

# Pilgrims, the Plymouth Colony, and Thanksgiving, 1608–1621

54.  
Acte by them done (this their condition considered) might  
be as firme as any patent; and in some respects more sure.  
The forme was as followeth.

In y<sup>e</sup> name of god Amen. We whose names are underwritten  
the loyall subjects of our dread soueraigne Lord King James  
by y<sup>e</sup> graco of god, of great Britaine, franc, & Ireland King,  
defendor of y<sup>e</sup> faith, &c.  
Haueing undertaken, for y<sup>e</sup> glorie of god, and aduancement  
of y<sup>e</sup> christian<sup>faith</sup> and honour of our king & countrey, a voyagd to  
plant y<sup>e</sup> first colonie in y<sup>e</sup> Northernd parts of Virginia. Doe  
by these presents solemnly & mutually in y<sup>e</sup> presence of god, and  
one of another, Couenant, & combine our selues together into a  
Ciull body politicke; for <sup>our</sup> better ordering, & preservation & fur-  
therance of y<sup>e</sup> ends aforesaid; and by vertue hereof to enacte,  
constitute, and frame such just & equall Lawes, ordinances,  
Acts, constitutions, & offices, from time to time, as shall be thought  
most meeete & conuenient for y<sup>e</sup> generall good of y<sup>e</sup> Colonie: vnto

*Text of the Mayflower Compact in William Bradford's "Of Plimoth Plantation," ca. 1630–1650  
(State Library of Massachusetts Digital Collections)*

# Pilgrims, the Plymouth Colony, and Thanksgiving, 1608–1621

BY TIM BAILEY (CREATED 2018, REVISED 2024)

*Tim Bailey taught middle school and elementary school in Utah for over two decades. Named the 2009 National History Teacher of the Year, he is the Gilder Lehrman Institute’s director of curriculum development and instructional design.*

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**GRADE LEVELS:** 7–12

**RECOMMENDED TIME FOR COMPLETION:** Five 45-minute class periods

## UNIT OVERVIEW

This unit is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute’s Teaching Literacy through History™ (TLTH) resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. Students will learn and practice skills that will help them analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned points of view on primary and secondary sources. These skills will enable students to understand, summarize, and evaluate documents of historical significance.

The five lessons in this unit explore the Pilgrims’ journey to the British colonies and their early settlement. Students will read primary sources, including excerpts from William Bradford’s “Of Plimoth Plantation,” the Mayflower Compact, and a letter describing the “First Thanksgiving.” A Historical Background essay will illuminate the Wampanoag people’s history and why the Pilgrims’ arrival served as an inflection point. You will assess students’ understanding through class discussions and their written responses on activity sheets.

Students will be able to

- Read primary sources and secondary sources using close-reading strategies
- Analyze and summarize the content and purpose of a primary source
- Integrate knowledge from primary and secondary sources in an essay
- Understand the cultural context of a historical event (e.g., the “First Thanksgiving”)

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What conditions encouraged the Pilgrims to leave Europe?
- What challenges did the Pilgrims face during their voyage on the *Mayflower*?
- What was the purpose of the Mayflower Compact?
- How does Edward Winslow’s description of the 1621 gathering resemble or differ from our traditional telling of the story of the “First Thanksgiving”?

## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.8: Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author's claims.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9: Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6: Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9: Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

## MATERIALS

- Source 1: Excerpts from William Bradford's "Of Plimoth Plantation," Chapters 2 and 4
  - o The version with modernized spelling and punctuation used here can be found at the Plymouth Colony Archive Project at Anthropology Department of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, [histarch.illinois.edu/plymouth/](http://histarch.illinois.edu/plymouth/) (originally from the Xroads Project of the American Studies Department at the University of Virginia). This text was transcribed from *William Bradford's Of Plymouth Plantation: 1620–1647* (New York: Modern Library, 1981).
  - o The original manuscript is at the State Library of Massachusetts and can be found in Digital Collections, [archives.lib.state.ma.us/items/db0e9f79-477c-4a4c-979b-359c2be1d4ad](http://archives.lib.state.ma.us/items/db0e9f79-477c-4a4c-979b-359c2be1d4ad).
- Activity Sheet 1: Critical Thinking about Bradford's "Of Plimoth Plantation," Chapters 2 and 4
- Source 2: Excerpts from William Bradford's "Of Plimoth Plantation," Chapters 4 and 9
  - o The version with modernized spelling and punctuation used here can be found at the Plymouth Colony Archive Project at Anthropology Department of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, [histarch.illinois.edu/plymouth/](http://histarch.illinois.edu/plymouth/) (originally from the Xroads Project of the American Studies Department at the University of Virginia). This text was transcribed from *William Bradford's Of Plymouth Plantation: 1620–1647* (New York: Modern Library, 1981).
  - o The original manuscript is at the State Library of Massachusetts and can be found in Digital Collections, [archives.lib.state.ma.us/items/db0e9f79-477c-4a4c-979b-359c2be1d4ad](http://archives.lib.state.ma.us/items/db0e9f79-477c-4a4c-979b-359c2be1d4ad).
- Activity Sheet 2: Critical Thinking about William Bradford's "Of Plimoth Plantation," Chapters 4 and 9
- Source 3: The Mayflower Compact, 1620, from William Bradford's "Of Plimoth Plantation," State Library of Massachusetts, Digital Collections, [archives.lib.state.ma.us/items/db0e9f79-477c-4a4c-979b-359c2be1d4ad](http://archives.lib.state.ma.us/items/db0e9f79-477c-4a4c-979b-359c2be1d4ad).
- Activity Sheet 3: Analyzing and Summarizing the Mayflower Compact

