

## Learning Targets

- Analyze the structure of an argumentative text
- Organize and write an argumentative speech

## Powerful Speeches

You have analyzed the rhetorical context of an effective speech. What about the message? Where does it get its power? Powerful writers like Lincoln use structure and rhetorical devices intentionally; effective argumentation is anything BUT an accident. And when you add a powerful delivery to strong writing, you move hearts, people, and sometimes, whole nations.

As you prepare to read one of the most powerful speeches in our nation’s history, a speech pivotal to the colonial Revolution against the throne of England, you will be examining two components:

- The structure of an argument
- The use of rhetorical devices

## The Structure of Argument

- a. The claim acknowledges the point of the argument.
- b. The support uses logical reasoning, relevant evidence, and accurate and credible sources. It also demonstrates an understanding of the topic.
- c. The counterclaim acknowledges the opposing point of view and offers reasons and evidence that reject the counterclaim.
- d. The concluding statement offers a call to action that asks audience members to change their minds or actions to support the claim.

## Rhetorical Devices

Rhetorical devices are literary devices that a writer uses to enhance the message and/or to create an effect. If the speech is argumentative, the effect should be to persuade for change. In Patrick Henry’s speech, be prepared to see devices such as aphorism, allusion, analogy, and rhetorical questions.

## Before Reading

1. What do you know about the historical context of Patrick Henry and his role in the argument for freedom from England?

## During Reading

2. You will participate in a shared reading of Patrick Henry’s “Speech to the Virginia Convention,” a speech delivered a year prior to the publication of *The Declaration of Independence*. As you read, do the following:
  - Mark elements of the argumentative structure you see in the text.
  - Highlight the rhetorical devices used by the speaker and note their impact.
  - Summarize the main point of each paragraph to help you determine support for Henry’s claim.

**LEARNING STRATEGIES:**  
Shared Reading, Marking the Text, Quickwrite, Revisiting Prior Work, Drafting, Discussion Groups

## My Notes

# The Power of Rhetoric



## WORD CONNECTIONS

### Allusion

An allusion is a direct or indirect reference to something from history, the Bible, etc. In paragraph 2, Henry alludes to both classical mythology and the Bible:

*“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.”*

*“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?”*

### My Notes

#### KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

What is the significance of the following allusion to the conflict in Virginia in 1755: “Suffer not yourselves to be betrayed with a kiss.”?

#### KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

Summarize Henry’s reasoning in the third paragraph.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Patrick Henry (1736–1799) was born in Virginia. He tried several occupations before becoming a lawyer and then a politician encouraging separation from Great Britain. He served as a delegate from Virginia to the 1st Session of the Continental Congress in 1774 and became noted as a powerful speaker whose words helped sweep the Colonists toward their declaration of independence.

### Speech

## SPEECH TO THE VIRGINIA CONVENTION

March 23, 1775

by Patrick Henry

**1** 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, 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 guilty of treason towards my country, and of an act of disloyalty toward the Majesty of Heaven, which I revere above all earthly kings.

**2** 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.

**3** 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 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 those 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.

4 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 motive 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. 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 upon 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. 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! 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!

5 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. 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. 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.

6 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!

**GRAMMAR & USAGE**  
Parallel Clauses

Notice the series of parallel independent clauses separated by semicolons and repeating the subject and verb.

*We have petitioned; we have remonstrated; we have supplicated; and we have prostrated ourselves.*

What is the effect of this syntactic structure on Henry's argument?

**My Notes**

**KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS**

Metaphors and similes are both types of analogy. What metaphors does Henry use to describe the coming war? What effect do these analogies have on the speech?

**KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS**

How is Henry building his case for independence from England in paragraph 5?

# The Power of Rhetoric

## My Notes

### After Reading

3. Review your notes about the structure of Henry’s speech. What pattern do you see?
4. With your discussion group, determine the order of claim, support, counterclaim, and conclusion/call to action, and recreate an outline in the space below.

### Check Your Understanding

**Writing Prompt:** Revisit the “close to home” issue in the previous activity. You have already prepared the rhetorical context for that speech. Now it is time to outline the structure and incorporate rhetorical devices in the writing of the speech. Remember that an argumentative speech without a well-planned structure, rhetorical devices, and powerful syntax will not achieve its purpose. Be sure to:

- Create an outline that includes the claim, support, counterclaim, and conclusion/call to action.
- Incorporate two rhetorical devices in your speech (metaphor, allusion, rhetorical questions, imagery). Mark them in your speech.
- Choose a syntactic structure from Henry’s “Give Me Liberty” speech for your own argument. Mark it in your speech, and in the margin note its intended effect.
- Practice reciting your speech to a classmate, parent, sibling, or friend. Consider how your delivery can enhance your written words.