

Persuasive Rhetoric

Beyond “Please!”

If old news footage of speeches by John F. Kennedy or Martin Luther King, Jr., never fails to capture your attention, you have experienced the power of persuasive language. The aim of persuasive writing or speaking is to convince people to adopt an opinion, perform an action, or both. **Rhetoric** is the art of communicating ideas.

Persuasive rhetoric consists of reasoned arguments in favor of or against particular beliefs or courses of action.



The pamphlets of Thomas Paine (1737-1809) urged American colonists to seek independence.

Action” below.) Furthermore, the writer needs to show that his or her position has a firm moral base. The Declaration of Independence (page 270) provides examples of the three basic types of appeals used in persuasive arguments:

LOGICAL APPEALS Generally based on sets of assumptions, **logical appeals** provide rational argument to support writers’ claims—for instance, the assumption that “all men are created equal”—and are supported with objective evidence such as the list of “injuries and usurpations” committed by King

George III. A writer can develop an argument **deductively**, by beginning with a **generalization**, or **premise**, and proceeding to marshal examples and facts that support it (as in the Declaration of Independence), or **inductively**, by beginning with examples or facts and proceeding to draw a

The Workings of an Argument

To be effectively persuasive, a work generally has to engage both the mind and the emotions of its audience, making them think that the problem the work deals with is important enough for them to care how it is resolved. (See “Persuasion in

Persuasion in Action

To be effective, a persuasive writer:

- clearly states the issue and a position
- gives an opinion and supports it with facts and reasons
- takes opposing views into account
- uses sound logic and effective language
- concludes by summing up reasons or calling for action

“When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve . . . political bands . . . they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.”

—Thomas Jefferson

“I cannot say that I think you are very generous to the ladies; for, whilst you are proclaiming peace and good-will to men, emancipating all nations, you insist upon retaining an absolute power over wives.”

—Abigail Adams

“With nonviolent resistance, no individual or group need submit to any wrong, nor need anyone resort to violence in order to right a wrong.”

—Martin Luther King, Jr.



YOUR TURN Pick one of the quotes above. Identify which of the bulleted standards to the left apply.

conclusion from them. Analyzing the reasoning of an argument can help you evaluate its soundness.

EMOTIONAL APPEALS Appeals to emotion are often based on specific examples of suffering or potential threats, as in Jefferson's statement that King George is attempting "to complete the works of death, desolation, and tyranny." Emotional appeals can also include "loaded language"—language that is rich in connotations and vivid images.

ETHICAL APPEALS Based on shared moral values, ethical appeals call forth the audience's sense of right, justice, and virtue. Jefferson, for example, reminded people that independence was a last resort, after the failure of other measures: "In every stage of these oppressions we have petitioned for redress, in the most humble terms; our repeated petitions have been answered only by repeated injury."

Styles of Persuasion

Persuasive writers and speakers use a number of techniques.

ELEVATED LANGUAGE Formal words and phrases can lend a serious tone to a discussion. In her "Declaration of the Rights of Woman" (page 277), written during the French Revolution, Olympe de Gouges used the political terminology of the time to stir women to action: "The powerful empire of

nature is no longer surrounded by prejudice, fanaticism, superstition, and lies. The flame of truth has dispersed all the clouds of folly and usurpation."

RHETORICAL QUESTIONS Think of these as questions that don't require answers. Writers pose rhetorical questions to show that their arguments make the answers obvious. Patrick Henry's speech in the Virginia Convention (page 262), for example, includes a variety of questions whose answers Henry considers self-evident, such as "Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery?"

REPETITION Repeating a point tells the audience that it is especially important; repeating a form of expression tells the audience that the ideas expressed in the same way are related. **Parallelism**, a form of repetition, is used very effectively in the Declaration of Independence. Notice the parallel clauses beginning with *that* in the following famous passage.

