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This month's Free Lesson comes from our newest book, ***Prestwick House AP Language and Composition***, written by former teacher, Douglas Grudzina. This book will be available for purchase in October, 2010.

Unlike other AP language and composition guides, ***Prestwick House AP Language and Composition*** includes complete and unabridged nonfiction passages. Helpful annotations allow you to effortlessly guide students in determining the types of questions they should be asking themselves.

This lesson, "Analyzing Language Conventions: Diction and Syntax," features Patrick Henry's Speech to the Second Virginia Convention. It includes introduction material, the full text of Henry's speech, multiple choice questions, a free response item, and answers and explanations.

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Chapter 2: Analyzing language conventions—Diction and Syntax

Exercise One:

Patrick Henry delivered this, his most famous speech, before the Second Virginia Convention on 23 March 1775. In it, he argues for the arming of a Virginia militia—both to defend Virginia from the increasing British military presence and to, perhaps, stage attacks against the British. The following account was recorded by Patrick Henry's first biographer William Wirt. At the end of the speech—according to Wirt's account—members of the Convention jumped up and shouted "To Arms! To Arms!"

Other eyewitness accounts, however, allege that Henry preyed upon his listeners' fear of Indian raids and slave revolts to build his case for arming against the British. The only written first-hand account further criticizes Henry for stooping to vitriolic name-calling.

Henry refused to participate in the Constitutional Convention of 1787, saying that he "smelt a rat ... tending toward the monarchy." He did serve as a representative to the 1788 Virginia convention that ratified the Constitution. He voted against ratification.

He was offered the position of President Washington's Secretary of State, but he declined, still suspecting the new Federal Government's potential threat to states' rights. It was not until the Reign of Terror following the French Revolution that Henry realized the potential of near-anarchy to break loose in the United States, and he came to support a strong Federal Government. His new Federal leanings were so strong that he publicly denounced the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, which tried to assert the right of any state's legislature to declare an act of Congress null and void.

In March 1799, in his last public address, Henry warned that the Resolutions threatened civil war, and he expressed deep regret that his native Virginia had fallen from the birth-mother of the Federal Government to the petulant stepson who desired to see the union's downfall.

Carefully read the address and then select the best answers to the multiple-choice questions that follow.

Patrick Henry's
Speech to the Second Virginia Convention
St. John's Church, Richmond
23 March 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 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 offence, I should consider myself as guilty of treason towards 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 war-like 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 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!

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. 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. 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.

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!

Source: Wirt, William. Sketches of the Life and Character of Patrick Henry . (Philadelphia) 1836.

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. Given the context of the rest of the speech, the word *patriotism*, as used in the first sentence, most likely means loyalty to the
   A. British Parliament.
   B. United States.
   C. state of Virginia.
   D. American people.
   E. English king.

2. Throughout his speech, Patrick Henry alludes to each of the following EXCEPT the
   A. mythology of ancient Greece.
   B. Judeo-Christian Old Testament.
   C. Christian New Testament.
   D. 1774 petition to King George III.
   E. Magna Carta.

3. Patrick Henry's use of the word *treason* (second paragraph) can best be described as
   A. sarcastic.
   B. fervent.
   C. connotative.
   D. ambiguous.
   E. understated.

4. Henry's frequent uses of first person serve to make his address
   A. personally revealing.
   B. universally appealing.
   C. antagonistic.
   D. conciliatory.
   E. broadly accusatory.

5. Which of the following most nearly approaches a propagandistic appeal?
   A. "... 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 hope ..."
   B. "Suffer not yourselves to be betrayed with a kiss."
   C. "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?"
   D. "We have petitioned; we have remonstrated; we have supplicated; we have prostrated ourselves before the throne."
   E. "There is no retreat but in submission and slavery!"

Free-response Item:
Carefully read Patrick Henry's 1775 Speech to the Second Virginia Convention, paying close attention to the speaker's word choice and sentence structure. Then write a well-supported essay in which you support, refute, or qualify modern historians' charges that Patrick Henry tended toward demagoguery and propaganda in this address. Do not merely summarize the speech.

