

American Government The Mayflower Compact – 1620

Everybody knows about the Pilgrims and how they celebrated America's first Thanksgiving. But, did you know the Pilgrims left our country another important **legacy**¹ as well?

It all began on November 19, 1620. The Pilgrims were on board their ship, the *Mayflower*. After many days at sea, they finally saw land. Even though everyone was happy to see the coast of America, some of the families on the ship were arguing. They disagreed on how to do things.

The Pilgrims were landing in an area that was not yet controlled by England. The land, in what is now the state of Massachusetts, did not have any laws. It also didn't have any houses. To survive, the Pilgrims would have to work together and create a colony. They would have to build houses, find food and take care of themselves. Everyone would need to get along and help.

Before they landed, the Pilgrims found a way that they would be able to work together. The 41 men aboard the *Mayflower* met and signed the Mayflower Compact. The compact organized the pilgrims into a "body politick." This **political**² body, or government, would act with one purpose, just like a physical body. It would work to create "just and equal laws" everyone would obey.

There is little doubt the Mayflower Compact created order and helped the Pilgrims to survive. Its legacy, however, continues to this day. The document is the first example in the New World of a **constitution**³. The Mayflower Compact was written *by* the Pilgrims and meant to be *for* them as well. This principle of government being "by, of, and for the people" is one of the main ideas of **democracy**⁴. Later, this principle would become a cornerstone of American Government and the United States *Constitution*.

¹ **legacy** – something handed from one generation to another

² **political** – of or concerned with politics and government

³ **constitution** – the system of laws in a country that state the rights of the people and the powers of the government

⁴ **democracy** – a way of governing a county in which the people choose their leaders in elections

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. In the first paragraph, you learn that the story will tell you
 - a. about the first government in America
 - b. about the Pilgrims and how they helped create America
 - c. about the first document in America
 - d. about the first Thanksgiving

2. From the fourth paragraph you learn that a “body politik” is
 - a. a group of people that helps make up the government
 - b. a group of people that works with the ship’s captain
 - c. part of your body
 - d. the ruler of a government

3. Read the last sentence of the passage. What do you think a cornerstone is?
 - a. Plymouth Rock
 - b. A sharp hard corner on a ship
 - c. Part of the Constitution
 - d. A very important idea

4. What do you think caused the Pilgrims to name the document, The Mayflower Compact?
 - a. Because it was early May when they arrived at Plymouth Rock
 - b. Because Mr. Mayflower was the primary author of the document
 - c. Because the pilgrims wrote the document aboard their ship, The Mayflower
 - d. Because Massachusetts was in full bloom when they landed

5. Who signed the Mayflower Compact?
 - a. All 41 men on the ship
 - b. Pilgrims and Native Americans
 - c. Benjamin Franklin
 - d. The state of Massachusetts

6. Why do you think it was important for the Pilgrims to sign the document before they landed? Imagine what could have happened if the Pilgrims landed and continued to disagree about everything.

7. Why did the Pilgrims need a document to figure out how to work together?

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word or phrase that best completes the sentence.

At first, the Pilgrims were arguing, but _____ they had a document they agreed on.

- a. before
- b. as a result
- c. never
- d. soon

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

The Pilgrims wrote the Mayflower Compact to figure out how to work together.

Who? the Pilgrims

(did) What? _____

Why? _____

10. **Vocabulary Word:** legacy: something handed from one generation to another.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: _____

Teacher Guide and Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 760

Featured Text Structure: Descriptive – the writer explains, defines or illustrates a concept or topic

Passage Summary: The Pilgrims did more than just celebrate the first Thanksgiving. While on their boat, the Mayflower, they created the first example in the New World of a constitution.

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Suggested answer: Answers may vary but could include that the Pilgrims would have lived in chaos and not been able to work together and survive. Some people might have decided that they didn't want to follow the laws of the group and made everything more difficult for the other people.

7. Why did the Pilgrims need a document to figure out how to work together?

Suggested answer: Some of the Pilgrims disagreed on how to do things and were arguing. [paragraph 2]

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word or phrase that best completes the sentence.

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- b. as a result
- c. never
- d. **soon**

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The Pilgrims wrote the Mayflower Compact to figure out how to work together.

Who? the Pilgrims

(did) What? **wrote the Mayflower Compact**

Why? **to figure out how to work together**

10. **Vocabulary Word:** legacy: something handed from one generation to another.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: answers may vary.