

DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints
in Primary Source Documents

The Pilgrims Image and Reality

*What is myth and what is reality concerning
the first years of Plymouth Colony in New England?*



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Debating the
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the first years of Plymouth Colony in New England?*

Contents

Teacher Introduction	1
Suggestions to the Student	5
Introductory Essay	6
The Pilgrims Time Line	7
First Group of Documents	8
Study the Documents	10
Comparing the Documents	12
Comparison Essay	13
Second Group of Documents	14
Study the Documents	16
Comparing the Documents	18
Comparison Essay	19
Document-Based Question	20
Visual Primary Sources	21

Teacher Introduction

★ Using Primary Sources

Primary sources are called “primary” because they are first-hand records of a past era or historical event. They are the raw materials, or the evidence, on which historians base their “secondary” accounts of the past.

A rapidly growing number of history teachers today are using primary sources. Why? Perhaps it's because primary sources give students a better sense of what history is and what historians do. Such sources also help students see the past from a variety of viewpoints. Moreover, primary sources make history vivid and bring it to life.

However, primary sources are not easy to use. They can be confusing. They can be biased. They rarely all agree. Primary sources must be interpreted and set in context.

To do this, students need historical background knowledge. *Debating the Documents* helps students handle such challenges by giving them a useful framework for analyzing sources that conflict with one another.



*“Multiple,
conflicting
perspectives are
among the truths
of history.
No single
objective or
universal account
could ever put an
end to this endless
creative dialogue
within and
between the past
and the present.”*

From the 2011 Statement on Standards
of Professional Conduct of the Council of
the American Historical Association.

INTRODUCTION

★ *The Debating the Documents Series*

Each *Debating the Documents* booklet includes the same sequence of reproducible worksheets. If students use several booklets over time, they will get regular practice at interpreting and comparing conflicting sources. In this way, they can learn the skills and habits needed to get the most out of primary sources.

Each *Debating the Documents* Booklet Includes

- **Suggestions for the Student and an Introductory Essay.** The student gets instructions and a one-page essay providing background on the booklet's topic. A time line on the topic is also included.
- **Two Groups of Contrasting Primary Source Documents.** In most of the booklets, students get one pair of visual sources and one pair of written sources. In some cases, more than two are provided for each. Background is provided on each source. *Within each group, the sources clash in a very clear way.* (The sources are not always exact opposites, but they do always differ in some obvious way.)
- **Three Worksheets for Each Document Group.** Students use the first two worksheets to take notes on the sources. The third worksheet asks which source the student thinks would be most useful to a historian.
- **One DBQ.** On page 20, a document-based question (DBQ) asks students to write an effective essay using all of the booklet's primary sources.

★ *How to Use This Booklet*

1. Have students read “Suggestions for the Student” and the Introductory Essay.

Give them copies of pages 5–7. Ask them to read the instructions and then read the introductory essay on the topic. The time line gives them additional information on that topic. This reading could be done in class or as a homework assignment.

2. Have students do the worksheets.

Make copies of the worksheets and the pages with the sources. Ask students to study the background information on each source and the source itself. Then have them take notes on the sources using the worksheets. If students have access to a computer, have them review the primary sources digitally.

3. “Debate the documents” as a class.

Have students use their worksheet notes to debate the primary source documents as a class. Urge students to follow these ground rules:

- Use your worksheets as a guide for the discussion or debate.
- Try to reach agreement about the main ideas and the significance of each primary source document.
- Look for points of agreement as well as disagreement between the primary sources.
- Listen closely to all points of view about each primary source.
- Focus on the usefulness of each source to the historian, not merely on whether you agree or disagree with that source’s point of view.

4. Have students do the final DBQ.

A DBQ is an essay question about a set of primary source documents. To answer the DBQ, students write essays using evidence from the sources and their own background knowledge of the historical era. (See the next page for a DBQ scoring guide to use in evaluating these essays.)

The DBQ assignment on page 20 includes guidelines for writing a DBQ essay. Here are some additional points to make with students about preparing to write this kind of essay.

The DBQ for this Booklet (see page 20):

“Typical historical images of the Pilgrims at Plymouth are not all myth. The Pilgrims were in many ways much like what these images show.”
Assess the validity of this statement—that is, explain why you do or do not agree with it.

- Analyze the question carefully.
- Use your background knowledge to set sources in their historical context.
- Question and interpret sources actively. Do not accept them at face value.
- Use sources meaningfully to support your essay’s thesis.
- Pay attention to the overall organization of your essay.

INTRODUCTION

★ *Complete DBQ Scoring Guide*

Use this guide in evaluating the DBQ for this booklet. Use this scoring guide with students who are already familiar with using primary sources and writing DBQ essays.

