Study Questions

The Age of Reason and the Revolutionary Period

Annotate as you read!! The following questions or statements require you to perform a close reading of the text and analyze the information before developing an answer.

from The Autobiography
1. What makes this excerpt representative of the Age of Reason?
2. Describe the approach that Franklin takes toward moral perfection. How does he hope to attain it?
3. Discuss the simile about a garden that Franklin uses. What is the comparison that he is making?
4. What does the anecdote about the “speckled ax” have to do with Franklin’s attempts at moral perfection?
5. Beginning with “for something” and continuing through the end of the sentence in the second-from-last paragraph, how does Franklin justify his faults?
6. Did Franklin achieve his goal? Explain.
7. What advice does Franklin offer to those who look back on the attempt of “their ancestor”?

from The American Crisis
1. What does Paine want to accomplish through this document?
2. What purpose is achieved by referring to God in ¶2?
3. How effective is Paine’s introductory paragraph? Why? What techniques does he use to draw his audience into his argument?
4. Discuss the purpose and effect of Paine’s use of rhetorical questions in ¶3.
5. What is the effect of the story of the man who “kept a tavern at Amboy” in ¶5?
6. Discuss the purpose and effect of Paine’s use of diction in at least two places in the passage.
7. How effective is Paine’s concluding paragraph? Why?

“Speech to the Virginia Convention”
1. Define the underlined words.
2. What is Henry’s purpose for beginning his speech by saying, “Mr. President: No man thinks more highly than I do of the patriotism, as well as the abilities of the very worthy gentlemen who have just addressed the house. But different men often see the same subject in different lights.”?
3. Henry states his view by saying, “I consider it as nothing less than a question of freedom or slavery.” What does he mean by “it”? What type of rhetorical appeal does he create? Explain.
4. What rhetorical appeal does he create when he says, “It is only in this way that we can hope to arrive at truth, and fulfill the great responsibility which we hold to God and our country.” Explain the appeal and explain you think truth means to Henry based on his statement here.
5. Explain the allusion in paragraph 2. How does it strengthen his argument?
6. In paragraphs 3 and 4, what evidence in his inductive argument does he give which supports his call to action to fight? What rhetorical devices and strategies does he use in the presentation of this evidence? There is a ton of information here, so answer accordingly. Pay attention to diction and imagery.
7. What does Henry emphasize about the British through his use of rhetorical questions in paragraphs 4-5? How is it persuasive? What appeal is created?
8. Discuss the use of anaphora in paragraph 6.
9. In paragraph 7, Henry states his position/call to action. What is it? Explain how the structure of this very long sentence affects the appeal.
11. In the last sentence, Henry once again makes his point that he equates British rule with death by saying, “but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death!” What appeal does he create? He can be using death here in a literal sense, but he also can be using it metaphorically. Explain his persuasive use of this metaphor.
12. What is the overall tone of the speech? What phrases or other literary devices from the text support your answer? Explain.
“What is an American?”

1. In an earlier chapter, Crevecoeur makes the following statement: “I am neither a philosopher, politician, divine, or naturalist, but a simple farmer.” What evidence is there in these few pages that might contradict that statement? If this is a false statement, why would he claim to be a “simple farmer”? How does it add ethos?

2. What kind of life did those seeking “asylum” in America face in Europe? In other words, what did America offer that Europe did not according to Crevecoeur? Explain. What type of appeal is this?

3. What is the “great operation daily performed by our laws” that Crevecoeur mentions? Explain how this adds to his argument.

4. Give at least three answers to the question “What is an American?” that Crevecoeur proposes in the text. Summarize—do not plagiarize.

5. What kind of picture does Crevecoeur paint about American life and America in general in these pages? Offer examples from the text for support.

6. At least twice in these pages, Crevecoeur compares men to plants. What is meant by this simile? Explain, paying close attention to diction and the context in which it is written.

7. Explain the function of rhetorical questions Crevecoeur uses throughout the letter.

8. How does Crevecoeur use compare & contrast to structure his argument? What is the effect? Explain.

9. Pay attention to repetition, diction, and imagery. How do these literary devices strengthen his argument?

10. Explain where and how Crevecoeur is creating or adding to the myth of the “American Dream”.

11. Locate the sentence that begins “I could point out to you a family…” and ends “…four wives of different nations.” Explain his point here and what this adds to his argument. Also, what does he mean by the phrase “they will finish the great circle”? What is this “great circle” of which he speaks?

12. Find at least two specific passages that you think Crevecoeur included for purposes of propaganda and explain the following: How is this passage used as propaganda? What ideals is he trying to persuade us to believe?

Declaration of Independence

1. Explain the deductive argument in these passages. What is the premise or generalization? What are the arguments that support the premise.

2. How does this document perpetuate the ideals inherent to the “American Dream”? (go beyond “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness)

3. Primarily, what type of rhetorical appeal does Jefferson use? How do you know?

4. As far as a declaration of war or any kind of social obligation, this document was unnecessary. Why is it that the colonists felt compelled to write this document? What does it demonstrate about the Founding Fathers?

5. How are imagery, repetition, asyndeton, anaphora, diction used to strengthen the rhetoric of the document? Annotate the passage for understanding, noting example of each of the techniques.

6. What similarities exist between this document and others we have studied from this period as far as their use of rhetoric?