

Learn
BRIGHT

WILLIAM BRADFORD

PLYMOUTH COLONY



GRADE 4-6

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Classroom Procedure:

1. Introduce the lesson by asking students what they know about the Puritans and the Mayflower. Ask students if they are familiar with the name William Bradford. Tell students they will be learning why his name is important in American history.
2. Distribute the *William Bradford and Plymouth Colony* content pages. Review the content with students. Use the Additional Teacher Resources to supplement the lesson.
3. Distribute the Activity Page and assist students in determining if the statements are myths. (All the statements are popular myths except, “The Mayflower Compact was one inspiration for the United States Constitution.” This statement is debatable, and there is evidence to support the claim and refute it!)
4. Distribute the Practice Page and review with students. Teachers may want to reword the passage in kid-friendly language to assist students in comprehension. The old English text is difficult, but teachers are encouraged to allow students to figure out the meaning.
5. Distribute the Homework Page and review the answers the following day.
6. In closing, ask students: What is a primary source? Why are primary sources important to historians? What did we learn about ‘myths in American history?’ Why is the Mayflower Compact sometimes referred to as the first Constitution in American history? Do you agree or disagree with that statement, and why?

Lesson Title:

William Bradford and Plymouth Colony

Subject: **Social Studies**

Approximate Grade Level: **4 - 6**

Objectives: Students will identify the characteristics of William Bradford’s leadership style and explain how he is a pivotal historical person in the founding of Plymouth Colony. Students will use primary source material (*Of Plymouth Plantation* and *Mayflower Compact*) to analyze what Bradford conveys about the early colonists. Students will examine some of the myths surrounding the founding of Plymouth Plantation.

State Educational Objectives:

NCSS.D2.HIS.4.6-8, NCSS.D2.HIS.3.6-8, NSSS.D2.HIS.14.3-5, LB.ELA.LITERACY.RI.3-6.10

Class Sessions (45 minutes):

3 Class Sessions.

Teaching Materials/Worksheets:

Content Pages (2), Activity Page (1), Practice Pages (2), Homework Pages (2)

Student Supplies: Pencils, pens, highlighters, internet access for research.

Prepare Ahead of Time:

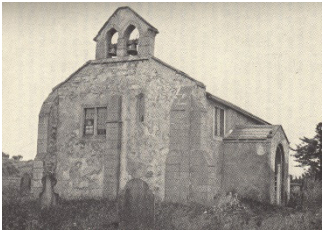
Copies of worksheets

Options for Lesson: Students love interactive games! One way to introduce the lesson or as a culminating activity is to have the students go to one of the two websites and complete the interactive games. **Scholastic: The First Thanksgiving Interactive** https://www.scholastic.com/scholastic_thanksgiving/index.html **Mass. Cultural Council: You Are the Historian** <https://plimoth.org/learn/plimoth-online-historyhome/thanksgiving-interactive-you-are-historian>

The Lessons are aligned to meet the education objectives and goals of most states. For more information on your state objectives, contact your local Board of Education or Department of Education in your state.

William Bradford and Plymouth Colony

While no one really knows precisely what William Bradford looked like (After all the camera had not been invented until 1816!), a lot is known about his life. Although we usually associate his name with the Mayflower, Puritans, and Pilgrims, there is a lot more to learn about William Bradford.



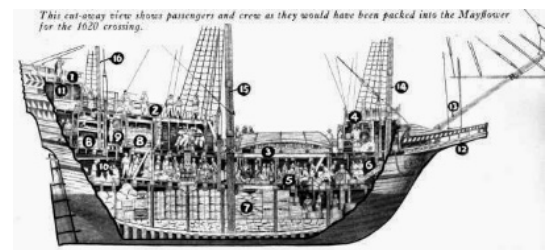
Bradford is thought to have been born somewhere around March of 1590. Historians know this because they have a copy of his baptism record from that time. In the sixteen century, babies were baptized within a few

short weeks after their birth. When historians have first-hand accounts of an event, documents, records, journals, newspapers, or photographs documenting an event, it is known as **primary source material**. The picture is of the St. Helen's in Austerfield, Yorkshire, England. The church is where William Bradford was baptized and attended as a youth. The photograph was taken in the 19th century, but his records were on file there.