- Source 4: Excerpts from Edward Winslow, “A Letter Sent from New England to a Friend in These Parts, Setting Forth a Briefe and True Declaration of the Worth of That Plantation,” *Relation or Iournall of the Begimning and Proceedings of the English Plantation Settled at Plimoth in New England, by Certaine English Aduenturers Both Merchants and Others* (London: John Bellamie, 1622), pp. 60–64. Available online at the Internet Archive, [archive.org/details/relationoriourna00daws](https://archive.org/details/relationoriourna00daws). In the version of the text presented here, the original punctuation and spellings have been modernized for readability, transcribed from Dwight B. Heath, ed., *Mourt's Relation: A Journal of the Pilgrims at Plymouth* (Bedford, MA: Applewood Books in cooperation with Plimoth Plantation, Inc., 1963), pp. 81–87.
- Activity Sheet 4: Critical Thinking about Edward Winslow's Letter
- Source 5: Historical Background: “The Wampanoags' Thanksgiving,” by David J. Silverman, Professor of History, The George Washington University
- Activity Sheet 5: Critical Thinking about “The Wampanoags' Thanksgiving”
- Essay: The Pilgrims: History and Tradition

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

## THE WAMPANOAGS' THANKSGIVING

by David J. Silverman, The George Washington University

Every year, Thanksgiving celebrations teach that the English or “Pilgrims” of Plymouth Colony and local Native Americans made friends, held a great feast, and thereby permitted United States history to proceed. These stories rarely address who the Natives were, why they were so friendly, and what happened to them later. The story of the Wampanoag people, the Natives of this story, reveals the struggles for power at the heart of American history.

The Wampanoags were in a crisis when the *Mayflower* appeared in the late fall of 1620. Between 1616 and 1619, an unidentified European epidemic disease had devastated them, wiping out at least half of their population. Then, the Narragansett people to the west took advantage of the Wampanoags' weakness to force them to pay an annual tribute (or tax) of corn, shell beads, and furs, and surrender valuable land. When the *Mayflower* arrived, the great Wampanoag leader, or chief, Massasoit faced a momentous choice: should they seek the help of these strangers against the Narragansetts?

The question was challenging because though the Wampanoags wanted English weaponry, they already knew the English to be treacherous. European sailing ships had been visiting the Wampanoag coast periodically since 1524, and at least once a year since 1602. Sometimes, the Wampanoags traded their fur and food for the strangers' goods. The Wampanoags particularly wanted the Europeans' metal knives, hatchets, and swords, arrowheads, and guns. The Wampanoags, like the rest of Native America, did not make their own metal tools. Yet this opportunity came with a steep cost. Too often, the explorers took Wampanoag people captive. Sometimes, the purpose was to train the captives as interpreters and guides. At other times, it was to sell them as slaves. Remarkably, two of these captives managed to return home after years in London with a knowledge of the English language and English society. One of them, named Squanto, would become the interpreter between the Wampanoags and the Pilgrims.

Massasoit decided to ally with Plymouth not because his people were simply friendly or misunderstood who the English were. Rather, it was because he wanted the newcomers' weapons and soldiers to help his people fight off the Narragansetts. Many of his people warned that this decision was a mistake. They wanted to wipe out the Plymouth colony before it became a threat worse than the Narragansetts. But Massasoit held firm. In the short term, his gamble was worth it. With English help, the Wampanoags regained their independence and became rich in English goods.

Yet, in the long term, they lost nearly everything. The survival of Plymouth, with the Wampanoags' help, led to the creation of the neighboring colonies of Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire. By the 1660s, colonists outnumbered Native Americans in New England. Once the English had the advantage, they turned on their Wampanoag allies, seizing their land and forcing them into servitude.

Consequently, in 1675–1676, the Wampanoags, Narragansetts, and several other Native American tribes allied against the English under the leadership of Massasoit's son, Pumetacom, or King Philip. They lost this war terribly and, with it, control of their own homeland. The Wampanoags and Narragansetts survive in southern New England to this very day, but on just tiny portions of their former territory under the rule of the United States. We all should understand that, for them, loss and subjugation are the legacy of the First Thanksgiving.

*David A. Silverman is a professor of history at The George Washington University. He is the author of This Land Is Their Land: The Wampanoag Indians, Plymouth Colony, and the Troubled History of Thanksgiving (2019).*

## LESSON 1

### THE SEARCH FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN THE DUTCH REPUBLIC, 1608–1620

BY TIM BAILEY (CREATED 2018, REVISED 2024)

#### OVERVIEW

This lesson explores the journey of a group of religious separatists from England to the Dutch Republic, and the desire for religious freedom that motivated their migration. Students will read and analyze the account of these travels from England written by William Bradford, who was the governor of the Plymouth Colony in New England for thirty years. You will assess students' understanding through their answers to critical thinking questions and class discussion.

