

PREVIEWING

NONFICTION

Speech in the Virginia Convention

Patrick Henry

PERSONAL CONNECTION

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 small group of classmates, discuss the reasons that you listed and circled.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION

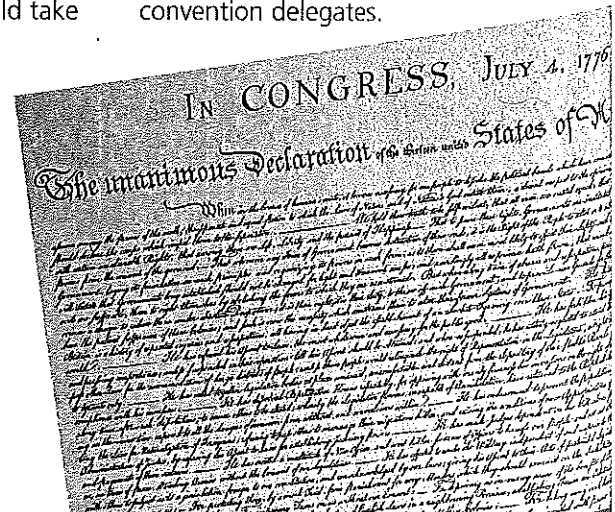
Until the mid-1700s, American colonists largely had been content to be under British rule. However, tension grew between Great Britain and her American colonies after the end of the French and Indian War in 1763. Although Britain had defeated the French and their Indian allies, thousands of British troops 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. Less than a month after this speech, Massachusetts volunteers fought British troops in the battles at Lexington and Concord. About 15 months after the speech, the Second Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence.

READING CONNECTION

Recognizing Rhetorical Questions 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 make listeners feel they should be more brave. As you read Henry's famous speech, look for other rhetorical questions he used to stir the patriotic feelings of the convention delegates.



SPEECH *in the*

Death

VIRGINIA CONVENTION

PATRICK HENRY

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
5 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
10 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
15 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
20 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.

25 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.

30 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.

35 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? 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 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.

40 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.

45 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 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
TO
KNOW

insidious (ɪn-sɪd'ē-əs) *adj.* treacherous
subjugation (süb'jə-gā'shen) *n.* control by conquering
martial (mä'r'shel) *adj.* warlike
tyrannical (tɪ-rän'Y-kəl) *adj.* harsh; oppressive
spurn (spurn) *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'Y-kā'shen): the act of asking for something humbly or earnestly.

59 remonstrated (rɪ-mōn'strā-tYd): objected.

60 interposition: intervention.

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—
70 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
75 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
80 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
85 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
90 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
100 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 **inviolated** (ɪn-vi'ə-lyt): not violated; intact.

68 **inestimable** (ɪn-ēs'te-mə-bəl): extremely valuable.

69 **basely** (bās'lē): dishonorably.

72-73 Henry has reached the main point of his speech. What is Henry trying to convince his listeners to 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—“the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.”

90 **election**: choice.

95 **extenuate** (ɪk-stēn'yoo-āt'): to lessen the seriousness of, especially by providing partial excuses.

97 **the next gale . . . north**: Some colonists in Massachusetts had already shown open resistance to the British and were on the brink of war.

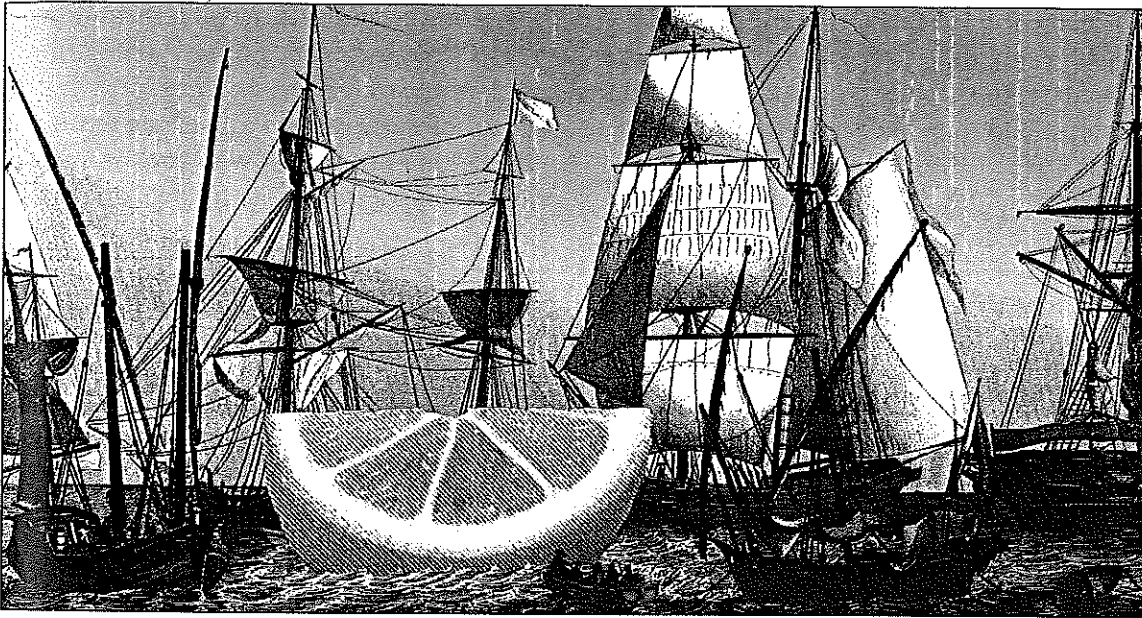
102-103 What emotions does Henry appeal to with the last lines of his speech?