Unfortunately for the young Bradford, his parents died at an early age leaving his care to relatives. As a teenager, William worked on his family farm and adopted the religious traditions of his family, a Separatist denomination of Puritanism. The Separatists believed the Church of England had betrayed its congregation's original spiritual roots and had become a political branch of the Church of England. In separating themselves from the Church of England, the group found themselves at odds with the church and King James 1st of England, a prominent supporter of the church. The Separatists came under severe persecution by religious leaders and under attack by government forces under the King's control. Persecution led them to flee their lives in England to the Netherlands, where they settled for several years. Even in the Netherlands, the Separatists continued to face the wrath of King James 1st. They came under persecution for their religious beliefs there as well as England.

By this time, William Bradford had grown into being a respected young leader of thirty years of age. Among the Separatists, the idea that moving as far away from England as possible was the only alternative if they were to continue to practice their religion in peace. The congregation determined the best course of action was to pursue religious freedom in the New World, journey to America, and settle north of the Virginia colony. Bradford was assigned to find financing for the trip and organize what they would need to voyage across the Atlantic Ocean to the New World.



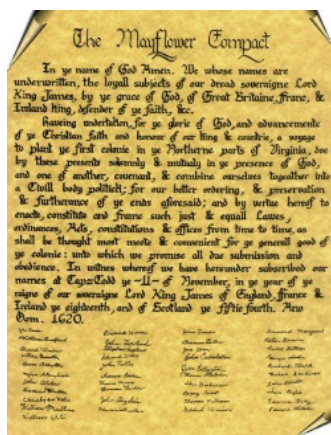
Bradford was more than up to the task. After finding two vessels that weren't seaworthy, he arranged financing and managed to locate a worthy sea vessel (the Mayflower) to take 102 passengers to the Virginia Colony.

Most everyone familiar with American History knows the rest of the story of the voyage of the Mayflower. In September of 1620, they set sail to America. Of the 102 passengers, some were called 'Saints' or the Separatists leaving for religious reasons. Others were called "Strangers" who had no particular religion but paid a fee to travel aboard the Mayflower.

The ship encountered violent weather and was blown off course, landing north of where they originally planned and eventually resettling at Plymouth.

Unfortunately for Bradford, while the ship was anchored off the shore of Cape Cod and him with a party of men were exploring sites to build a settlement, Bradford's wife Dorothy fell from the ship and drowned.

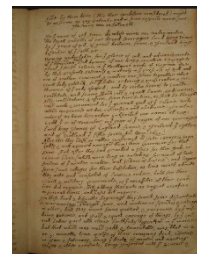
In 1621, William Bradford would be elected as Governor of Plymouth. As head of the government, Bradford had a wide range of duties, including being over the court system, managing the colony's finances, negotiating agreements for trade, and managing the settlement. Bradford served as governor for thirty years. William Bradford died in May of 1657 after serving a distinguished career as a public servant and inspirational leader.



However, while William Bradford is remembered for his leadership abilities, his main claim to fame is two written works he left as primary sources. According to many historians, Bradford is the principal author of the *Mayflower Compact*. The *Mayflower Compact* is considered by historians to be one of the most important documents in American History even sometimes compared with the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution. The *Mayflower Compact* is important as it was the first document in the New World colonies to establish self-governance rules. It was one of the first documents to set out to establish a democratic society. Many years later, some historians think it influenced the founders to declare independence from Great Britain

during the American Revolutionary War.

The second most important work is a book called, *Of Plymouth Plantation*. His book is the only book that chronicles the settlers' lives at Plymouth written by a passenger and is the primary source for how historians know so much about the Pilgrims' early life. Unlike other literature of the time, Bradford's writing is considered by historians to represent a balanced view of life, leaving out much of the religious overtones found in other works. William Bradford may be one of the most underrated leaders in American History!





