Chapter 3

Forging a New Nation

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Preparing to Read

Speech to the Virginia Convention
by Patrick Henry

LITERARY SKILLS FOCUS: PERSUASION

Persuasion is a form of writing or speaking that aims to change the way a person thinks or feels. Some forms of persuasion also call on people to take action to solve a problem. To be effectively persuasive, a writer or speaker must appeal to the audience’s emotions (feelings) or to their logic (reason).

READING SKILLS FOCUS: ANALYZING PERSUASIVE TECHNIQUES

Patrick Henry was an American Patriot and a member of the Continental Congress. He used both logical and emotional appeals in an attempt to persuade his audience to go to war against Great Britain in 1775. Logical appeals provide reasons and examples to support a particular opinion or course of action. Emotional appeals concentrate more on using certain words and images to stir an audience’s feelings.

Use the Skill  As you read Henry’s speech, pay attention to the persuasion he uses and decide if he is appealing to logic or emotion. One example of this process is provided below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words, phrases, and sentences</th>
<th>Logical or emotional appeal?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“But different men often see the same subject in different lights.” (lines 3–4)</td>
<td>Logical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Shall we acquire the means of effectual resistance, by lying supinely on our backs?” (lines 81–82)</td>
<td>Emotional</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reading Standard 2.6
Critique the power, validity, and truthfulness of arguments set forth in public documents; their appeal to both friendly and hostile audiences; and the extent to which the arguments anticipate and address reader concerns and counterclaims (e.g., appeal to reason, to authority, to pathos and emotion).

Grades 9–10
Review Reading Standard 3.11
Evaluate the aesthetic qualities of style, including the impact of diction and figurative language on tone, mood, theme, using the terminology of literary criticism. (Aesthetic approach)
Speech to the Virginia Convention

SELECTION VOCABULARY

solace  (SAHL  IHS)  v.:  comfort.
    Henry does not believe that the behaviors of the British ministry can solace the colonists.

insidious  (IHN  SIHD  EE  UHS)  adj.:  sly; sneaky.
    Their insidious expressions gave away their true beliefs.

supplication  (SUHP  LUH  KAY  SHUHN)  n.:  plea; prayer.
    Henry declares that their supplication toward Britain has gone unanswered.

avert  (UH  VURT)  v.:  prevent; turn away.
    Nothing could avert the coming war.

spurned  (SPURND)  v.:  rejected.
    Every attempt at compromise has been spurned.

inviolate  (IHN  VY  UH  LIHT)  adj.:  uncorrupted.
    Henry believes that freedom should be inviolate.

adversary  (AD  VUHR  SEHR  EE)  n.:  opponent.
    Britain’s ministry does not believe the Colonies are a dangerous adversary.

vigilant  (VIH  UH  LUHNT)  n.:  those who are watchful.
    Henry believes that in times of crisis, the vigilant are just as important as the strong.

WORD STUDY

DIRECTIONS: Write the vocabulary word that is a synonym (word with a similar definition) for each word provided below.

1. pure __________________
2. stop __________________
3. soothe __________________
4. challenger __________________
5. refused __________________
Mr. President:¹ 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. A 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, entertaining² 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 moment³ 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. B It is only in this way that

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1. **Mr. President**: Peyton Randolph (1721–1775), president of the Virginia Convention.
2. **entertaining**: having in mind; considering.
3. **awful moment**: great importance.
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 toward my country, and of an act of disloyalty toward 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, having eyes, see not, and having ears, hear not, the things which so nearly concern their temporal salvation? For my part, whatever 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 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 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 reconciled, that force must be called in to win back our love?

4. **listen ... beasts:** In Greek mythology, the sirens are sea maidens whose seductive singing lures men to wreck their boats on coastal rocks. In the *Odyssey*, Circe, an enchanter, transforms Odysseus’s men into swine after they arrive at her island home. Henry’s allusion combines these two stories.

5. **our petition:** The First Continental Congress had recently protested against new tax laws. King George III had withdrawn the laws conditionally, but the colonists were unwilling to accept his conditions.

6. **comports:** agrees.
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 motives for it? Has Great Britain any enemy, in this quarter of the world, to call for 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. 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 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.

7. *subjugation:* conquest; domination.
8. *remonstrated:* objected; complained.
ourselves before the throne, and have implored its interposition\(^9\) 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. In vain, after these things, may we indulge the fond\(^10\) 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!

They tell us, sir, that we are weak; unable to cope with so formidable\(^11\) 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\(^12\) 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 the 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.\(^13\) If

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9. interposition: intervention; stepping in to try to solve the problem.
10. fond: foolishly optimistic.
11. formidable: powerful; difficult to defeat.
12. delusive: deceptive; misleading.
13. election: choice.
we were base\(^{14}\) enough to desire it, it is now too late to retire from the contest. E There is no retreat, but in submission and slavery! F 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!

It is in vain, sir, to extenuate\(^{15}\) 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! G

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14. **base**: showing little courage, honor, or decency.
15. **extenuate**: weaken.
Speech to the Virginia Convention

VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

DIRECTIONS: Complete the sentences below with the correct vocabulary words from the Word Box. Some words will not be used.

Word Box

solace
insidious
supplication
avert
spurned
inviolate
adversary
vigilant

1. Patrick Henry is well-known for his speech in which he attacked Great Britain, a powerful ___________________________ of the Colonies at the time.
2. Henry considered Britain a sly, or ____________________________, foe.
3. Henry was among the ____________________________, a patriot always on the lookout for any political act that threatened the Colonies.
4. Henry knew that there was no way to ____________________________ war with Great Britain, so he encouraged his listeners to fight.

LITERARY SKILLS FOCUS: PERSUASION

DIRECTIONS: Suppose that you were at the Virginia Convention during Henry’s famous 1775 speech. Write a brief paragraph telling why you were or were not persuaded by his words.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

READING SKILLS FOCUS: ANALYZING PERSUASIVE TECHNIQUES

DIRECTIONS: Complete the chart below by deciding if the passages are examples of logical appeals, emotional appeals, or both.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example of persuasive appeal</th>
<th>Logical or emotional?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Ask yourselves how this gracious reception of our petition comports with these warlike preparations which cover our waters and darken our land.” (lines 36–38)</td>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“There is no retreat, but in submission and slavery! Our chains are forged! Their clanking may be heard on the plains of Boston!” (lines 94–96)</td>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>