WORDS
TO
KNOW

formidable (fôr'mĭ-də-bəl) *adj.* difficult to defeat
adversary (ăd'ver-sēr'é) *n.* an opponent
irresolution (ɪ-rēz'ə-lōō'shən) *n.* uncertainty; indecision
invincible (ɪn-vĭn'sə-bəl) *adj.* unbeatable
vigilant (vĭj'ə-lənt) *adj.* alert; watchful

THE BOSTON TEA PARTY

Dave Barry



One afternoon some freedom-loving colonists known as the Boston Patriots were sitting around their locker room, trying to think up ways to throw off the yoke of colonial oppression. Suddenly one of them, Bob, had an idea:

"Hey!" he said. "Let's dress up like the locals and throw tea into the harbor!"

Instantly the other Patriots were galvanized. "What was that?" they shouted.

"A galvanic reaction," responded Bob. "Named for the Italian physiologist Luigi Galvani (1737-1798), who conducted experiments wherein he sent electrical currents through the legs of frogs."

But the Boston Patriots were not the only people engaging in inhumane scientific research during the colonial era. Another person doing this was Benjamin Franklin, who, in a famous experiment, sought to prove his theory that if you flew a kite in a rainstorm, a huge chunk of electricity would

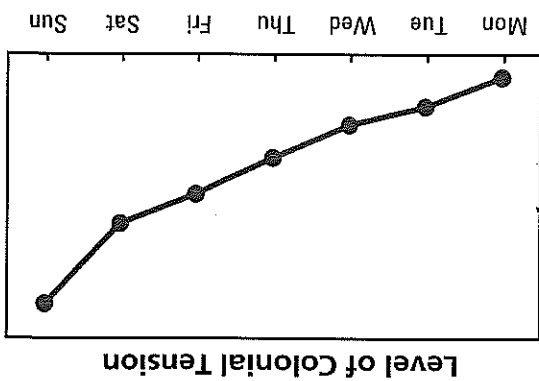
come shooting down the string and damage your brain. Sure enough, he was right, and he spent the rest of his days making bizarre, useless, and unintelligible statements such as: "A penny saved is a penny earned."

Eventually he became so dodderingly pathetic that he had to be placed in charge of the U.S. Postal Service. Also around this time women and minority groups were accomplishing a great many achievements.

But getting back to the Boston Patriots: Later that night, they boldly carried out Bob's bold plan of dressing up as Native Americans and throwing tea into the harbor, but for some reason this did not result in Independence. "Maybe we should also toss in some lemon," somebody suggested. And so they did this, and then they tried some Sweet 'n Low; still no sign of Independence. Also the harbor was starting to look like a toxic-waste dump, which did not go unnoticed by early ancestors of future

3. *The Eternal Container Act*, requiring that colonists who purchased appliances had to save the original packing cartons forever and ever, passing them down through the generations, or else they would void their warranties.

All of these factors caused the tension in the colonies to mount with each passing day, as can be seen from the following chart:



It was amid this climate of rising tension and anger, with a 50 percent chance of lingering afternoon and evening violence, that the First Continental Congress was held. It met in Philadelphia, and its members, realizing that the actions they took in this hour of crisis could very well determine the fate of the New World, voted, after many hours of angry debate, to give themselves a pay raise. There was no turning back now. Clearly, the stage had been set for the Discussion Questions.

1. Do you think Unitas should have started for the Colts?
 2. What the hell *are* chickpeas, anyway?

Discussion Questions

president George Herbert Walker Piedmont Harrington Armoire Vestibule Bush.

This angered the king, so he ordered Parliament to pass the Stamp Act, under which every time the colonists made a purchase, the cashier would give them some stamps, and they had to paste these into books, which was even more boring than churning butter. When the colonists had acquired a certain number of stamps, they were required to go down to the Royal Stamp Redemption Center and exchange them for cheap cookware (£4.5 million) or tacky folding card tables (£3 billion). As you can imagine, this was less than popular with the colonists, whose anger was eloquently expressed by Tom Paine in his fiery pamphlet *Common Sense*, which, in its most famous passage, states: "How many fondue sets does any one colonial family need?"

This further enraged the king, who, as you have probably gathered by now, had the political savvy of a croissant. He ordered Parliament to pass the Irritation Acts, whose entire purpose was to make life in the colonies even *more* miserable. These included: 1. *The Sneeze Shield Act*, requiring that all colonial salad bars had to have shields suspended over them—allegedly for "sanitary" purposes, but actually intended to make it difficult for short colonists to reach the chickpeas. 2. *The Pill Blockade Act*, requiring that colonial aspirin bottles had to come with wads of cotton stuffed in the top, making the aspirin virtually inaccessible, especially to colonists with hangovers.

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Name: _____ Date: _____

**Speech at the Second Virginia Convention
Patrick Henry**

1. Explain what Henry accuses the British government of doing in the first part of his speech.
2. Describe how Henry views the British reactions towards petitions made by the colonists.
3. What kind of words or phrases create the tone for this piece? (1 example)
4. Please draw and complete a SOAPStone either below or on the back of this sheet.

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