The Age of Reason

1750-1800

(Revolutionary America)

What happened in America during this time? Make a list with a partner.
The Age of Reason was the emergence from centuries of darkness and ignorance into an age enlightened by reason, science (Newton’s discovery of universal gravitation), and a respect for humanity.
Key Terms

- **Rationalism**: based on the belief that human-beings can discover truth by using reason rather than by relying solely on religious faith.

- **Deism**: Rationalist belief that God created the natural world and its laws, but that people could use reason to understand the world and guide their lives.

**TPQ**: How is Deism different from and similar to Puritanism?
Literary Genres

- Biographies/Autobiographies- Benjamin Franklin’s Autobiography
- Government Documents- The Declaration of Independence- Thomas Jefferson
- Newspapers/Pamphlets- Common Sense/The Crisis- Thomas Paine
- Speeches- Speech at the Virginia Convention- Patrick Henry

TPQ: The writing of the time contains many persuasive techniques. Why??
Authors we will study

• Patrick Henry: “Give me Liberty or give me Death!”
• Thomas Paine: “These are the times that try men’s souls”
• Thomas Jefferson: “We hold these truths to be self-evident”
• Elizabeth Cady Stanton: “The best protection any woman can have is...courage.”
• Benjamin Franklin: “A countryman between two lawyers is like a fish between two cats”
Rhetoric: the art of speaking or writing effectively.

- Appeals to emotion AND logic
- Repetitions of clauses (parallelisms) or words
- Rhetorical questions—questions not meant to be answered but rather thought about
- Figures of speech—metaphor, simile, analogy, allusion, hyperbole, oxymoron...
Patrick Henry

- Born in VA in 1736
- Recognized as one of the most persuasive orators in American Colonial history
- 1765 - made a powerful speech against the Stamp Act
- 1775 - After colonists protested against the “Intolerable Acts”, Britain agreed to ease their taxes on the condition that the colonists fully support British rule.
- After several delegates of the VA House of Burgesses gave speeches supporting the compromise with Britain, Henry rose and gave his famous “Give me Liberty or give me Death” speech.
- **Interesting Fact:** While giving the speech, Henry supposedly grabbed a letter opener and plunged it toward his chest as he delivered the aforementioned, famous line. **What type of effect might that have had on Henry’s audience??**
Examine the statements from Patrick Henry’s “Speech to the Virginia Convention”, and explain why they are effective rhetoric.

• 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.
Persuasive Techniques

• Henry begins his speech with a very respectful tone; he refers to the previous speakers as “worthy gentlemen”. By doing so, Henry’s audience is more likely to be interested in what he has to say.

• Henry also uses a logical appeal when he states that “different men often see the same subject in different lights.” This is precisely what he is about to prove when he delivers his argument that instead of compromising with Britain, the colonists need to wage war.
Henry’s speech continued...

- This is no time for ceremony. The questions 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 would to God and our country. Should I keep back my opinions at such a time, through fear of giving offense, I should consider myself as guilty of treason toward my country, and of an act of disloyalty toward the majesty of heaven, which I revere above all earthly kings.
Persuasive Techniques

- “This is no time for ceremony” emphasizes to his audience the seriousness and the urgency of the situation.

- **Emotional Appeal:** compares complying with British rule to being enslaved. Surely, this would get at the hearts of his audience. He also appeals to their sense of responsibility to their country and God. Although this was a more rational time in history, surely the love and respect for God was present in people’s hearts.
Thomas Paine (1737-1809)

- born in England
- drifted through various occupations first 37 years of his life
- emigrated to America in 1774 (PA) just in time to take part in American Rev.
- 1776- published *Common Sense*, a persuasive pamphlet that advocated American Independence from Britain
- left America to live in France for a while and supported the French Revolution; when he wrote a pamphlet that persuaded people to overthrow the King of England, he was tried for treason in England and banished.
- later imprisoned in France for being a citizen of England.
- eventually freed by an American Minister who persuaded the French that Paine was actually an American.
- when Paine finally returned to America, he was considered a radical and an atheist
- Paine died an outcast and yet his writings continue to inspire people today.
“The Crisis, No. 1” Let’s examine the following paragraph and discuss whether or not it is effective rhetoric.

• These are the times that try men’s souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it NOW, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap we esteem too lightly; ‘tis dearness only that gives everything its goods; and it would be strange indeed, if so celestial an article as FREEDOM should not be highly rated. Britain, with an army to enforce her tyranny, has declared that she has a right (not only to tax) but “to BIND us in ALL CASES WHATSOEVER,” and if being bound in that manner, is not slavery, then is there not such a thing as slavery upon earth. Even the expression is impious, for so unlimited a power can belong only to God.
Persuasive Techniques

• **Emotion**: By comparing British rule to tyranny (analogy), Paine is arousing the colonists’ anger. He also reminds colonists that although the war is difficult, the taste of freedom will be that much sweeter once they win.

• **Logic**: Paine quotes the British Declaratory Act which states that Britain has the right to “Bind us in all cases whatsoever,” which, when analyzed, is the very definition of slavery. He also states that only God has the power to invest people with freedom; therefore, Britain does NOT have the right to strip colonists of it.
Abigail Adams

- Wife of John Adams, delegate to the First Continental Congress and future president
- While John was away on business, which was a majority of the time, she corresponded with him through letters (they have written over 1100 letters to each other).
- In 1776, Abigail wrote to her husband about the Declaration of Independence, urging him to consider the rights of women.
So what were major obstacles women faced during this time?

- Women were not allowed to vote.
- When a woman married, all of her property became a legal possession of her husband. She no longer had control over it.
- Women were allowed only to run small businesses (inns, shops, etc.) on a very limited basis.
- Men were allowed to use corporal (physical) punishment on their wives. **RULE OF THUMB!**
- If a divorce occurred, the husband would retain custody of the children. Women had no rights with regard to the children.
Benjamin Franklin

- Born in Boston in 1706
- Rose from rags to riches even though he had to quit school to earn a living
- He was a prosperous merchant, owner of a successful print shop, and publisher of *The Pennsylvania Gazette*
- He was a gifted scientist and inventor. Among his inventions were an open heating stove, bifocal glasses, a type of harmonica, and a rocking chair that could swat flies.
- Was also a talented diplomat, and while in London, he lobbied for the Colonies in their dispute with Britain hoping to bring about a compromise without going to war
- By 1774, the stress between the Colonies and Britain became too great, and Franklin sailed back to the Colonies in 1775.
- Helped negotiate the treaty that brought France into the war on the Colonies’ side, and when the Revolutionary War ended, he helped mediate the peace.
- In 1787, Franklin served as a member of the Constitutional Convention.
- His death in 1790 was cause for international mourning.
Poor Richard’s Almanack- Franklin

- Published in 1732 and was Franklin’s biggest publishing success.
- The almanack remained in publication for 25 years!
- Almost every household had an almanac; the almanac calculated the tides and phases of the moon, forecasts of the weather, astrological advice (horoscopes), recipes, jokes, and aphorisms.
- Aphorism: short, witty saying that offers a significant truth about life.
- Poor Richard was an imaginary astrologer.