*Tim Bailey taught middle school and elementary school in Utah for over two decades. Named the 2009 National History Teacher of the Year, he is the Gilder Lehrman Institute's director of curriculum development and instructional design.*

GRADE LEVELS: 7–12

RECOMMENDED TIME FOR COMPLETION: One 45-minute class period

UNIT OVERVIEW: This unit is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute's Teaching Literacy through History™ (TLTH) resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. Students will learn and practice skills that will help them analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned points of view on primary sources. The five lessons in this unit explore the Pilgrims' journey to the British colonies and their early settlement, focusing on the Mayflower Compact and the "First Thanksgiving."

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

- What conditions encouraged the Pilgrims to leave Europe?

#### MATERIALS

- Source 1: Excerpts from William Bradford's "Of Plimoth Plantation," Chapters 2 and 4 (written between 1630 and 1650)
  - o The version with modernized spelling and punctuation used here can be found at the Plymouth Colony Archive Project at Anthropology Department of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, [histarch.illinois.edu/plymouth/](http://histarch.illinois.edu/plymouth/) (originally from the Xroads Project of the American Studies Department at the University of Virginia). This text was transcribed from *William Bradford's Of Plymouth Plantation: 1620–1647* (New York: Modern Library, 1981).
  - o The original manuscript is at the State Library of Massachusetts and can be found in Digital Collections, [archives.lib.state.ma.us/items/db0e9f79-477c-4a4c-979b-359c2be1d4ad](http://archives.lib.state.ma.us/items/db0e9f79-477c-4a4c-979b-359c2be1d4ad).
- Activity Sheet 1: Critical Thinking about Bradford's "Of Plimoth Plantation," Chapters 2 and 4

#### PROCEDURE

1. You may choose to have students do this activity individually, with a partner, or in small groups of three or four.
2. Distribute Source 1. Explain that spelling, punctuation, and some words have been updated for a modern audience. If you want your students to read the original manuscript, you can consult the manuscript at the State Library of Massachusetts. When using the original copy, it would be a good idea to prepare lists of vocabulary words, ensure students can read cursive lettering, and provide references for modern spellings.

3. You may have students read Source 1 for themselves or, since the text may prove very challenging, “share read” the text with your students. To share read, have the students follow along silently while you begin to read aloud, modeling prosody, inflection, and punctuation. Then ask the class to join in with the reading while you continue to read along with the students, still serving as the model for the class. This technique will support struggling readers as well as English language learners (ELL).
4. Distribute Activity Sheet 1 with the critical thinking questions. The students can develop responses with their partners, but they must each complete their own activity sheet.
5. You may choose to have the students share with another student or group before having a class discussion about the Pilgrims’ motivation for leaving England for Holland and then deciding to move on.

## LESSON 2

### THE SEARCH FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN AMERICA, 1620

BY TIM BAILEY (CREATED 2018, REVISED 2024)

#### OVERVIEW

This lesson further explores the journey of a group of religious separatists to Plymouth Colony through the account written by William Bradford, who was the governor of the Plymouth Colony in New England for thirty years. You will assess students' understanding through their answers to critical thinking questions and class discussion.

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

- What challenges did the Pilgrims face during their voyage on the *Mayflower*?

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GRADE LEVELS: 7–12

RECOMMENDED TIME FOR COMPLETION: One 45-minute class period

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#### MATERIALS

- Source 2: Excerpts from William Bradford's "Of Plimoth Plantation," Chapters 4 and 9 (written between 1630 and 1650)
  - o The version with modernized spelling and punctuation used here can be found at the Plymouth Colony Archive Project at Anthropology Department of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, [histarch.illinois.edu/plymouth/](http://histarch.illinois.edu/plymouth/) (originally from the Xroads Project of the American Studies Department at the University of Virginia). This text was transcribed from *William Bradford's Of Plymouth Plantation: 1620–1647* (New York: Modern Library, 1981).
  - o The original manuscript is at the State Library of Massachusetts and can be found in Digital Collections, [archives.lib.state.ma.us/items/db0e9f79-477c-4a4c-979b-359c2be1d4ad](http://archives.lib.state.ma.us/items/db0e9f79-477c-4a4c-979b-359c2be1d4ad).
- Activity Sheet 2: Critical Thinking about William Bradford's "Of Plimoth Plantation," Chapters 4 and 9

#### PROCEDURE

1. You may choose to have students do this activity individually, with a partner, or in small groups.
2. Distribute Source 2, excerpts from Bradford's "Of Plimoth Plantation." You may choose to have the students read the text independently or share read it as described in Lesson 1.
3. Distribute Activity Sheet 2 with the critical thinking questions. Once the students or student groups complete their responses, you may have them share with another student or group before leading a class discussion about the Pilgrims' decision to travel to British North America and the results of that decision.



## LESSON 3

### THE MAYFLOWER COMPACT, 1620

BY TIM BAILEY (CREATED 2018, REVISED 2024)

#### OVERVIEW

This lesson explores an early political agreement made by the Pilgrims, non-separatist *Mayflower* passengers, and ship's crew: the Mayflower Compact (1620). The text of the Mayflower Compact was preserved in William Bradford's "Of Plimoth Plantation." Students will read and understand this complex primary source by answering precise questions focused on specific passages of the Mayflower Compact. They will demonstrate their comprehension through class discussion and completion of an activity sheet.

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GRADE LEVELS: 7–12

RECOMMENDED TIME FOR COMPLETION: One 45-minute class period

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#### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

- What was the purpose of the Mayflower Compact?

