

---

## Rhetorical Analysis Of Patrick Henry's Speech

Throughout history, numerous ideas have been proposed by many people through various speeches and pieces of text. Literature has permitted many people, regardless of the time, to gain knowledge about former events that helped shape the present. Through these bits of literature, readers are able to establish a deeper connection and understanding of past events. One part of this literature includes Patrick Henry's speech to the delegates from the state of Virginia, delivered in the spring of 1775. Henry gives a speech to press for the delegates of Virginia to prepare for war. In Henry's speech, he uses numerous rhetorical devices to enable the listeners to comprehend and connect to the author's purpose in appealing the delegates from the state of Virginia to take action in the war with Britain. Henry utilizes these rhetorical devices to persuade and advocate an armed rebellion towards Britain by indicating the necessity to be cautious of past failures, presenting the perfect opportunity to engage in armed conflict, and calling for action.

To begin his speech, Henry's first objective of instilling a sense of urgency about war is to make the delegates from Virginia aware of past failures or defeats. In order to do so, Henry uses rhetorical strategies to set forth knowledge about past failures. This knowledge allows the delegates to realize their mistakes, and not repeat those failures. Henry lists numerous failed attempts towards Britain, such as, "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." The repeated use of the same grammatical structure and examples of failed attempts shows Henry's use of parallelism. With the help of this device, the previous attempts by the delegates towards Britain have been deemed useless, since they have had no permanent effect or impact. The delegates had tried numerous times to gain freedom from Britain, but every attempt failed. With these factors placed in the minds of the delegates by Henry, a sense of realization and awareness has been gained. The delegates have now realized that the past failures had no impact at all, and that true change must be achieved to see any positive effects. Additionally, Henry points out that the delegates have attempted every possible peaceful method to retaliate against Britain, however, these efforts did not yield any results for the delegates. They have instead witnessed loss and failure from these attempts, along with the exhaustion of successful plans or ideas. Henry restates the idea of the worn-out attempts, which implements a sense of realization and awareness into the minds of the delegates, by saying, "what terms shall we find which have not been already exhausted?" Through an appeal to the reasoning ability of the delegates, Henry can instill a sense of urgency into the delegates with the use of logos. By utilizing logos, Henry provides the delegates with facts and knowledge of their past performance in previous wars partaken. With the help of this rhetorical device, Henry reminds the delegates that every plan or idea has been exhausted and that they have no other choice than to meet Britain in armed conflict if the desired change is to be made into reality. With this understanding imposed into the minds of the delegates, they gain an awareness of past failures and realize that to gain independence or freedom, a change in authority or executed plans must be brought into action.

When given a perfect opportunity, one must grasp it to maximize the benefits given the current opportunities. Patrick Henry had advocated for this plan of action by bringing attention to the ordeal at hand: the incoming conflicts with Britain. Along with the use of various rhetorical

---

devices, Henry gave information on all past events that had led up to the right moment to engage in war, "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." Through the use of logos, Henry supplies the delegates with knowledge regarding the inevitability of the war. Now that the delegates have been informed that they have done everything possible to avoid the war, they can see the perfect opportunity. The opportunity, in this case, is all of the events leading up to the very moment necessary to participate in war with Britain. The delegates had previously attempted and shared their peaceful retaliations or events such as, "our petitions have been slighted; our remonstrances have produced additional violence and insult; our supplications have been disregarded." Through the use of parallelism, the similar sentence structure allows for the listeners, the delegates, to clearly understand how urgent the action demanded by the opportunity is. The events leading up to the war include mostly peaceful protests, in which independence was the main goal. However, through the realization of these failed attempts, this points the delegates towards the necessity for a call of action, to gain independence. By explaining and listing past events that have led up to the perfect opportunity to engage in war, Henry creates a sense of awareness and realization in the delegates.

Lastly, Henry's final objective of instilling awareness into the delegates is to spur the delegates to action. Originally, the delegates had desired to press for peaceful solutions with Britain, but these efforts did not end in their favor. Instead, negative outcomes resulted from these actions, and due to this, Henry aimed to gather delegates to spread awareness and instill urgency into their minds to make a more revolutionary change to see truly beneficial results. For these effects to take place, Henry must get his message through to the delegates, for example, "the war is inevitable--and let it come! I repeat it, sir, let it come!" Through the use of a reiteration of words to emphasize his points, Henry uses repetition to his advantage to get his message through. By stating that the war is inevitable, Henry tries to convey that there is no way around this incoming fight, and to see any beneficial changes, a need for action must be brought to their attention. Along with this, Henry also repeats the phrase, "let it come," which, through repetition, intensifies his main points in his speech. This repetition creates a lasting impact in the minds of the delegates by reinforcing the overall message, that engagement in war is the only solution. Additionally, Henry provides illustrative scenarios or analogies to embed a sense of urgency into the delegates. These scenarios allow for the delegates and Henry to predict future outcomes if no action is taken, "they are sent over to bind and rivet upon us those chains which ministry have been so long forging." Through the use of a comparison between the delegates' freedom and chains, Henry is able to use a metaphor to support his message. The "chains" in this phrase means the restrictions on the delegates' freedom. Henry is implying that have been forging "chains" to restrict the delegates' freedom, a process that seems inescapable, and without any action or retaliation, the delegates' freedom and independence will be substantially restricted once again. By comparing the restriction provided by "chains" and the delegates' freedom, the overall message is reinforced by these scenarios and analogies. Due to all of these factors being collected by the delegates, the general message in the speech must have created a sense of urgency in the delegates, along with a sense of awareness and realization, that in order to gain independence or see change, a call for action must occur for effective and beneficial outcomes to take place.

Patrick Henry provides the delegates with numerous rhetorical devices which is able to sway their perceptions. By using rhetorical devices such as logos and parallelism, Henry wields past experiences as a tool to change mindset and to emphasize that decisive action needs to be taken. Alongside the need for decisive action, Henry reminds the delegates of their past failures,

---

which heeds a warning for them. With these warnings, the delegates have gained a sense of realization that the perfect opportunity is incoming, due to the exhaustion of failed attempts. With all of these factors coming together, Patrick Henry is able to clarify the consequences as well as persuade the delegates to prepare for war with Britain.