

Rhetorical Analysis of Persuasion
Patrick Henry's Speech to the Virginia Convention
AP Language and Composition—11th Grade
Teacher Overview

Close Reading <i>written, spoken, and visual texts</i>	Grammar <i>purposeful use of language for effect</i>	Composition <i>written, spoken, and visual products</i>
<p>Genres</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prose Nonfiction <p>Reading Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annotation Determining Audience Determining Author's Purpose Determining Fact and Opinion Determining Main Idea Generalization Inference Paraphrase Seminar/Discussion Summary <p>Rhetorical Modes of Discourse</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Descriptive Mode <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sensory Detail Expository Mode <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cause/Effect Comparison/Contrast Persuasive Mode <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invention <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Topics Modes of Persuasion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appeal to Logos <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Induction/Deduction Appeal to Ethos Appeal to Pathos Arrangement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction Statement of Facts Division (Argument) Proof Refutation of Opposing Arguments Conclusion Style <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connotation Denotation Syntax <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Functional Constructs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Declarative Interrogative 	<p>Grammar</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clauses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dependent/Subordinate Independent <p>Usage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use and Form of Verbs <p>Syntactical Structures for Rhetorical Purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Functional Constructs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Declarative Interrogative Imperative Exclamatory Grammatical Constructs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compound Complex Rhetorical Constructs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Periodic Balanced Antithetical Rhetorical Question Schemes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schemes of Balance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Antithesis Climax Parallelism Schemes of Repetition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anaphora <p>Analysis of a Text</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meaning and Effect related to parts of speech, phrases, clauses, sentences, and syntax 	<p>Rhetorical Modes of Discourse</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expository Analytical Rhetorical Analysis

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Close Reading <i>written, spoken, and visual texts</i>	Grammar <i>purposeful use of language for effect</i>	Composition <i>written, spoken, and visual products</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Imperative Exclamatory Grammatical Constructs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compound Complex Rhetorical Constructs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Periodic Balanced Antithetical Rhetorical Question Paragraphing and Structure Figures of Speech <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tropes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Metaphor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extended Controlling Rhetorical Questions Simile Schemes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schemes of Balance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Antithesis Climax Parallelism Schemes of Repetition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anaphora Climax 		
<p>Rhetorical Techniques</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analogy Contrast Hypotaxis Juxtaposition Parataxis Rhetorical Shift 		
<p>Literary Elements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detail Imagery Tone 		
<p>Literary Techniques</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allusion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mythological Biblical Motif 		

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Materials and Resources:

- *Speech to the Virginia Convention*—Patrick Henry

Lesson Introduction:

In order to rhetorically analyze Patrick Henry's *Speech to the Virginia Convention*, students need to be able to identify the following elements:

- His audience and the occasion of the speech
- His argument
 - His position/Call to action
 - His evidence in support of his position
 - A determination of whether the argument(s) uses inductive or deductive logic—Appeal to logos
- The opposing arguments
 - Concession to the opposing arguments
- Refutation of the opposing arguments
- Appeal to ethos created through rhetorical devices and strategies
- Appeal to pathos created through rhetorical devices and strategies
- Assumptions underlying the argument
- Fallacies of logic

Time: 3-4 days

Activities (with teacher notes)

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. Read his speech and answer the following questions in order to analyze the persuasiveness of his speech.

First, determine his overall position and/or call to action.

He is calling 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

Who is his audience? *The members of the Virginia Convention*

What is the occasion of the speech? *The meeting of the Convention*

Determine Patrick Henry's tone in this speech. *Urgent, pleading, inflammatory*

Paragraph 1

- 1. Why do you think Henry begins his speech with the statement “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.”**

Here, Patrick Henry is defending his position as a patriot just as those who hold the opposing view call themselves patriots. This could be regarded as a concession to the opposing view that patriotism is important, but also a refutation to the opposing side who may say that only those who are not patriots would fight the British. He is also showing respect for those who hold opposing views to his. He introduces his opposing view with the rhetorical shift, “But...”

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- 2. Henry says that “different men often see the same subject in different *lights*.” What does the word *light* mean here? Why do you think he uses it?**

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.

- 3. Henry states his view in saying that, “I consider it as nothing less than a question of freedom or slavery.” What does he mean by “it” and what fallacy in logic does he use here to be persuasive? What appeal does he create?**

By “it,” he is referring to the need to fight for their freedom. This is an either/or fallacy, and 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.

- 4. What appeal does he create when he says, “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”? What does truth mean to Henry?**

He creates an appeal to authority (ethos)(appeal to the authority of God and appeal to his own ethos since this position shows him as a Christian) and what he is saying is that fighting for freedom is God’s truth and that it is a responsibility to both God and country. In saying this, he again aligns God on the side of the colonists in fighting for their freedom.