#### MATERIALS

- Source 3: The Mayflower Compact, 1620, from William Bradford's "Of Plimoth Plantation," State Library of Massachusetts, Digital Collections, [archives.lib.state.ma.us/items/db0e9f79-477c-4a4c-979b-359c2be1d4ad](https://archives.lib.state.ma.us/items/db0e9f79-477c-4a4c-979b-359c2be1d4ad).
- Activity Sheet 3: Analyzing and Summarizing the Mayflower Compact

#### PROCEDURE

1. After landing north of their intended landfall, and with the absence of a royal charter to govern their settlement in territory outside their expected location, the Plymouth leadership needed a legal structure to establish legitimate authority over their colonists. Forty-one adult men (separatists [or Pilgrims], non-separatist *Mayflower* passengers, and ship's crew) set out to form a "civill body politick" on November 11, 1620. The women, children, and servants in the group did not participate in the signing of the document.
2. Distribute and then share read Source 3, the Mayflower Compact, as described in Lesson 1. The original spelling has been provided. While the spelling of many words will be unfamiliar to the students, reading it aloud will help them recognize most of those words. Therefore, you may want to share read the Mayflower Compact as described in Lesson 1 and only provide definitions if the students cannot reason out the meaning of the words.
3. Distribute Activity Sheet 3: Analyzing and Summarizing the Mayflower Compact. Students will answer the question related to each phrase. You may choose to project an image of the activity sheet so that the entire class can see it and follow along on their personal copies.

4. Model the answer to the first question with the class.
5. For the summary section, show the students how to use the answers to the questions to construct a short summary paragraph. They can string together their responses to each question on a separate sheet and then work with their text to make a clear, grammatical summary using complete sentences.
6. You may discuss the circumstances that led to the need for the Mayflower Compact.

## LESSON 4

### TWO VIEWS OF THANKSGIVING, 1621

BY TIM BAILEY (CREATED 2018, REVISED 2024)

#### OVERVIEW

This lesson explores what has come to be known as the “First Thanksgiving.” Students will closely analyze a letter written by colonist Edward Winslow on December 11, 1621. They will also use the Historical Background essay by Professor David Silverman to gain an understanding of the Wampanoag people’s point of view of the event. They will demonstrate their comprehension through class discussion and answers to critical thinking questions.

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GRADE LEVELS: 7–12

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#### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

- How does Edward Winslow’s description of the 1621 gathering resemble or differ from our traditional telling of the story of the “First Thanksgiving”?

#### MATERIALS

- Source 4: Excerpts from Edward Winslow, “A Letter Sent from New England to a Friend in These Parts, Setting Forth a Briefe and True Declaration of the Worth of That Plantation,” December 11, 1621, in *Relation or Iournall of the Beginning and Proceedings of the English Plantation Settled at Plimoth in New England, by Certaine English Aduenturers Both Merchants and Others* (London: John Bellamie, 1622), pp. 60–64. Available online at the Internet Archive, [archive.org/details/relationoriourna00daws](https://archive.org/details/relationoriourna00daws).
  - o In the version of the text presented here, the original punctuation and spellings have been modernized for readability, transcribed from Dwight B. Heath, ed., *Mourt’s Relation: A Journal of the Pilgrims at Plymouth* (Bedford, MA: Applewood Books in cooperation with Plimoth Plantation, Inc., 1963), pp. 81–87. Available on Google Books, [google.com/books/edition/Mourt\\_s\\_Relation/OEzGCrVmUssC](https://google.com/books/edition/Mourt_s_Relation/OEzGCrVmUssC)
- Activity Sheet 4: Critical Thinking about Edward Winslow’s Letter.
- Source 5: Historical Background: “The Wampanoags’ Thanksgiving,” by David J. Silverman, Professor of History, The George Washington University
- Activity Sheet 5: Critical Thinking about “The Wampanoags’ Thanksgiving”

#### PROCEDURE

1. You may choose to have the students complete the lesson individually, as partners, or in small groups.
2. Distribute Source 4: Excerpts from a Letter from Edward Winslow, December 11, 1621.

3. You may choose to share read the text as described in Lesson 1, or ask the students to read it to themselves.
4. Distribute Activity Sheet 4: Critical Thinking about Edward Winslow's Letter. Ask students to answer the critical thinking questions. Emphasize that they must support their answers with quotations from the letter.
5. Let the students reason out the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary through context. If they are truly stuck or context clues are insufficient, then provide a simple definition.
6. Distribute Source 5: Historical Background: "The Wampanoags' Thanksgiving." You may choose to share read the text as described in Lesson 1, or ask the students to read it to themselves
7. Distribute Activity Sheet 5: Critical Thinking about "The Wampanoags' Thanksgiving." Ask students to answer the critical thinking questions. Emphasize that they must support their answers with evidence from the essay. Students can brainstorm as partners or in small groups.
8. You may reconvene the class for a discussion of the students' responses.

## LESSON 5

### THE PILGRIMS: HISTORY AND TRADITION

BY TIM BAILEY (CREATED 2018, REVISED 2024)

#### OVERVIEW

This lesson uses the material from Lessons 1–4. Students will use these materials and their analysis over the past four lessons to develop a short essay using three questions about the obstacles the Pilgrims faced, their accomplishments, and the impact they had on the Native peoples.

