile with which our petition has been lately received?”	Rhetorical question
paragraph 3	“Trust it not, sir; it will prove a snare to your feet.”metaphor “Suffer yourselves not to be betrayed with a kiss.” allusion	<p>Metaphor. He metaphorically calls the British response a “snare”, connoting the image of a trap that will ensnare them.</p> <p>Allusion: refers to the apostle Judas, who betrayed Jesus by kissing him. Henry used to brief, powerful allusion to suggest that there might be something sinister behind Great Britain’s friendly gestures.</p>
paragraph 3	Are fleets and armies necessary to a work of love and reconciliation? Have we shown ourselves so unwilling to be reconciled that force must be called in to win back our love?	Rhetorical questions are used in Lines 50-55 to anticipate the arguments of his opponents. This technique grabs attention, makes a deeper impression than simple sentences, and persuades listeners the negotiating will not work.

paragraph 4	Ask yourselves...Are fleets and armies...Have we shown...our love?...Can gentleman...Has Great Britain...	5 Rhetorical questions in this paragraph. What emotions is Henry trying to evoke through these questions? Feelings of OUTRAGE . he is arguing that the British govt. is treating the colonists unfairly and dishonestly. The British say that they want reconciliation, but their military actions suggest otherwise.
paragraph 4	"They are sent over to bind and rivet upon us those chains which the British ministry have been so long forging."	Metaphor —he says the British intend to control the colonists by force.
paragraph 5	Another series of rhetorical questions	Henry follows each rhetorical question with a declarative sentence answering it. The rhetorical effect is that he emphasizes the military procedures the British are taking. This creates an appeal to pathos because it evokes fear in the minds of the colonists.
paragraph 5 last sent.	"Let us not, I beseech you, sir, deceive ourselves longer."	Appeal to ethos
paragraph 6	"Sir, we have done everything that could be done to avert the storm which is now coming on."	Metaphor
paragraph 6	"We have petitioned; we have remonstrated; we have supplicated; we have prostrated ourselves before the throne..Our petitions have been slighted; our..."	The effect of these parallel sentences (colonists' actions/British actions) is to create a rhetorical pattern of cause and effect. He uses the same wording
para 6 last sentence	"we have been spurned, with contempt, from the foot of the throne!"	Metaphor —shows that the colonists petitions have been totally disregarded—in other words their petitions are no longer even being considered.
para 7	" <u>If we wish to be free-- if we mean to preserve</u> inviolate those inestimable privileges for which we have been so long contending-- <u>if we mean not</u> basely to abandon the noble struggle in which we have been so long engaged"	Parallel structure
para 7	"we must fight! I repeat it, sir, we must fight!"	He uses repetition to present his Call to Action . He wants his listeners to vote in favor of assembling an army to defend itself against Britain.
para 8	"But when shall we be stronger? Will it be the next week, or the next year? Will it be when we are totally disarmed, and when a British guard shall be stationed in every house? Shall we gather strength by irresolution and inaction?"	Rhetorical questions . An appeal to pathos (emotions) through his description of the outcome of waiting until they are stronger
para 8	"Shall we acquire the means of effectual resistance by lying supinely on our backs and hugging the delusive phantom of hope, until our enemies shall have bound us hand and foot?"	Scary image through metaphor —compares their waiting and hoping for this phantom of hope...he refers to hope as not being real. He alludes to slavery here as he refers to the colonists being "bound hand and foot" a metaphor for their lack of freedom under British rule.

para 9	<p>“Sir, we are not weak if we make a proper use of those means which the God of nature hath placed in our power. The millions of people, armed in the holy cause of liberty, and in such a country as that which we possess, are invincible by any force which our enemy can send against us. Besides, sir, we shall not fight our battles alone. There is a just God who presides over the destinies of nations, and who will raise up friends to fight our battles for us. The battle, sir, is not to the strong alone; it is to the vigilant, the active, the brave.”</p>	<p>Appeal to authority (ethos) as he gives credit to their power as coming only from God</p>
para 9	<p>“Besides, sir, we have no election. If we were base enough to desire it, it is now too late to retire from the contest.”</p>	<p>Appeal to Logos (logic)</p>
para 9	<p>Our chains are forged! ...Their clanking may be heard on the plains of Boston! The war is inevitable--and let it come! I repeat it, sir, let it come.”</p>	<p>Imagery of slavery Sound imagery Repetition All appeals to pathos (emotion) as the listeners can picture themselves in chains. He emphasizes an urgent call to arms.</p>
para 10	<p>“Peace! peace!...The war is actually begun!” “The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms!”</p>	<p>He creates an appeal to pathos as he metaphorically describes the advancement of the British military as a gale that will sweep from the north. Through this metaphor, he is saying that just as a storm cannot be stopped by man’s human endeavors, the British will not be stopped by man’s human strength. This refers back to his point that it is only through God’s power that the colonists will win.</p>
para 10	<p>“Why stand we here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery?”</p>	<p>Using rhetorical questions, he continues the motif of slavery as he metaphorically calls British rule “chains and slavery,” once again creating an appeal to pathos. He says that peace and life, referring back to those who don’t want to fight, are not important enough to be purchased at the price of slavery.</p>
para 10	<p>“I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death! “</p> <p>parallel structure</p>	<p>Using an appeal to ethos (ethics) Henry again makes his point that he equates British rule with death. An explanatory sentence shows that liberty is equally as valuable and desirable as death is destructive and undesirable. By paralleling them, he is saying that the outcome will be one or the other and there can be no compromise. He completes his motif here of equating slavery (lack of freedom because of British rule) with death.</p>