- 5. What is the appeal created by juxtaposing God as the Majesty of Heaven with earthly kings? What is the effect of his using the word *Majesty* for God and *king* for King George III?**

He creates an appeal to authority (ethos) in placing God above King George III. He shows the parallel by calling God the Majesty of Heaven just as King George III is the King of England. Thus, he is calling them both kings but then he raises God over an earthly king. The word “Majesty” connotes splendor of the quality of one’s character whereas “king” denotes the position of authority. So, in using the different words, he is implying that God has a greatness of character whereas King George III only has the position of authority.

Paragraph 2

- 6. What part of the argument is it when he says, “Mr. President, it is natural to man to indulge in the illusions of hope.”**

He begins paragraph 2 with a concession to the opposition and a refutation. His concession is that it is natural that man hopes for freedom without fighting. His refutation comes with the use of the word “illusions.” He is refuting by saying that freedom without fighting is only an illusion—it cannot be a reality.

- 7. What rhetorical device is he using when he says, “listen to the song of that siren till she transforms us into beasts”? Explain it and discuss what appeal it creates.**

Through a mythical allusion, he is metaphorically comparing how the British are saying things to the colonists which are promising false hopes to how Circe in Homer’s Odyssey transformed men into swine after charming them with her singing. This creates an appeal to pathos in that just as the end result for those whom Circe tricked was dehumanization, so also the colonists will be dehumanized because they will not be free.

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- 8. Henry says, “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.” What rhetorical device is he using? Explain its persuasive effect and what appeal it creates.**

Henry is using a Biblical allusion here to create an appeal to authority (ethos) and an appeal to pathos. This comes from Ezekiel 12:2 which 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 hear or see. Here, though, he changes spiritual salvation to temporal salvation which means that the colonists will not be free which he equates with death. Again he is comparing God's truth to the need to fight for freedom.

Paragraph 3

- 9. What rhetorical device does Henry use when he says, “I have but one lamp by which by feet are guided, and that is the lamp of experience.” How does this continue with the idea of light representing truth and spiritual illumination from the first paragraph? What appeal is created?**

In metaphorically calling experience a lamp, he is saying that experience will show or “light” the way for the future. There is a Biblical allusion here to the scripture which says that God's word (which is truth) is a “lamp unto thy feet and a light unto thy path.” This is an appeal to authority (God and the Bible) and an appeal to ethos because it shows him as a spiritual person.

- 10. What evidence in his inductive argument does he give in this paragraph which supports his call to action to fight? What appeals does he create through rhetorical devices and strategies in the presentation of this evidence?**

He says that the colonists' petition have been met with “an insidious smile.” The use of the words “insidious smile” creates appeal to pathos because it implies that the British are fooling the colonists into believing that they will act on these petitions in a positive manner, but it is really only a trap to keep them under their rule. He also metaphorically calls the British response “a snare to your feet” also connoting the image of a trap which will ensnare them. He again employs Biblical allusion to metaphorically compare the positive reception of the colonists' petition to the kiss which Judas gave to Jesus in his betrayal of him in saying, “Suffer yourselves not to be betrayed with a kiss.” The kiss of Judas, which appeared to be positive, is, in effect, what ultimately led to Jesus' betrayal and death. In using this metaphor, Henry is saying that the positive reception of the colonists' petition will fool the colonists into thinking that the British will work for their good, but in effect, it will only lead to their betrayal and slavery which he has equated with death through this metaphor and also earlier in the passage.

More evidence which he gives are the fleets and armies which the British have sent. He creates an appeal to pathos in presenting this evidence because he calls them “warlike preparations which cover our waters and darken our land.” The use of the words “cover” and “darken” connote an image of suffocation (death) and total imprisonment.

Paragraph 4

- 11. Henry continues to present the evidence of the British sending armies and navies. What is his rhetorical pattern for the presentation of this evidence? How is it persuasive? What appeal is created?**

He uses a series of rhetorical questions and then follows each one with a declarative sentence answering the questions. The rhetorical effect is that he emphasizes the military procedures

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which the British are taking. This creates an appeal to pathos because it evokes fear in the minds of the colonists.

- 12. In his sentence, “They are meant for us; they can be meant for no other,” he uses a syntactical structure for rhetorical purpose. Name what it is and explain its rhetorical function.**

He uses a balanced sentence with parallel independent clauses which repeat the same point. Again, this emphasizes the military preparations which the British are taking.

- 13. He ends this paragraph with what rhetorical device to create imagery? What appeal does it create?**

He ends the paragraph with a metaphor comparing the build-up of armies and navies to “chains” which the British will “bind” and “rivet.” He continues the freedom/slavery motif here and creates an appeal to pathos through the imagery of imprisonment created through the metaphor.

Paragraph 5

- 14. In this paragraph, Henry presents more opposing arguments with his refutation. Name the opposing arguments and his refutation. Explain the effectiveness of his rhetorical pattern for presenting these arguments.**

The opposing arguments are asking that the colonists try arguing with the British with new information and to ask for their demands with entreaty and humble supplication. Henry refutes these arguments by saying that they have already tried all of these strategies to no avail.

Henry's rhetorical pattern is to present the opposing arguments through rhetorical questions and then to respond to the rhetorical question with a declarative sentence. Through the rhetorical questions, he is forcing the colonists to think about their arguments and through the declarative sentences; he is refuting their arguments immediately.