Activity

Name _____ Date _____

Instructions: In American History, there are several facts that we often assume as accurate. With a partner, research each statement below. If the information is a myth, in the space, write the fact that corrects the myth and includes a citation of where you got the information.

- The first Thanksgiving was held in 1621, about a year after the Pilgrims arrived in America. Thanksgiving has been celebrated every year since 1621.

- The Mayflower was headed for Virginia and ended up in the Cape Cod area because several passengers did not want to go to Virginia.

- The Pilgrims landed and came ashore at Plymouth Rock.

- The Mayflower Compact was one inspiration for the United States Constitution.



Practice

Name _____ Date _____

Instructions: Read the quote and explain what William Bradford was trying to say to the reader.

“And I may not omit here a special work of God’s providence. There was a proud and very profane young man [aboard the Mayflower], one of the seamen, of a lusty, able body, which made him the more haughty; he would always be contemning the poor people in their [sea]sickness, and cursing them daily with grievous execrations, and did not let to tell them, that he hoped to help cast half of them overboard before they came to their journey’s end, and to make merry with what they had; and if he were by any gently reprov’d, he would curse and swear most bitterly.

But it pleased God before they came half seas over, to smite this young man with a grievous disease, of which he died in a desperate manner, and so was himself the first that was thrown overboard. Thus his curses light on his own head; and it was an astonishment to all his fellows, for they noted it to be the just hand of God upon him.”

William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 1651.

Instructions: Mark next to the source “P” if it is primary.

- Newspaper from the year being studied.
- A photograph from the year being studied.
- A diary or journal written in the year studied.
- An internet article about a time in History being studied.
- A book that was written about a time in History being studied.
- A biography that was written about a person in History being studied.
- An autobiography that was written about a person in History being studied.



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Bradford is writing an account of a sailor that was bullying and threatening other passengers onboard the Mayflower. In the course of the trip, the sailor becomes ill, dies, and is the first to be thrown overboard. Bradford is commenting about the irony of the situation and many thought it was a punishment from God for the sailor’s arrogance..

Instructions: Mark next to the source “P” if it is primary.

- Newspaper from the year being studied. **P**
- A photograph from the year being studied. **P**
- A diary or journal written in the year studied. **P**
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Homework

Name _____ Date _____

Instructions: Go to the website, History.com, at <https://www.history.com/news/mayflower-compact-colonial-america-plymouth>. Read the article and answer the questions.

1. Why does the author say the Mayflower Compact was the first Constitution in American history?

2. What was the purpose of the Mayflower Compact?

3. What were the rules in the Mayflower Compact?

4. Do you think the Mayflower Compact was successful in accomplishing what the purpose and rules describe? Explain your answer.

5. In the last section, the author writes, "While they intended to form a government for their new colony, the Pilgrims and others aboard the Mayflower were not declaring their independence." Do you think this is an accurate statement? Explain.



Homework

Name _____ **Answer Key** Date _____

Instructions: Go to the website, History.com, at <https://www.history.com/news/mayflower-compact-colonial-america-plymouth>. Read the article and answer the questions.

1. Why does the author say the Mayflower Compact was the first Constitution in American history?

The author explains, "Finally, as the first written constitution in the New World, the Mayflower Compact laid the foundations for two other revolutionary documents: the Declaration of Independence, which stated that governments derive their powers "from the consent of the governed," and the Constitution.

2. What was the purpose of the Mayflower Compact?

To bind and unify the passengers together so there would be no disunity among the ranks.

3. What were the rules in the Mayflower Compact?

Everyone would abide by the same laws or rules set up by the governing body of the colony for the common good of everyone.

4. Do you think the Mayflower Compact was successful in accomplishing what the purpose and rules describe? Explain your answer.

Answers will vary, but for the most part yes as the colony survived. As evidence of this William Bradford was governor for thirty years!

5. In the last section, the author writes, "While they intended to form a government for their new colony, the Pilgrims and others aboard the Mayflower were not declaring their independence." Do you think this is an accurate statement? Explain.

Yes, they were declaring independence from the Church of England. No, the colonists stated they were not declaring independence from the government of Great Britain.