Patrick Henry – “Speech to the Virginia Convention” (pp. 230-234)

1. What is Henry’s purpose in this speech? What is he trying to convince the delegates of Virginia to do?
2. Henry begins his speech with a “concession and rebuttal” technique. What effect do you think that would have on his audience? Why?
3. Why do you think Henry uses language such as “the great responsibility which we hold to God and our country” and “an act of disloyalty towards the majesty of heaven, which I revere above all earthly kings”?
4. Henry makes a few allusions (implied or indirect references to a person, event, or thing) in his speech, first to the Greek epic *The Odyssey* when he mentions the Sirens, then to the Bible when he references Ezekiel 12:2 and Luke 22:47-48 (the betrayal of Judas). Why do you think he chose to include these allusions? What effect do you think they have on his overall message?
5. What evidence does Henry cite that the British are not seeking a peaceful, equal reconciliation with the colonies?
6. Henry asks a series of rhetorical questions in lines 30-37, the answer to all of which is “no.” He then makes a (parallel) statement, “They are meant for us; they can be meant for no other.” Why do you think Henry structures this section of his speech like this? What effect does it have?
7. Henry again uses parallel structure when explaining the actions the colonists have taken to protest their treatment by the British. What effect does this create in the audience? How does it add to Henry’s persuasive message?
8. Henry uses direct repetition twice in the speech. What two lines does he repeat, and why do you think he chooses to repeat those two specific lines?
9. In lines 69-79, Henry tries to both assuage (ease or lessen) a fear, as well as instill (create) another. What fear of the colonists does he try to assuage, and what fear does he try to instill?
10. The final line of this speech – “give me liberty, or give me death!” – is famous, and Henry has built up the drama of his rhetoric throughout his speech to make these last lines memorable. What do you think is the most effective rhetorical device Henry uses in his speech? What makes it so effective? Cite examples from the text to support your answer.