

The CRISIS

Thomas Paine

BACKGROUND On the blustery Christmas Eve of 1776, the situation looked bleak for the Continental Army. General Washington's ragtag troops had retreated to the western banks of the Delaware River. Tom Paine was camped with them. The British were within striking distance of Philadelphia, and Washington knew he had to advance the next day or risk losing the war. To boost the morale of his ill-equipped and outnumbered soldiers, he ordered his officers to read aloud the following essay, which Paine had written the day before.

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 every thing its value. Heaven knows how to set a proper price upon 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 10 ALL CASES WHATSOEVER,"¹ and if *being bound in that manner* is not slavery, then there is not such a thing as slavery upon earth. Even the expression is impious, for so unlimited a power can only belong to God. ❶

1. "to BIND us in ALL CASES WHATSOEVER": a reference to wording in the Declaratory Act of 1766, in which the British parliament asserted its "power and authority" to make and enforce laws over the American colonies.

ANALYZE VISUALS

A minuteman was pledged to be ready to fight on a minute's notice. What does this suggest about the preparedness of the colonists?

tyranny (tĭr'ə-nē) *n.*
cruel and oppressive government or rule

esteem (ĭ-stēm') *v.* to set a high value on

celestial (sə-lēs'chəl) *adj.*
heavenly

❶ PERSUASIVE TECHNIQUES

Identify the loaded language—words with strong connotations—in lines 1–12. Then paraphrase the lines using neutral language.

Whether the Independence of the Continent was declared too soon, or delayed too long, I will not now enter into as an argument; my own simple opinion is, that had it been eight months earlier, it would have been much better. We did not make a proper use of last winter, neither could we, while we were in a dependant state. However, the fault, if it were one, was all our own; we have none to blame but ourselves. But no great deal is lost yet; all that Howe has been doing for this month past is rather a ravage than a conquest which the spirit of the Jersies a year ago would have quickly repulsed, and which time and a little resolution will soon recover. **B**

I have as little superstition in me as any man living, but my secret opinion has ever been, and still is, that God almighty will not give up a people to military destruction, or leave them unsupportedly to perish, who had so earnestly and so repeatedly sought to avoid the calamities of war, by every decent method which wisdom could invent. Neither have I so much of the **infidel** in me, as to suppose, that he has **relinquished** the government of the world, and given us up to the care of devils; and as I do not, I cannot see on what grounds the king of Britain can look up to heaven for help against us: A common murderer, a highwayman, or a

housebreaker, has as good a pretense as he. . . .
I once felt all that kind of anger, which a man ought to feel, against the mean principles that are held by the Tories:² A noted one, who kept a tavern at Amboy,³ was standing at his door, with as pretty a child in his hand, about eight or nine years old, as most I ever saw, and after speaking his mind as freely as he thought was **prudent**, finished with this unfatherly expression, "Well! give me peace in my day." Not a man lives on the Continent but fully believes that a separation must some time or other finally take place, and a generous parent would have said, "If there must be trouble, let it be in my day, that my child may have peace;" and this single reflection, well applied, is sufficient to awaken every man to duty. Not a

place upon earth might be so happy as America. Her situation is remote from all the **wrangling** world, and she has nothing to do but trade with them. A man may easily distinguish in himself between temper and principle, and I am as confident, as I am that God governs the world, that America will never be happy until she gets clear of foreign **dominion**. Wars, without ceasing, will break out until that period arrives, and the Continent must in the end be conqueror; for, though the flame of liberty may sometimes cease to shine, the coal never can expire. . . . **C**

I turn with the warm **ardor** of a friend to those who have nobly stood, and are yet determined to stand the matter out: I call not upon a few, but upon all; not on this State or that State, but on every State; up and help us; lay your shoulders to the wheel; better have too much force than too little, when so great an object is at stake. Let it be told to the future world, that in the depth of winter, when nothing but hope and virtue could survive, that the city and the country, alarmed at one

B MAIN IDEAS AND SUPPORT

How does Paine support his main idea that all is not lost for the colonists, despite their military defeats?

infidel (ɪnˈfɪ-dəl) *n.* a person with no religious beliefs

relinquish (rɪˈlɪŋˈkwɪʃ) *v.* to withdraw from; to give up

prudent (prɒdˈnt) *adj.* showing caution or good judgment

wrangling (ræŋˈɡlɪŋ) *adj.* arguing noisily
wrangle *v.*

dominion (dəˈmɪnˈjən) *n.* control; authority over

C PERSUASIVE TECHNIQUES

Notice that Paine makes an **ethical appeal** in lines 31-39. How does he say a parent should behave?