We hold these truths to be self-evident:—That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

—Thomas Jefferson

Strategies for Reading: Persuasive Rhetoric

1. Identify the problem that is addressed and the solution that is proposed. Restate them in your own words.
2. Analyze the writer's presentation of his or her argument. What rhetorical tools does the writer use?
3. Analyze the evidence used to support the argument. What facts support the writer's opinions?
4. Consider how the writer appeals to the logic, emotions, and ethics of the audience.
5. Evaluate the credibility of the writer. What motivations might lie behind the work?
6. **Monitor** your reading strategies and modify them when your understanding breaks down. Remember to use the Strategies for Active Reading: **predict, visualize, connect, question, clarify, and evaluate.**

Speech in the Virginia Convention

Speech by PATRICK HENRY



Connect to Your Life

Patriotism and Battle Think about what *patriotism* means to you. Then list at least three reasons a patriot might give for fighting in a war. Circle the reason that seems most compelling to you. With a partner, discuss the reasons that you listed and circled.

Build Background

Heading Toward War Until the mid-1700s, American colonists largely had been content to be under British rule. However, tension grew between Great Britain and her American colonies after the end of the French and Indian War in 1763. Although Britain had defeated the French and their Indian allies, thousands of British troops remained quartered in the colonies, which caused resentment among the colonists. Their resentment increased and angry protests ensued when, beginning in 1764, the British Parliament passed a series of harsh laws and taxes.

To discuss the growing crisis, the First Continental Congress, composed of delegates from all 13 colonies except Georgia, met in Philadelphia in 1774. The delegates held out hope that they could restore the colonies' relationship with Great Britain, and they sent formal petitions to King George III and the British people, asking for their rights as British subjects. Six months after this meeting, in March 1775, the Second Virginia Provincial Convention was called to vote on whether Virginia should take up arms to defend against a feared British attack. Patrick Henry, the most famous orator of the American Revolution, delivered a fiery speech to convince delegates of the need for armed resistance.

WORDS TO KNOW Vocabulary Preview

adversary	irresolution	tyrannical
formidable	martial	vigilant
insidious	subjugation	
invincible	spurn	

Focus Your Reading

LITERARY ANALYSIS ALLUSION

An **allusion** is an indirect reference to a person, place, event, or literary work with which the author believes the reader will be familiar. Refer to the Guide for Reading for an explanation of the allusions in Patrick Henry's speech. Consider what technique contributes to Henry's argume

ACTIVE READING RHETORICAL QUESTIONS AND PERSUASION

A **rhetorical question** is a question to which no answer is expected because the answer is obvious. Rhetorical questions are often used in persuasive writing to emphasize a point or create an emotional effect. For example, Patrick Henry asks this rhetorical question in his speech: "Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery?" The obvious answer is no, and the effect of the question is to stir his listener to act decisively against the British.

READER'S NOTEBOOK As you read Henry's famous speech, list some examples of rhetorical questions.

SPEECH *in the*

Death

VIRGINIA CONVENTION

liberty

PATRICK HENRY

erty

March 23, 1775

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 that it will not be thought disrespectful to those gentlemen, if, entertaining as I do opinions of a character very opposite to theirs, I shall speak forth my sentiments freely and without reserve. This is no time for ceremony. The question before the House is one of awful moment to this country. For my own part I consider it as nothing less than a question of freedom or slavery; and in proportion to the magnitude of the subject ought to be the freedom of the debate. It is only in this way that we can hope to arrive at truth, and fulfill the great responsibility which we hold to God and our country. Should I keep back my opinions at such a time, through fear of giving offense, I should consider myself as guilty of treason towards my country, and of an act of disloyalty towards the majesty of heaven, which I revere above all earthly kings.

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. Is this the part of wise men, engaged in a great and arduous struggle for liberty? Are we disposed to be of the number of those who,

GUIDE FOR READING

1 Mr. President: the president of the Virginia Convention, Peyton Randolph.

5 entertaining: holding in mind.

1–7 Henry states his respect for the previous speakers, a technique called “concession to the opposition.” **What effect might this have on the audience?**

8 The question before the House: Henry proposed resolutions to prepare the Virginia colony for war and gave this speech to support those resolutions.

20 song . . . beasts: an allusion to 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.

having eyes, see not, and having ears, hear not, the things which so nearly concern their temporal salvation? For my part, whatever
25 anguish of spirit it may cost, I am willing to know the whole truth—to know the worst and to provide for it.

