

Patrick Henry as a Change Agent:

How He was Influenced by Samuel Davies and the Polegreen Meeting House

“I was first taught what an orator should be by listening to Davies preach.”

--Patrick Henry

Grade Level: 4th—6th grade

National Standards:

- Time, Continuity, and Change
- People, Places, and Environment
- Power, Authority, and Governance

Virginia State Standards of Learning:

- The student will demonstrate knowledge of the role of Virginia in the American Revolution by identifying the various roles played by whites, enslaved African Americans, free African Americans, and American Indians in the Revolutionary War era, including George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, and James Lafayette. [VS.5b]
- The student will demonstrate knowledge of the causes and results of the American Revolution by describing key events and the roles of key individuals in the American Revolution, with emphasis on George Washington, Ben Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and Patrick Henry. [USI.6c]

Time required: 45 minutes or more

Overview: Patrick Henry, famously known for his “Give me liberty or give me death” speech, learned to speak after listening to an itinerant preacher named Samuel Davies. Davies spoke at the Polegreen Meeting House. An attentive listener of Davies was a young Patrick Henry. Henry’s mother often took her children to listen to the sermons of Davies. After services, Patrick Henry would recite Davies’ sermons to his mother on the way home. In addition to using emotion and conviction to deliver his speeches, Davies spoke about religious and personal freedoms. Henry later credited Davies for teaching him how to speak in public. While Henry learned to speak from Davies, his mother initially planted the seed of religious freedom as she sought out the Presbyterian faith with her children. Henry’s infamous words motivated Virginia to prepare for war against Great Britain. Great Britain, after all, controlled all religious and personal freedoms of the colonists. Both men changed the course of religion and history in America.

Learning Objectives:

- To know that a young Patrick Henry attended services at the Polegreen Meeting House where he listened to the message of liberty and freedom of religion of Rev. Samuel Davies
- To explain that Patrick Henry later revealed the beginnings of oratorical aspirations: "I was first taught what an orator should be by listening to Davies preach."
- To identify the ideas of personal and religious freedom that were discussed by Davies at the Polegreen Meeting House
- To describe the contribution of Patrick Henry inspiring patriots with his "Give me liberty or give me death" speech at St. John's Church
- To connect the themes of the speech with the ideas discussed at the Polegreen Meeting House

Materials needed:

- Copies of [Patrick Henry Timeline](#)
- Copies of [Patrick Henry as Change Agent Reading](#)
- Copies of [Patrick Henry as Change Agent Graphic Organizer](#)
- Copies of [Hanover County Historical Map](#)
<http://users.inetconn.net/~hspdjones/images/HistoricHanoverMap.jpg>
- Audio version of "Give me liberty or give me death"
<http://www.history.org/Almanack/people/bios/biohen.cfm>

Learning Activities

1. Introduction: Tell the students that today they are going to learn about Patrick Henry and his role in the Revolution. Tell them that today's discussion may include information they already know about Henry as well as new information. Start off by having the students read and answer true or false for the following statements. They are to answer these based on what they already know about Henry and answer the ones they aren't sure of with what they think would be true or false for him. Reassure them that this is to get them thinking and that it will not be graded.
 - a. Patrick Henry trained to be a store clerk.
 - b. Patrick Henry is known for saying "Give me liberty or give me death".
 - c. Patrick Henry went to college to learn how to speak in public.
 - d. Patrick Henry commanded Virginia soldiers during the Revolution.

Pass out copies of the Patrick Henry Timeline and encourage the students to find proof that will confirm the answers to the above statements. As you discuss each one, share with the students the following facts.

- a. True. Patrick Henry trained as a store clerk in 1751. This means that he was an apprentice. He tried to open a store in 1752 with his brother and later again in 1760. Both times the store failed.
 - b. True. Patrick Henry gave a moving speech in 1775 at St. John's Church in Richmond, Virginia. He gives this speech which ends in the famous phrase "Give me liberty or give me death" as a call to action against the rule of Great Britain. This took place about one month before the shots were first fired in Lexington and Concord which officially started the American Revolution and the fight for independence against Great Britain.
 - c. False. The timeline does not mention college. In fact, Henry worked for his wife's father John Shelton. While working at his father-in-law's tavern, Patrick Henry studied and became a self-taught lawyer.
 - d. True. On August 5, 1775, Henry was elected Commander-in-Chief of the Virginia military. Ask students to look for the date in which he resigned: Feb. 28, 1776. Ask the students to figure out how many months he served. Ask: What would possibly cause Henry to leave his position in the military for an event which he encouraged people to join with his words "give me liberty or give me death"? (TEACHER NOTE: When Congress reorganized the militia regiments and combined smaller units into the newly formed Continental Army, Henry found himself subordinate in rank to some of his previous charges. He resigned which prompted his men to protest the loss of their beloved leader and many threatened to quit altogether. Henry quickly convinced the men to stay and support the new leadership. He would not let personal disappointment overrule the cause of freedom.)
2. Pass out copies of the reading "Patrick Henry as Change Agent" and "Patrick Henry as Change Agent Graphic Organizer". Have students take turns reading out loud and completing the graphic organizer. Share student responses as the organizer is completed.
 3. Have students listen to an audio version of the "Give me liberty or give me death speech". Write these questions on the board and use them for class discussion after the speech is over: What individual rights does Henry talk about throughout the speech? What feelings or emotions do you have when listening to the speech? How does the actor use his voice as a tool? Do you think this actor gave the speech like Patrick Henry did? Why or why not?
 4. Additional activities if time permits:
 - a. Have students write a letter to either Samuel Davies or Patrick Henry. In the letter, students should address what they learned about the men and how it affects their lives today. Students should be encouraged to say what they admire about the men, what they would have liked to see the men do differently, and ask any questions that they want answered.

- b. While listening to the audio version of "Give me liberty or give me death", have students draw a picture. The guidelines for the picture should be to draw something that represents the feelings they have when they listen to the speech.
 - c. Map activity: Have students locate and label the places where events happened to further the cause of religious and civil freedoms. Students could locate and label Polegreen Church for Samuel Davies and St. John's Church for Patrick Henry. What does it mean to you that these two events happened so close together in proximity?
5. Closure: Ask the students to write and to complete this statement on a small piece of paper:
The most important change or changes from Samuel Davies and Patrick Henry was/were

If I were to act as a change agent for something, I would want to change

Share responses as a way of closing the lesson.