#### MATERIALS

- Source 1: Excerpts from William Bradford’s “Of Plimoth Plantation,” Chapters 2 and 4
- Activity Sheet 1: Critical Thinking about Bradford’s “Of Plimoth Plantation,” Chapters 2 and 4
- Source 2: Excerpts from William Bradford’s “Of Plimoth Plantation,” Chapters 4 and 9
- Activity Sheet 2: Critical Thinking about William Bradford’s “Of Plimoth Plantation,” Chapters 4 and 9
- Source 3: The Mayflower Compact, 1620
- Activity Sheet 3: Analyzing and Summarizing the Mayflower Compact
- Source 4: Excerpts from a Letter from Edward Winslow, December 11, 1621
- Activity Sheet 4: Critical Thinking about Edward Winslow’s Letter
- Source 5: Historical Background: “The Wampanoags’ Thanksgiving,” by David J. Silverman, Professor of History, The George Washington University
- Activity Sheet 5: Critical Thinking about “The Wampanoags’ Thanksgiving”
- Essay: The Pilgrims: History and Tradition

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GRADE LEVELS: 7–12

RECOMMENDED TIME FOR COMPLETION: One 45-minute class period

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#### PROCEDURE

1. Students may work individually or with a partner.
2. They should have all the sources and activity sheets from the previous four lessons.
3. Instruct students to re-examine the sources and activity sheets. Using evidence from these resources students will complete the essay The Pilgrims: History and Tradition based on the following prompts:

- a. What obstacles challenged the Pilgrims?
- b. What successes did they nonetheless achieve?
- c. What were the consequences of the Pilgrims' settlement for the Wampanoag people who lived nearby?

## Source 1

### Excerpts from William Bradford's "Of Plimoth Plantation," Chapters 2 and 4

*The people who William Bradford led, and who would eventually become known as Pilgrims, were separatists from the Anglican Church.*

#### Chapter II

##### OF THEIR DEPARTURE INTO HOLLAND AND THEIR TROUBLES THEREABOUT, WITH SOME OF THE MANY DIFFICULTIES THEY FOUND AND MET WITHAL. ANNO 1608

Being thus constrained to leave their native soil and country, their lands and livings, and all their friends and familiar acquaintance, it was much; and thought marvellous by many. But to go into a country they knew not but by hearsay, where they must learn a new language and get their livings they knew not how, it being a dear place and subject to the miseries of war, it was by many thought an adventure almost desperate; a case intolerable and a misery worse than death. Especially seeing they were not acquainted with trades nor traffic (by which that country cloth subsist) but had only been used to a plain country life and the innocent trade of husbandry. But these things did not dismay them, though they did sometimes trouble them; for their desires were set on the ways of God and to enjoy His ordinances; but they rested on His providence. . . . There was a large company of them purposed to get passage at Boston in Lincolnshire, and for that end had hired a ship wholly to themselves and made agreement with the master to be ready at a certain day, and take them and their goods in at a convenient place, where they accordingly would all attend in readiness. So after long waiting and large expenses, though he kept not day with them, yet he came at length and took them in, in the night. But when he had them and their goods abroad, he betrayed them, having before hand plotted with the searchers and other officers to do; who took them, and put them into open boats, and there rifled and ransacked them, searching to their shirts for money, yea even the women further than became modesty; and then carried them back into the town and made them a spectacle and wonder to the multitude which came flocking on all sides to behold them.

#### Chapter IV

##### SHOWING THE REASONS AND CAUSES OF THEIR REMOVAL

After they had lived in this city about some eleven or twelve years . . . the sagest members began both deeply to apprehend their present dangers and wisely to foresee the future and think of timely remedy. In the agitation of their thoughts, and much discourse of things hereabout, at length they began to incline to this conclusion of removal to some other place. Not out of any newfangledness or other such like giddy humor by which men are oftentimes transported to their great hurt and danger, but for sundry weighty and solid reasons . . . they saw and found by experience the hardness of the place and country to be such as few in comparison would come to them, and fewer that would bide it out and continue with them. For many that came to them, and many more that desired to be with them, could not endure that great labour and hard fare, with other inconveniences which they underwent and were contented with. Yea, some preferred and chose the prisons in England rather than this liberty in Holland with these afflictions. . . . But that which was more lamentable, and of all sorrows most heavy to be borne, was that many of their children, by these occasions. and the great licentiousness of youth in that country, and the manifold temptations of the place, were drawn away by evil examples into extravagant and dangerous courses, getting the reins off their necks and departing from their parents. Some became soldiers, others took upon them far voyages by sea, and others some worse courses tending to dissoluteness and the danger of their souls, to the great grief of their parents and dishonor of God. So that they saw their posterity would be in danger to degenerate and be corrupted. Lastly (and which was not least), a great hope and inward zeal they had of laying some good foundation, or at least to make some way thereunto, for the propagating and advancing the gospel of the kingdom of Christ in those remote parts of the world; yea, though they should be but even as stepping-stones unto others for the performing of so great a work.

*Source: The Plymouth Colony Archive Project, Anthropology Department, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, [histarch.illinois.edu/plymouth/](http://histarch.illinois.edu/plymouth/), transcribed from William Bradford's Of Plymouth Plantation: 1620–1647 (New York: Modern Library, 1981).*

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**Activity Sheet 1****Critical Thinking about William Bradford's "Of Plimoth Plantation," Chapters 2 and 4**

1. Why did the separatists think that leaving England was a "desperate" adventure?

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2. How were some of the separatists exploited and victimized when they sought to sail to Holland (the Dutch Republic)?

