

Patrick Henry: The Voice of Freedom



ABOUT THE READING By 1775 Great Britain and the colonies were on the brink of war. Parliament said Massachusetts was in a state of rebellion. On March 23 the Virginia House of Burgesses met. They had to decide whether to join the cause. Patrick Henry spoke to the members before their vote. This strong speech convinced them to join the Revolutionary War.

VOCABULARY

ministry government

solace comfort

comports goes along

avert turn away

invincible unbeatable



As you read note how Patrick Henry uses images to convey his point of view.

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 nothing less than a question of freedom or slavery; . . . Mr. President, it is natural to man to indulge in the illusions of Hope.

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 lately been 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. . . Let us not deceive ourselves, sir. These are the implements of war and subjugation, the last arguments

The issue the members are about to vote on is of great importance.

Henry says not to trust the British. They are trying to trap the colonists by acting friendly.

The king is using his army to scare the colonists into doing what he wants.

to which kings resort. . . I ask gentlemen, sir, what means this martial array, if its purpose be not to force us into submission? . . .

They are sent over to bind and rivet upon us those chains which the British ministry have been so long forging. . . . Sir, we have done everything that could be done to **avert** the storm which is now coming on. . . Our petitions have been slighted . . . and we have been spurned with contempt from the foot of the throne. . . . They tell us, sir, that we are weak,—unable to cope with so formidable an adversary. But when shall we be stronger? . . . Sir, we are not weak. . . Three millions of people armed in the holy cause of liberty, and in such a country as that we possess, are **invincible** by any force which our enemy can send against us. . .

The battle, sir, is not to the strong alone: it is to the vigilant, the active, the brave. . . 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! . . . Gentlemen may cry 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 . . . 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!

The image of chains suggests that the British plan to treat the colonists like slaves.

The king has refused to have anything to do with the colonists.

Other colonists are ready to fight.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. Why is Patrick Henry not hopeful about the chances for peace?

2. Why does Henry think the colonists are strong?

3. Why does Henry think it is necessary to fight the British?
