



The Society of Mayflower Descendants in the State of New Jersey

A Teacher's Guide for Studying the Mayflower Compact

The purpose of studying the Mayflower Compact and its place in our history is to develop an understanding of how this first experiment in a self-government contributed to our present democratic procedures of governance.

The study of the Mayflower Compact is also intended to develop an appreciation of the history of the period, including some ideas and questions which may challenge you, the teacher. Depending on how you choose to approach the topic, the sample of questions listed below may be assigned to students individually or in groups.

The following materials are suggested for this study: copies of the Mayflower Compact; good dictionaries; and a general encyclopedia (e.g., Compton's, Encyclopedia Britannica, World Book, Funk and Wagnall's, and others of comparable quality). A selected bibliography is also provided here for those who want to more deeply explore the voyage and passengers of the Mayflower as well as their experiences upon reaching America.

Some Sample Questions for Study of the Mayflower Compact

1. Mayflower passengers who went to America for religious reasons were called "Separatists" by themselves and others. What did this term mean? What did their beliefs lead them to do?
2. Some of the Separatists settled for several years in Holland. Why there? And why, after a generation, did they decide to leave?
3. The "Puritans" were another group who settled elsewhere in Massachusetts Bay a decade after the landing of the Mayflower at Plymouth. How were their religious beliefs and practices different from those of the Separatists at Plymouth? Did these two colonies differ in their treatment of those having other beliefs?
4. About half of the Mayflower's passengers did not undertake the crossing for religious reasons. Why might the individuals in that half have wanted to leave England?
5. When the Mayflower reached Cape Cod, why did the passengers feel the necessity to agree to the Mayflower Compact as a means of self-government?
6. What parts of the Compact do you recognize as forecasting how we govern ourselves today?
7. The calendar used in England in 1620 was the "Julian" or "Old Style" (O.S.) calendar. How does it differ from the "Gregorian" or "New Style" (N.S.) calendar we use today? For example, George Washington's birthday is February 22, 1732 (N.S.). What would his birthday be using the Julian (O.S.) calendar?
8. Several words and phrases in the Mayflower Compact are difficult to understand. What do the following mean?
 - a. "King James . . . of . . . France"? [A Scottish King of England? Why France?]
 - b. "Defender of the Faith"? [This title has an ironic component. How?]
 - c. "Covenant"? [A simple and complex understanding of purposes!]
 - d. "Civil body politic"? [How do we understand this term today?]
 - e. "Just and equal laws"? [A concept that remains challenging for our modern society.]
 - f. "Ano. Dom."? [This is typically even more abbreviated as A.D., often said to mean "After Death" (of Christ). What does A.D. really mean?]
 - g. Are there other words and phrases in the Mayflower Compact that you do not understand? What are they?

Selected Bibliography (more sources may be found at njmayflower.org)

1. Caffrey, K. (1974). The Mayflower. New York: Stain and Day.
2. Gill, C. (1970). Mayflower Remembered: A History of the Plymouth Pilgrims. New York: Taplinger Publishing Co.
3. Johnson, C. H. (2006). The Mayflower and Her Passengers. Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corporation.
4. Morrison, S. E. (editor). (1952). Bradford, William: Of Plymouth Plantation, 1620-1647. New York: Knopf.
5. Morrison, S. E. (1956). The Story of the "Old Colony" of New Plymouth, 1620-1692. New York: Knopf.
6. Philbrick, N. (2007). Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community, and War. New York: Barnes and Noble.
7. Willison, G. F. (1945). Saints and Strangers. New York: Reynal and Hitchcock.
8. Ziner, F. (1961). The Pilgrims and Plymouth Colony. New York: American Heritage Junior Library.