



What is the “storm” to which Patrick Henry refers?

The storm is the conflict between England and the colonies, which will soon erupt into war.



What institution does he mean when he refers to “the throne”?

The word “throne” refers to the English monarchy; more specifically, to King George III.



What are the “contest” and the “glorious object” which Patrick Henry hopes to obtain?

The “contest” is the approaching conflict. The “glorious object” is freedom from foreign rule.



The Quartering Act had been passed in 1774.

The Quartering Act allowed British army officers to quarter, or lodge, soldiers in the homes of the colonists without their permission.

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Speech at the Virginia House of Burgesses

Delivered to the Second Virginia Convention, March 23, 1775

Patrick Henry

FOCUS: PERSUASIVE SPEAKING

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. 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 next week, or 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*

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

remonstrated — protested.

supplicated — requested something in an earnest and humble manner; prayed.

prostrated — lay on the ground in an expression of submission.

interposition — intervention.

inviolate — unbroken; whole.

inestimable — having great value.

irresolution — doubt; uncertainty.

1 Point out that Patrick Henry *lists* the ways the colonists have tried to avert war and then, in the next sentence, shows how each of these attempts has been rebuffed: petitioned/slighted; remonstrated/produced additional violence and insult; supplicated/disregarded; prostrated/spurned. This repetition stresses that the colonists have tried all means to preserve peace and are now forced to wage war. Ask students to find other examples of lists in Henry’s speech; i.e., in the second paragraph, he lists phrases beginning “if we mean.” In the third paragraph, he begins a list of phrases, “Shall we.” These *rhetorical questions* encourage the audience to agree with the speaker.



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

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

supinely — passively; lying on one's back.

delusive — false; unreal; deceptive.

election — here, choice.

extenuate — to make a crime or an offense seem less serious than it is.

resounding — making a loud, echoing sound.

brethren — brothers.



Who does Patrick Henry believe will help them?

Patrick Henry believes that God will help them to be victorious; He will “raise up” other nations, such as France, to fight with them.



The Boston Massacre, the Boston Tea Party, and the First Continental Congress have already taken place.

These incidents show that “there is no peace,” and that the British have no intention of softening their grip on the colonies.

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