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3. What were the "solid and weighty" reasons the separatists had for wanting to leave Holland (the Dutch Republic)?

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4. What concerns did the separatists have about their children?

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## Source 2

### Excerpts from William Bradford's "Of Plimoth Plantation," Chapters 4 and 9

#### Chapter IV (Part 2)

The place they had thoughts on was some of those vast and unpeopled countries of America, which are fruitful and fit for habitation, being devoid of all civil inhabitants, where there are only savage and brutish men. . . . This proposition being made public and coming to the scanning of all, it raised many variable opinions amongst men and caused many fears and doubts amongst themselves. . . . The length of the voyage was such as the weak bodies of women and other persons worn out with age and travail (as many of them were) could never be able to endure And yet if they should, the miseries of the land which they should be exposed unto, would be too hard to be borne and likely, some or all of them together, to consume and utterly to ruinate them. For there they should be liable to famine and nakedness and the want, in a manner, of all things. The change of air, diet and drinking of water would infect their bodies with sore sicknesses and grievous diseases. And also those which should escape or overcome these difficulties should yet be in continual danger of the savage people, who are cruel, barbarous and most treacherous, being most furious in their rage and merciless where they overcome; not being content only to kill and take away life, but delight to torment men in the most bloody manner that may be; flaying some alive with the shells of fishes, cutting off the members and joints of others by piecemeal and broiling on the coals, eat the collops of their flesh in their sight whilst they live, with other cruelties horrible to be related. . . . It was further objected that it would require greater sums of money to furnish such a voyage and to fit them with necessaries, than their consumed estates would amount to and yet they must as well look to be seconded with supplies as presently to be transported. . . .

It was answered that all great and honourable actions are accompanied with great difficulties and must be both enterprised and overcome with answerable courages. It was granted the dangers were great, but not desperate. The difficulties were many, but not invincible. For though there were many of them likely, yet they were not certain. It might be sundry of the things feared might never befall; others by provident care and the use of good means might in a great measure be prevented; and all of them, through the help of God, by fortitude and patience might either be borne or overcome. . . . Yea, though they should lose their lives in this action, yet might they have comfort in the same and their endeavours would be honourable. . . . After many other particular things answered and alleged on both sides, it was fully concluded by the major part to put this design in execution and to prosecute it by the best means they could.

#### Chapter IX

#### OF THEIR VOYAGE, AND HOW THEY PASSED THE SEA; AND OF THEIR SAFE ARRIVAL AT CAPE COD

. . . After they had enjoyed fair winds and weather for a season, they were encountered many times with cross winds and met with many fierce storms with which the ship was shroudly shaken, and her upper works made very leaky; and one of the main beams in the midships was bowed and cracked, which put them in some fear that the ship could not be able to perform the voyage. So some of the chief of the company, perceiving the mariners to fear the sufficiency of the ship as appeared by their mutterings, they entered into serious consultation with the master and other officers of the ship, to consider in time of the danger, and rather to return than to cast themselves into a desperate and inevitable peril. . . . But in examining of all opinions, the master and others affirmed they knew the ship to be strong and firm under water; and for the buckling of the main beam, there was a great iron screw the passengers brought out of Holland, which would raise the beam into his place; the which being done, the carpenter and master affirmed that with a post put under it, set firm in the lower deck and otherways bound, he would make it sufficient. And as for the decks and upper works, they would caulk them as well as they could, and though with the working of the ship they would not long keep staunch, yet there would otherwise be no great danger, if they did not overpress her with sails. So they committed themselves to the will of God and resolved to proceed . . . after long beating at sea they fell with that land which is called Cape Cod; the which being made and certainly known to be it, they were not a little joyful. After some deliberation had amongst themselves and with the master of the ship, they tacked about and resolved to stand for

the southward (the wind and weather being fair) to find some place about Hudson's River for their habitation. But after they had sailed that course about half the day, they fell among dangerous shoals and roaring breakers, and they were so far entangled therewith as they conceived themselves in great danger; and the wind shrinking upon them withal, they resolved to bear up again for the Cape and thought themselves happy to get out of those dangers before night overtook them, as by God's good providence they did. And the next day they got into the Cape Harbors where they rid in safety. . . . Being thus arrived in a good harbor, and brought safe to land, they fell upon their knees and blessed the God of Heaven who had brought them over the vast and furious ocean, and delivered them from all the perils and miseries thereof, again to set their feet on the firm and stable earth, their proper element.

*Source: The Plymouth Colony Archive Project, Anthropology Department, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, [histarch.illinois.edu/plymouth/](http://histarch.illinois.edu/plymouth/), transcribed from William Bradford's Of Plymouth Plantation: 1620–1647 (New York: Modern Library, 1981).*

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**Activity Sheet 2****Critical Thinking about William Bradford's "Of Plimoth Plantation," Chapters 4 and 9**

1. What "fears and doubts" were raised about going to America?

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2. What arguments were made in favor of going to America despite the dangers?

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3. What made the crew of the *Mayflower* doubt the ship's ability to make the crossing to America?

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4. Why did the travelers decide to stay in Cape Cod rather than sail farther south to the Hudson River?

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### Source 3

#### The Mayflower Compact, 1620

In the name of God, Amen. We whose names are underwritten, the loyall subjects of our dread soveraigne Lord, King James, by the grace of God, of Great Britaine, Franc, & Ireland king, defender of the faith, &c.