—I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided; and that is the lamp of experience. I know of no way of judging of the future but by the past. And judging by the past, I wish to know what there has
30 been in the conduct of the British ministry for the last ten years, to justify those hopes with which gentlemen have been pleased to solace themselves and the House? Is it that insidious smile with which our petition has been lately received? Trust it not, sir; it will prove a snare to your feet. Suffer not yourselves to be betrayed with
35 a kiss.

Ask yourselves how this gracious reception of our petition comports with these warlike preparations which cover our waters and darken our land. Are fleets and armies necessary to a work of love and reconciliation? Have we shown ourselves so unwilling to be
40 reconciled that force must be called in to win back our love? Let us not deceive ourselves, sir. These are the implements of war and subjugation—the last arguments to which kings resort. I ask gentlemen, sir, what means this martial array, if its purpose be not to force us to submission? Can gentlemen assign any other possible
45 motives for it? Has Great Britain any enemy, in this quarter of the world, to call for all this accumulation of navies and armies? No, sir, she has none. They are meant for us; they can be meant for no other. They are sent over to bind and rivet upon us those chains— which the British ministry have been so long forging.

50 And what have we to oppose to them? Shall we try argument? Sir, we have been trying that for the last ten years. Have we anything new to offer on the subject? Nothing. We have held the subject up in every light of which it is capable; but it has been all in vain. Shall we resort to entreaty and humble supplication? What
55 terms shall we find which have not been already exhausted? Let us not, I beseech you, sir, deceive ourselves longer.

Sir, we have done everything that could be done to avert the storm which is now coming on. We have petitioned; we have remonstrated; we have supplicated; we have prostrated ourselves
60 before the throne, and have implored its interposition to arrest the tyrannical hands of the ministry and Parliament. Our petitions have been slighted; our remonstrances have produced additional violence and insult; our supplications have been disregarded; and we have been spurned, with contempt, from the foot of the throne.

WORDS **insidious** (ɪn-sɪd'ē-əs) *adj.* treacherous
TO **subjugation** (süb'jə-gā'shən) *n.* control by conquering
KNOW **martial** (mä'r'shəl) *adj.* warlike
tyrannical (tɪ-rän'Y-kəl) *adj.* harsh; oppressive
spurn (spörn) *v.* to reject scornfully

23 having eyes . . . hear not: an allusion to Ezekiel 12:2.

24 temporal: worldly.

32 solace (söl'Ys): comfort.

34 snare: trap.

35 betrayed with a kiss: a biblical allusion to the Apostle Judas, who betrayed Jesus. When soldiers came to arrest Jesus, Judas identified him by kissing him.

38–49 What does Henry say is the reason for the British military buildup in America?

50–55 Notice how Henry uses rhetorical questions to anticipate the arguments of his opponents. How effective is this technique?

54 entreaty (ən-trē'tē): earnest request; plea; supplication (süp'li kă'shən): the act of asking for something humbly or earnestly.

59 remonstrated (rɪ-mŏn'strā-tĭd) objected.

60 interposition: intervention.



Patrick Henry Before the Virginia House of Burgesses (1851), Peter R. Rothenmel. Red Hill, The Patrick Henry National Memorial, Brookneal, Virginia.

65 In vain, after these things, may we indulge the fond hope of peace and reconciliation. There is no longer any room for hope.

If we wish to be free—if we mean to preserve inviolate those inestimable privileges for which we have been so long contending—if we mean not basely to abandon the noble struggle in which we have been so long engaged, and which we have pledged ourselves never to abandon until the glorious object of our contest shall be obtained, we must fight! I repeat it, sir, we must fight! An appeal to arms and to the God of Hosts is all that is left us!

75 They tell us, sir, that we are weak—unable to cope with so formidable an adversary. 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? 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?

Sir, we are not weak, if we make a proper use of those means which the God of nature hath placed in our power. Three 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. Besides, sir, we have no election. If we were base enough to desire it, it is now too late to retire from the contest. There is no retreat but in submission and slavery! 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!

95 It is in vain, sir, to extenuate the matter. Gentlemen may cry, “Peace! peace!”—but there is no peace. The war is actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms! Our brethren are already in the field! 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? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death! ❖

67 inviolate (ɪn-ˈvi-ə-lyt): not violated; intact.