Paragraph 6

- 15. In the first part of this paragraph, Henry gives evidence in his inductive argument as he cites the actions which the colonists have taken to get the British to respond to some of their demands. What rhetorical strategies does he use and what appeal does he create?**

Henry presents his evidence in a long compound sentence through a series of parallel independent clauses beginning with the anaphora of “we have” which ends with the climax of the actions which the colonists have taken. The parallel structure indicates that all actions are equally important, but they become more emphatic in that they go from “petitioning” to “prostrating ourselves before the throne.” The intensity of the final action is metaphorically compared to lying face down on the floor in front of the throne. This creates an image of extreme pleading and vulnerability. This creates an appeal to pathos.

- 16. What rhetorical strategies does Henry use to present the British actions in response to the petitions? What appeals are created?**

Henry uses the same syntactical pattern which he uses in presenting the actions of the colonists. He uses a compound sentence with a series of parallel independent clauses beginning with the anaphora of “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 for the actions of the colonists and the response by the British but uses passive voice for the British response which shows their negative response to the colonists' demands. (“We have petitioned” “Our petitions have been slighted.” The word choice in this series is more inflammatory with such words such as “additional violence and insult, and “spurned with contempt from the foot of the throne.” He

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completes the imagery in the metaphor by showing that the colonists' petitions have been totally disregarded ("spurned with contempt from the foot of the throne")—in other words, their petitions are no longer even being considered.

- 17. In the last part of this paragraph, Henry states his position/call to action. What is it? Analyze the syntax of the sentence in which the call to action is presented and explain its rhetorical effect.**

Henry states his call to action, "we must fight" in a long periodic exclamatory sentence which begins with a series of adverb clauses which state the results of fighting. He puts emphasis on the call to action as it places it in a dominant position in the independent clause and further emphasizes it using periodic structure to place it at the end of the sentence for further emphasis. He creates urgency by using an exclamation point at the end of the call to action. By placing the goals of the colonists in introductory clauses, he is showing the desirable outcomes before he shows the undesirable way of attaining those goals, by fighting, which so many of them wanted to avoid.

Paragraph 7

- 18. What opposing argument does Henry begin with in this paragraph? How does he concede to it? How does he refute it? What rhetorical devices and strategies does he use in the presentation of these arguments which are persuasive? What appeals does he create?**

Henry begins with the opposing argument that the colonists are weak. He concedes in saying, "But when shall we be stronger?" He creates an appeal to pathos through his description of the outcome of waiting until they are stronger such as asking if they will be stronger "when a British guard shall be stationed in every house." He creates a scary image in metaphorically comparing their waiting and hoping to someone "lying supinely on [their] backs and hugging the delusive phantom of hope until [their] enemies have bound [them] hand and foot?" Here, again, he metaphorically refers to hope as not being real (phantom) just as he had called it an illusion earlier. The image of slavery is extended here as he refers to the colonists being "bound hand and foot" which is a metaphor for their lack of freedom under British rule. He begins his refutation with the statement, "Sir we are not weak, if we make proper use of those means which the God of nature hath placed in our power." He creates an appeal to authority (ethos) as he gives credit to their power as coming only from God. He refutes the opposing argument's position that they are weak by citing the evidence that they are invincible when they are armed in the holy cause of liberty. Here again, he is uniting freedom with God's will by calling it a "holy cause of liberty." In his refutation he also gives God the credit of raising up allies. His last point in the refutation is that there is no choice because retreat (not acting out of weakness) would only result in "submission and slavery." He continues the imagery of being a prisoner by metaphorically comparing British control to their being in chains. He uses sound imagery in saying, "Their clanging may be heard on the plains of Boston." Here he creates appeal to pathos as the listeners can picture their themselves in chains in close proximity (Boston). He emphasizes an urgent call to arms in his imperative, exclamatory sentence, "The war is inevitable—and let it come!"

Paragraph 8

- 19. Paragraph 8 begins with the last opposing argument. What is it? How does Henry refute it? In this refutation he uses what rhetorical device to create appeal to pathos?**

The last opposing argument is when Henry says, "Peace, peace" and he refutes it by saying, "but there is not peace. The war is actually begun." He creates an appeal to pathos as he metaphorically describes the advancement of the British military as a "gale" which will "sweep from the north." Through the comparison, 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

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back to his point that it is only through God's power that the colonists will win. He continues the motif of slavery as he metaphorically calls British rule "chains and slavery" once again creating 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.

- 20. In the last sentence, Henry once again makes his point that he equates British rule with death by saying, "but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death!" What syntactical devices does he use in this clause which makes it persuasive? What appeal does he create? He can be using death here in a literal sense, but he also can be using it metaphorically. Explain his persuasive use of this metaphor.**

Henry uses antithesis in parallel structure in an exclamatory sentence to show that liberty is equally as valuable and desirable as death (metaphorically used to describe British rule) is destructive and undesirable. By paralleling them in a balanced sentence, 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.