Answers and Explanation to Multiple-Choice Questions

Chapter 2, Exercise One

1. Henry's use of the word *patriotism* in this sentence is certainly ambiguous, even ironic. He begins by acknowledging the "patriotism" of the gentlemen who have apparently spoken before him, and one might infer from Henry's call to arms that these gentlemen were advocating loyalty to Great Britain (A, E). Henry's rhetorical questions and his use of first person plural—especially in references to "our country," "our petition"—clearly suggest that even the previous speakers were arguing for what they considered the best path for some entity *other than* Britain. (C) is tempting, but Henry calls the men in other states who have been fired upon—" Our brethren are already in the field!"—"brothers." Thus, he is concerned with more than merely Virginia. (B) and (D) might appear to be equally tempting, but every reference in the speech to liberty, to the need to fight, is on the personal level, the desire for freedom and the abhorrence to slavery to Britain. There is, as yet, no mention of a collective "United States." **Thus, (D) is the best answer.**

2. (A) is eliminated by Henry's asking whether the pacifists in the assembly will listen to the "song of that siren till she transforms us into beasts," which is a slightly inaccurate allusion Homer's *Odyssey*, in which Henry conflates the episodes of the Sirens (who sang the irresistible song) and Circe (who transformed Odysseus's men into swine). (B) is eliminated by the clear references to Psalm 115: "having eyes, [they] see not, and, having ears, [they] hear not"; Psalm 119: "one lamp by which my feet are guided"; and the book of the prophet Amos: "cover our waters and darken our land." (C) is eliminated by the reference to the Gospel accounts of Judas Iscariot's betrayal of Jesus with a kiss: "Suffer not yourselves to be betrayed with a kiss." (D) might alarm some students as it is such a specific choice, but the speech is identified as having been delivered in 1775, nearly a year after the 1774 petition, and Henry makes numerous references to "our petition." Thus, whether Henry is referring to this specific petition or any others that were drafted and sent prior to March 1775, his references to petitions, entreaties, and efforts at reconciliation eliminate (D). There is, however, no direct reference to any specific document like the Magna Carta (E) that grants British subjects the rights that Henry warns against losing. **Thus, (E) is the best answer.**

3. Like his use of *patriotism* in his opening sentence, this use raises the question of whether the treason being committed is against the lawful government (Parliament and the king) or against the insurrectionists (the American revolutionaries). While there is sarcasm in many of Henry's rhetorical questions and uses of hypophora, his specific and limited use of this word is sincere. Likewise, his speech is indeed fervent (B), and his use of the word *treason* is sincere, this is not the best answer. Certainly Henry is using the word to express exactly the betrayal it means, so (C) is eliminated, and nothing in this speech, redolent with rhetorical devices and near-propaganda, can be described as understated (E). **Thus, (D) is the best answer.**

4. One might expect use of the first person to be personally revealing (A), but the Patrick Henry delivering this speech is a thoroughly public persona with no real evidence of his private self. Wherever Henry acknowledges that his views might be antagonistic, he rhetorically apologizes, and his use of first persons seems intended actually to *lessen* antagonism, to allege that he is speaking only for himself. This (C) is eliminated. (D) might be tempting, but Henry is unyielding in his views; he simply does not claim to be speaking for anyone else. (E) is likewise tempting if one recognizes the rhetorical strength of the speech. Henry is speaking "for only himself," but the is a tone of judgment to those who believe or would act differently. Whatever tacit accusations he makes, however, cannot really be considered "broad" (E). In the mild accusation of his personal references—"as for me, give me liberty, or give me death!"—Henry sets himself up almost as an archetype, an example to be followed: "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 ..." **Thus, (B) is the best answer.**

5. (A) is an example of inductive reasoning, in which Henry is basing his mistrust of the future by referring to the series of British atrocities in the past. Whether completely accurate or not, it is logical, and therefore not propaganda. (B) is an allusion to Judas Iscariot's betrayal of Jesus as portrayed in the Christian gospels. Henry is using the allusion metaphorically to describe his fear of the consequences of American pacifism. (C) is a series of rhetorical questions that point to the current British actions that cause Henry alarm. (D) is an anaphora, summing up the recent American response to British actions. (E), however is a strong statement, a false dichotomy or fallacy of false choice. As Henry knows he is presenting this "choice" in an attempt to persuade his colleagues to arm and fight, he is not committing a legitimate fallacy but employing a technique of propaganda. **Thus, (E) is the best answer.**