68 inestimable (ɪn-ˈes-ɪ-tə-mə-ˌbeɪ): extremely valuable.

69 basely (ˈbɑːs-ə-ly): dishonorably

72–73 Henry has reached the m point of his speech. What is Her trying to convince his listeners t do?

74–94 In these two paragraphs, what reasons does Henry give for taking military action now?

89 battle . . . strong alone: an allusion to Ecclesiastes 9:11— “t race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.”

90 election: choice.

95 extenuate (ɪk-ˈstɛn-ju-ˈeɪ-t): t lessen the seriousness of, especia by providing partial excuses.

97 the next gale . . . north: Som colonists in Massachusetts had already shown open resistance t the British and were on the brin of war.

102–103 What emotions does Henry appeal to with the last lin of his speech?

WORDS TO KNOW
formidable (fɔrˈmɪ-də-bəl) *adj.* difficult to defeat
adversary (ədˈvɜr-sɜr-ē) *n.* an opponent
irresolution (ɪ-rɛz-ə-ˈlɔʊ-shən) *n.* uncertainty; indecision
invincible (ɪn-vɪnˈsə-bəl) *adj.* unbeatable
vigilant (vɪjˈe-lənt) *adj.* alert, watchful

Connect to the Literature

1. What Do You Think?

After hearing Henry's speech, would you have voted to prepare for war?

Comprehension Check

- What does Henry warn the colonists about?
- What does Henry urge the colonists to do?

Think Critically

2. In your view, what is the most convincing point Henry makes in his argument?

THINK ABOUT

- the main points he makes in the speech
- whether his reason for wanting to fight is the one you circled as the most compelling

3. ACTIVE READING RHETORICAL QUESTIONS AND PERSUASION

Review the examples of rhetorical questions you copied in your **READER'S NOTEBOOK**. Choose one of these rhetorical questions and reread the passage of the speech in which it is found. How does the use of a rhetorical question strengthen the persuasive force of this passage?

4. Think about Henry's famous statement, "Give me liberty, or give me death!" Do you agree that liberty is more important than life itself? Explain your answer.

tend Interpretations

5. Different Perspectives

Imagine how each of these people might have responded to Henry's speech:

- an American-born colonist whose grandparents were British
- a Loyalist, meaning an American colonist who sides with the British
- an African enslaved in the Virginia colony
- a Native American

6. Comparing Texts

How would you compare Patrick Henry's speech and Jonathan Edwards's sermon as examples of persuasion? Consider the purpose of each speech and the emotions to which it appeals.

7. Connect to Life

Patrick Henry argued that the actions of King George III and the British Parliament posed major threats to the liberty of the American colonists. In your opinion, what are the major threats to the liberty of Americans today?

Literary Analysis

ALLUSION An **allusion** is an indirect reference to a person, place, event, or literary work with which the author believes the reader will be familiar. Many works contain allusions to the Bible, classical mythology, or other works of literature. By using allusions, writers tap the knowledge and memory of the reader, drawing upon associations already in the reader's mind. For example, Patrick Henry warns colonists not to be "betrayed with a kiss." This biblical allusion refers to the Apostle Judas, who betrayed Jesus by kissing him. Henry used this brief, powerful allusion to suggest that there might be something sinister behind Great Britain's friendly gestures.


Paired Activity Work with a partner to investigate Henry's allusions in this speech. Review the Guide for Reading notes that explain the allusions to Homer's *Odyssey* and to Ecclesiastes. Each of you should choose one of these allusions to research, locating the particular passage in the original source, reading it carefully, and then expanding the note given in the Guide for Reading. Share your new note with your partner and with the rest of the class.

REVIEW REPETITION Reread the paragraph that begins "Sir, we have done everything . . ." (pages 264–266). What words, phrases, and sentence patterns are repeated in this paragraph? What effect does this repetition have?

Writing Options

1. Newspaper Report Write the first paragraphs of a newspaper report about Henry's speech that might have been published in the colonial *Virginia Gazette*. Describe the speech and its probable effect on the audience.