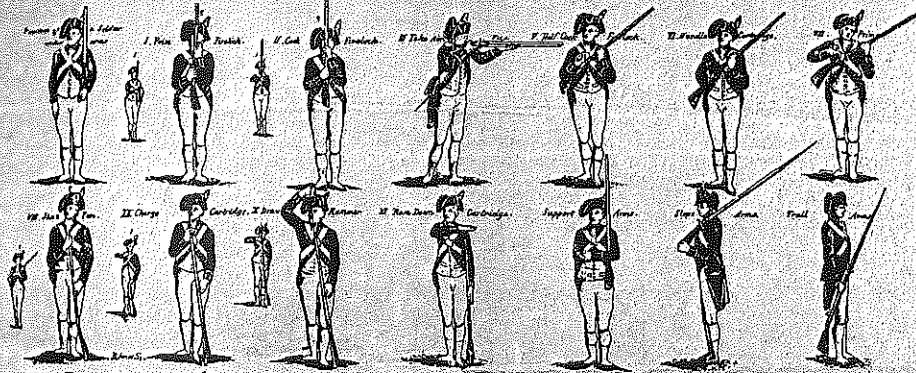
ardor (ɑːˈdər) *n.* intense enthusiasm; passion

2. **the mean principles . . . Tories:** the small-minded beliefs of those colonists who remain loyal to Great Britain.

3. **Amboy:** probably Perth Amboy, a town in New Jersey.

TO ALL BRAVE, HEALTHY, ABLE BODIED, AND WELL
 DISPOSED YOUNG MEN,
 IN THIS NEIGHBOURHOOD, WHO HAVE ANY INCLINATION TO JOIN THE TROOPS,
 NOW RAISING UNDER
 GENERAL WASHINGTON,
 FOR THE DEFENCE OF THE
 LIBERTIES AND INDEPENDENCE
 OF THE UNITED STATES,
 Against the hostile designs of foreign enemies,

TAKE NOTICE,



THAT *Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday at New Wood in Middlesex* *Recruiting* with his musk and recruiting party of *County, attendance will be given by* *of the 11th Regiment of Infantry, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel, Austin Ogden, for the purpose of receiving the enrollment of* such youth of SPIRIT, as may be willing to enter into this HONOURABLE SERVICE.
 The ENCOURAGEMENT at this time, to enlist, is truly liberal and generous, namely, a bounty of TWENTY DOLLARS, an annual and fully sufficient supply of good and handsome clothing, a daily allowance of a large and ample ration of provisions, together with SEVEN DOLLARS a year in good comfort money on account of pay, the whole of which the soldier may lay up for himself and friends, as all articles proper for his subsistence and comfort are provided by law, without any expence to him.
 Those who may favour this recruiting party with their attendance as above, will have an opportunity of hearing and seeing in a more particular manner, the great advantages which these brave men will have, who shall embrace this opportunity of spending a few happy years in serving the different parts of this beautiful continent, in the honourable and truly respectable character of a soldier, after which, he may, if he pleases return home to his friends, with his pockets full of money and his head covered with laurels.
 GOD SAVE THE UNITED STATES.

ANALYZE VISUALS
 A broadside is a public notice printed on one side of a large sheet of paper. What feelings and emotions does this American Revolutionary War broadside appeal to?

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 military

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common danger, came forth to meet and to **repulse** it. Say not, that thousands are gone, turn out your tens of thousands; throw not the burden of the day upon Providence, but "*shew your faith by your works,*" that God may bless you. It matters not where you live, or what rank of life you hold, the evil or the blessing will reach you all. The far and the near, the home counties and the back, the rich and the poor, shall suffer or rejoice alike. The heart that feels not now, is dead: The blood of his children shall curse his cowardice, who shrinks back at a time (64) when a little might have saved the whole, and made *them* happy. I love the man that can smile in trouble, that can gather strength from distress, and grow brave by reflection. 'Tis the business of little minds to shrink; but he whose heart is firm, and whose conscience approves his conduct, will pursue his principles unto death. My own line of reasoning is to myself as strait and clear as a ray of light. (65) Not all the treasures of the world, so far as I believe, could have induced me to support an offensive war, for I think it murder; but if a thief break into my house, burn and destroy my property, and kill or threaten to kill me, or those that are in it, and to "*bind me in all cases whatsoever,*" to his absolute will, am I to suffer it?

repulse (rĭ-pŭls') v.
 to drive back by force

D PERSUASIVE TECHNIQUES
 Reread lines 58–64. Identify some examples of loaded words and phrases in this passage. What point is Paine making about those who refuse to act?