Haveing undertaken, for the glorie of God, and advancemente of the christian faith, and honour of our king & countrie, a voyage to plant the first colonie in the Northerne parts of Virginia, doe by these presents solemnly & mutuallly in the presence of God, and one of another, covenant, & combine our selves together into a civill body politick, for our better ordering, & preservation & furtherance of the ends aforesaid; and by vertue hearof to enacte, constitute, and frame such just & equall Lawes, ordinances, Acts, constitutions, & offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most meete & convenient for the generall good of the Colonie: unto which we promise all due submission and obedience. In witness whereof we have hereunder subscribed our names at Cap-Codd the 11. of November, in the year of the raigne of our soveraigne lord, King James, of England, France, & Ireland, the eighteen, and of Scotland the fiftie fourth. An[no] Dom[ini] 1620.

John Carver	Edward Tilley	Digory Priest
William Bradford	John Tilley	Thomas Williams
Edward Winslow	Francis Cook	Gilbert Winslow
William Brewster	Thomas Rogers	Edmond Margeson
Isaac Allerton	Thomas Tinker	Peter Brown
Miles Standish	John Ridgdale	Richard Britteridge
John Alden	Edward Fuller	George Soule
Samuel Fuller	John Turner	Richard Clark
Christopher Martin	Francis Eaton	Richard Gardiner
William Mullins	James Chilton	John Allerton
William White	John Crackstone	Thomas English
Richard Warren	John Billington	Edward Doten
John Howland	Moses Fletcher	Edward Leister
Stephen Hopkins	John Goodman	

*Source: William Bradford's "Of Plimoth Plantation," ca. 1630–1650, State Library of Massachusetts, Digital Collections, [archives.lib.state.ma.us/items/db0e9f79-477c-4a4c-979b-359c2be1d4ad](https://archives.lib.state.ma.us/items/db0e9f79-477c-4a4c-979b-359c2be1d4ad).*

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### Activity Sheet 3

#### Analyzing and Summarizing the Mayflower Compact

The Mayflower Compact	Questions
<p>In the name of God, Amen. We . . . the loyall subjects of our dread soveraigne Lord. King JAMES . . .</p> <p>Haveing undertaken, for the glorie of God, and advancemente of the christian faith, and honour of our king &amp; countrie, a voyage to plant the first colonie in the Northerne parts of Virginia,</p> <p>doe by these presents solemnly &amp; mutuallly in the presence of God, and one of another, covenant, &amp; combine our selves together into a civill body politick,</p> <p>for our better ordering, &amp; preservation &amp; furtherance of the ends aforesaid . . .</p> <p>to enacte . . . such just &amp; equall Lawes, ordinances, Acts, constitutions, &amp; offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most meete &amp; convenient for the generall good of the Colonie: unto which we promise all due submission and obedience. . . .</p>	<p>Who wrote this compact?</p> <p>Why did they take a voyage?</p> <p>What action were they taking?</p> <p>Why were they doing this?</p> <p>What would they do next?</p>

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In witness whereof we have hereunder subscribed our names at Cap-Codd 11. of November, in the year of the raigne of our soveraigne Lord, King James, of England, France, & Ireland, the eighteen, and of Scotland the fiftie fourth. An[no] Dom[ini] 1620.

When did they agree to this compact?

Summary:

## Source 4

## Excerpts from a Letter from Edward Winslow, December 11, 1621

Loving, and old Friend,

[W]e have built seven dwelling-houses . . . and have made preparation for divers others. We set the last spring some twenty acres of Indian corn, and sowed some six acres of barley and pease, and according to the manner of the Indians, we manured our ground with herrings . . . which we have in great abundance. . . . Our corn did prove well, and, God be praised, we had a good increase of Indian corn. . . .

Our harvest being gotten in, our governor sent four men on fowling, that so we might after a special manner rejoice together after we had gathered the fruit of our labors . . . at which time, amongst other recreations, we exercised our arms, many of the Indians coming amongst us, and among the rest their greatest king Massasoit, with some ninety men, whom for three days we entertained and feasted, and they went out and killed five deer, which they brought to the plantation and bestowed on our governor, and upon the captain and others. And although it be not always so plentiful as it was at this time with us, yet by the goodness of God, we are so far from want that we often wish you partakers of our plenty.

We have found the Indians very faithful in their covenant of peace with us. . . . It hath pleased God so to possess the Indians with a fear of us, and love unto us, that not only the greatest king amongst them, called Massasoit, but also all the princes and peoples round about us, have either made suit unto us, or been glad of any occasion to make peace with us . . . so that there is now great peace amongst the Indians themselves, which was not formerly, neither would have been but for us; and we for our parts walk as peaceably and safely in the wood as in the highways in England. We entertain them familiarly in our houses, and they as friendly bestowing their venison on us. They are a people without any religion or knowledge of any God, yet very trusty, quick of apprehension, ripe-witted, just. . . .

I never in my life remember a more seasonable year than we have here enjoyed. . . . For fish and fowl, we have great abundance; fresh cod in the summer is but coarse meat with us; our bay is full of lobsters all the summer and affordeth variety of other fish . . . All the spring-time the earth sendeth forth naturally very good sallet herbs. Here are grapes, white and red, and very sweet and strong also. . . . [T]he country wanteth only industrious men to employ, for it would grieve your hearts if, as I, you had seen so many miles together by goodly rivers uninhabited, and withal, to consider those parts of the world wherein you live to be even greatly burdened with abundance of people. . . . I forbear further to write for the present, hoping to see you by the next return, so I take my leave, commending you to the Lord for a safe conduct unto us. Resting in Him,

Your loving friend

E. W.

Plymouth, in New England this 11th of December, 1621.