2. Character Sketch It has been said that history is written by the winners. Patrick Henry is regarded as a patriot today, but if the British had won the Revolutionary War, how would he be described? Write a brief sketch of Henry as it might appear in a current British history textbook.

3. Rebuttal Speech Draft a rebuttal opposing Henry's point of view. Offer a counterargument in favor of peaceful compromise with the British. Place this piece in your **Working Portfolio**. 

Writing Handbook
See page 1285: Persuasive Writing

Activities & Explorations

1. Political Advertisement Plan a political advertisement for television that promotes one or more ideas from Henry's speech.

Select fitting visual images, music, or slogans to use in the ad. Then share your TV spot with classmates. - **VIEWING AND REPRESENTING**

2. Liberty Poster Which images in Henry's speech do you think are the most powerful? Create a poster that conveys Henry's message, using illustrations and quotations that best capture the spirit of his speech. Use a computer to experiment with different type fonts and type sizes for your poster. - **ART**

3. Dramatic Reading Prepare and give a dramatic reading of Henry's speech, using gestures and varying your tone of voice to make the speech effective. - **PERFORMING**

4. Independence Discussion Take part in a roundtable discussion in which you identify groups of people who have recently fought or are now fighting for independence from another nation. What arguments have they used to support their cause? What do they stand to lose or gain? - **SPEAKING AND LISTENING**

Art Connection

Patrick Henry earned fame as an orator long before he made the speech reprinted here. In the painting on page 265, Peter F. Rothermel portrays Henry giving a speech in Virginia's House of Burgesses, which was Virginia's colonial legislature before the Revolution. Look for techniques that make this scene dramatic. What features of the painting focus attention on Henry?

Inquiry & Research

Countdown to Revolution What events led up to the conflict between Great Britain and the American colonists? What event happened after Patrick Henry called for war on March 23, 1775? Use an encyclopedia or a American history textbook to find out about important events that occurred before and after Henry gave his speech. Then make a time line of these events to share with the class.



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Vocabulary in Action

EXERCISE: CLASSIFYING WORDS On your paper, copy the chart shown. Then review the Words to Know. Which vocabulary words best fit the American colonists' view of the British? Write these words in the first column of the chart. Which words best fit the colonists' view of themselves? Write them in the second column. Be ready to explain your choices in class.

British	Colonists

WORDS TO KNOW

adversary	irresolution	tyrannical
formidable	martial	vigilant
insidious	spurn	
invincible	subjugation	



Patrick Henry

1736–1799

Fiery Orator American patriot Patrick Henry was a self-taught lawyer whose gift of oration helped spark the American Revolution. In acknowledging Henry's gift, fellow Virginian Thomas Jefferson said: "Call it oratory or what you will, but I never heard anything like it. He had more command over the passions than any man I ever knew." An eloquent defender of colonial rights, Henry spent more than 30 years in public life and took part in the creation of a new nation.

A Voice of Protest In 1765, at the age of 28, Henry joined the House of Burgesses, the lower house of Virginia's colonial legislature. Just nine days after becoming a burgess, Henry introduced the Stamp Act Resolves. He opposed the Stamp Act, which required colonists to buy stamps to put on taxable paper items, on the grounds that only the colonial legislature—not the British Parliament—had the right to tax colonists. Virginia became the first colony to officially protest the Stamp Act.

Revolutionary Activities Ten years later, Henry again proposed resolutions that led toward

American independence. At the Second Virginia Provincial Convention, he gave the impassioned speech you have just read. His resolutions to prepare for war passed by five votes, and he was named chairman of a committee to implement the plan to arm Virginia. In 1776, while the American Revolution raged, Henry helped draw up Virginia's first state constitution and was elected Virginia's first governor.

Later Years After the Revolution had ended and the U.S. Constitution had been ratified, Henry resumed his law practice. Then, in 1794, he retired to his Virginia estate, Red Hill. Although he was offered a U.S. Senate seat, posts as minister to Spain and to France, and the positions of Secretary of State and Chief Justice, he did not return to politics until George Washington urged him to run for representative in the Virginia state legislature in 1799. Henry won the election, but he died before taking office.