What signifies it to me, whether he who does it, is a king or a common man; my
70 countryman or not my countryman? whether it is done by an individual villain,
or an army of them? If we reason to the root of things we shall find no difference;
neither can any just cause be assigned why we should punish in the one case, and
pardon in the other. Let them call me rebel, and welcome, I feel no concern from
it; but I should suffer the misery of devils, were I to make a whore of my soul by
swearing allegiance to one, whose character is that of a sottish, stupid, stubborn,
worthless, brutish man. I conceive likewise a horrid idea in receiving mercy from a
being, who at the last day shall be shrieking to the rocks and mountains to cover him,
and fleeing with terror from the orphan, the widow and the slain of America.

There are cases which cannot be overdone by language, and this is one. There
80 are persons too who see not the full extent of the evil that threatens them; they
solace themselves with hopes that the enemy, if they succeed, will be merciful.
It is the madness of folly to expect mercy from those who have refused to do
justice; and even mercy, where conquest is the object, is only a trick of war: The
cunning of the fox is as murderous as the violence of the wolfe; and we ought
to guard equally against both. Howe's first object is partly by threats and partly
by promises, to terrify or seduce the people to deliver up their arms, and receive
mercy. The ministry recommended the same plan to Gage, and this is what the
Tories call making their peace; "*a peace which passeth all understanding*" indeed!
A peace which would be the immediate forerunner of a worse ruin than any we
90 have yet thought of. Ye men of Pennsylvania, do reason upon those things! Were
the back counties to give up their arms, they would fall easy prey to the Indians,
who are all armed: This perhaps is what some Tories would not be sorry for.
Were the home counties to deliver up their arms, they would be exposed to the
resentment of the back counties, who would then have it at their power to chastise
their defection at pleasure. And were any one State to give up its arms, that State
must be garrisoned by all Howe's army of Britons and Hessians to preserve it from
the anger of the rest. Mutual fear is a principal link in the chain of mutual love,
and woe be the State that breaks the compact. Howe is mercifully inviting you to
barbarous destruction, and men must be either rogues or fools that will not see it.
100 I dwell not upon the vapours of imagination; I bring reason to your ears; and in
language, as plain as A, B, C, hold up truth to your eyes. ☺

I thank God that I fear not. I see no real cause for fear. I know our situation
well, and can see the way out of it. While our army was collected, Howe dared not
risk a battle, and it is no credit to him that he decamped from the White Plains,
and waited a mean opportunity to ravage the defenceless Jerseys; but it is great
credit to us, that, with an handful of men, we sustained an orderly retreat for near
an hundred miles, brought off our ammunition, all our field-pieces, the greatest
part of our stores, and had four rivers to pass. None can say that our retreat was

- ❸ **PERSUASIVE
TECHNIQUES**
Reread lines 79–101.
What statement does
Paine make about the
use of language at
the beginning of this
paragraph? What does
this tell you about his
use of **emotional appeals**
and loaded language in
this piece?



Washington Crossing the Delaware (1851), Eastman Johnson. Copy after the Emmanuel Leutze painting in the Metropolitan Museum, New York. Private collection. © Art Resource, New York.

precipitate, for we were near three weeks in performing it, and the country might
 110 have time to come in. Twice we marched back to meet the enemy and remained
 out till dark. The sign of fear was not seen in our camp, and had not some of the
 cowardly and disaffected inhabitants spread false alarms through the country, the
 Jerseys had never been ravaged. Once more we are again collected and collecting;
 our new army at both ends of the Continent is recruiting fast, and we shall be
 able to open the next campaign with sixty thousand men, well armed and clothed.
 This is our situation, and who will may know it. By perseverance and fortitude
 we have the prospect of a glorious issue; by cowardice and submission, the sad
 choice of a variety of evils—a ravaged country—a depopulated city—habitations
 without safety, and slavery without hope—our homes turned into barracks and
 120 bawdy-houses for Hessians, and a future race to provide for whose fathers we shall
 doubt of. Look on this picture, and weep over it!—and if there yet remains one
 thoughtless wretch who believes it not, let him suffer it unlamented. 🔄 📖

ANALYZE VISUALS

What figures and objects are emphasized by the **composition**, or the arrangement of shapes? Consider what this emphasis adds to the painting's meaning.

MAIN IDEAS AND SUPPORT

The main idea is stated in the first line of this paragraph. What evidence does Paine give to support the idea that there is no cause for fear?