*Source: Dwight B. Heath, ed., Mourt's Relation: A Journal of the Pilgrims at Plymouth (Bedford, MA: Applewood Books in cooperation with Plimoth Plantation, Inc., 1963), pp. 81–87.*

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**Activity Sheet 4**  
**Critical Thinking about Edward Winslow's Letter**

*Use quotations from the text in your answers to these questions.*

1. Whose planting technique did the Pilgrims copy?

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2. Why did the governor send “four men on fowling” (to go bird hunting)?

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3. What did Chief Massasoit and his men bring to the feast?

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4. According to Winslow, what was the Pilgrims' relationship with the American Indians?

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5. According to Winslow, were the Pilgrims afraid of the American Indians or were the American Indians afraid of the Pilgrims?

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6. What kinds of food were there for the Pilgrims to eat?

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7. Did Winslow want more people to come to America?

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8. Using evidence from the text, where do you think Edward Winslow's friend lived?

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## Source 5: Historical Background

### The Wampanoags' Thanksgiving

by David J. Silverman, The George Washington University

Every year, Thanksgiving celebrations teach that the English or “Pilgrims” of Plymouth Colony and local Native Americans made friends, held a great feast, and thereby permitted United States history to proceed. These stories rarely address who the Natives were, why they were so friendly, and what happened to them later. The story of the Wampanoag people, the Natives of this story, reveals the struggles for power at the heart of American history.

The Wampanoags were in a crisis when the *Mayflower* appeared in the late fall of 1620. Between 1616 and 1619, an unidentified European epidemic disease had devastated them, wiping out at least half of their population. Then, the Narragansett people to the west took advantage of the Wampanoags' weakness to force them to pay an annual tribute (or tax) of corn, shell beads, and furs, and surrender valuable land. When the *Mayflower* arrived, the great Wampanoag leader, or chief, Massasoit faced a momentous choice: should they seek the help of these strangers against the Narragansetts?

The question was challenging because though the Wampanoags wanted English weaponry, they already knew the English to be treacherous. European sailing ships had been visiting the Wampanoag coast periodically since 1524, and at least once a year since 1602. Sometimes, the Wampanoags traded their fur and food for the strangers' goods. The Wampanoags particularly wanted the Europeans' metal knives, hatchets, and swords, arrowheads, and guns. The Wampanoags, like the rest of Native America, did not make their own metal tools. Yet this opportunity came with a steep cost. Too often, the explorers took Wampanoag people captive. Sometimes, the purpose was to train the captives as interpreters and guides. At other times, it was to sell them as slaves. Remarkably, two of these captives managed to return home after years in London with a knowledge of the English language and English society. One of them, named Squanto, would become the interpreter between the Wampanoags and the Pilgrims.

Massasoit decided to ally with Plymouth not because his people were simply friendly or misunderstood who the English were. Rather, it was because he wanted the newcomers' weapons and soldiers to help his people fight off the Narragansetts. Many of his people warned that this decision was a mistake. They wanted to wipe out the Plymouth colony before it became a threat worse than the Narragansetts. But Massasoit held firm. In the short term, his gamble was worth it. With English help, the Wampanoags regained their independence and became rich in English goods.

Yet, in the long term, they lost nearly everything. The survival of Plymouth, with the Wampanoags' help, led to the creation of the neighboring colonies of Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire. By the 1660s, colonists outnumbered Native Americans in New England. Once the English had the advantage, they turned on their Wampanoag allies, seizing their land and forcing them into servitude.

Consequently, in 1675–1676, the Wampanoags, Narragansetts, and several other Native American tribes allied against the English under the leadership of Massasoit's son, Pumetacom, or King Philip. They lost this war terribly and, with it, control of their own homeland. The Wampanoags and Narragansetts survive in southern New England to this very day, but on just tiny portions of their former territory under the rule of the United States. We all should understand that, for them, loss and subjugation are the legacy of the First Thanksgiving.

*David A. Silverman is a professor of history at The George Washington University. He is the author of This Land Is Their Land: The Wampanoag Indians, Plymouth Colony, and the Troubled History of Thanksgiving (2019).*

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**Activity Sheet 5**  
**Critical Thinking about “The Wampanoags’ Thanksgiving”**

1. What had happened to the Wampanoags to make them especially vulnerable prior to the Pilgrims’ arrival?

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2. What rewards and risks did the Wampanoags see in engaging with the Pilgrims?

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3. Why did Massasoit decide to engage with the Pilgrims?

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4. What were the consequences in the 1670s for the Native people who had engaged with the Pilgrims?

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**The Pilgrims: History and Tradition**

The story of the Pilgrims and the origins of Thanksgiving are deeply embedded in American tradition. Using your analysis of the primary source documents and the secondary source essay, answer the following prompts in a short essay:

1. What obstacles challenged the Pilgrims?
2. What successes did they nonetheless achieve?
3. What were the consequences of the Pilgrims' settlement for the Wampanoag people who lived nearby?

Cite specific evidence from the sources provided.

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