Excellent Essay

- Offers a clear answer or thesis explicitly addressing all aspects of the essay question.
- Does a careful job of interpreting many or most of the documents and relating them clearly to the thesis and the DBQ. Deals with conflicting documents effectively.
- Uses details and examples effectively to support the thesis and other main ideas. Explains the significance of those details and examples well.
- Uses background knowledge and the documents in a balanced way.
- Is well written; clear transitions make the essay easy to follow from point to point. Only a few minor writing errors or errors of fact.

Good Essay

- Offers a reasonable thesis addressing the essential points of the essay question.
- Adequately interprets at least some of the documents and relates them to the thesis and the DBQ.
- Usually relates details and examples meaningfully to the thesis or other main ideas.
- Includes some relevant background knowledge.
- May have some writing errors or errors of fact, as long as these do not invalidate the essay's overall argument or point of view.

Fair Essay

- Offers at least a partly developed thesis addressing the essay question.
- Adequately interprets at least a few of the documents.
- Relates only a few of the details and examples to the thesis or other main ideas.
- Includes some background knowledge.
- Has several writing errors or errors of fact that make it harder to understand the essay's overall argument or point of view.

Poor Essay

- Offers no clear thesis or answer addressing the DBQ.
- Uses few documents effectively other than referring to them in "laundry list" style, with no meaningful relationship to a thesis or any main point.
- Uses details and examples unrelated to the thesis or other main ideas. Does not explain the significance of these details and examples.
- Is not clearly written, with some major writing errors or errors of fact.

Suggestions to the Student

★ *Using Primary Sources*

A primary source is any record of evidence from the past. Many things are primary sources: letters, diary entries, official documents, photos, cartoons, wills, maps, charts, etc. They are called “primary” because they are first-hand records of a past event or time period. This *Debating the Documents* lesson is based on two groups of primary source documents. Within each group, the sources conflict with one another. That is, they express different or even opposed points of view. You need to decide which source is more reliable, more useful, or more typical of the time period. This is what historians do all the time. Usually, you will be able to learn something about the past from each source, even when the sources clash with one another in dramatic ways.

★ *How to Use This Booklet*

1. Read the one-page introductory essay.

This gives you background information that will help you analyze the primary source documents and do the exercises for this *Debating the Documents* lesson. The time line gives you additional information you will find helpful.



2. Study the primary source documents for this lesson.

For this lesson, you get two groups of sources. The sources within each group conflict with one another. Some of these sources are visuals, others are written sources. With visual sources, pay attention not only to the image’s “content” (its subject matter) but also to its artistic style, shading, composition, camera angle, symbols, and other features that add to the image’s meaning. With written sources, notice the writing style, bias, even what the source leaves out or does not talk about. Think about each source’s author, that author’s reasons for writing, and the likely audience for the source. These considerations give you clues as to the source’s historical value.

3. Use the worksheets to analyze each group of primary source documents.

For each group of sources, you get three worksheets. Use the “Study the Document” worksheets to take notes on each source. Use the “Comparing the Documents” worksheet to decide which of the sources would be most useful to a historian.

4. As a class, debate the documents.

Use your worksheet notes to help you take part in this debate.

5. Do the final DBQ.

“DBQ” means “document-based question.” A DBQ is a question along with several primary source documents. To answer the DBQ, write an essay using evidence from the documents and your own background history knowledge.

The Pilgrims: Old Myths and New Myths

In 1620, a small group of religious settlers landed in New England near Cape Cod. They were “separatists.” That is, they could not accept the rules of the official Church of England and had separated from it completely. At first, they tried living in the Netherlands. In time, however, they decided they could only practice their religion fully by founding a colony in North America. They called their settlement Plymouth.

Americans have always celebrated the Pilgrims. These settlers are said to have lived out America’s highest ideals right from the start. We’re told they created a democratic form of government even while still on board the *Mayflower*, the ship that brought them to America. Also, they seem to have dealt fairly with the Native Americans near them right from the start. This was shown by the fact that these Wampanoag Indians were fully present as guests at the colony’s first Thanksgiving Day celebration. In this booklet, two dramatic paintings convey this positive view of these early events in the Pilgrim story. The paintings are from the 1930s. This means they are not really primary sources for the time of the Pilgrims. Yet they do illustrate the idealistic view of the Pilgrims, and that is the topic of this booklet.

In recent decades, some historians have raised questions about this view. They say it is a myth—in other words, it is mainly a false story meant to portray the Pilgrims as great heroes. These critics say, for example, that the Pilgrims often dealt unfairly with Native Americans and showed them little respect. The critics also say the first Thanksgiving actually meant little to the settlers—that it was only a common, non-religious harvest celebration. One book even claims there was no turkey at this Thanksgiving!

As for the *Mayflower Compact*, these same critics say it was only a temporary set of rules. They say the Pilgrims never planned to follow these rules for long. These critics also say the Compact was not

really all that “democratic.” That is, not everyone on board the *Mayflower* was given a real say in running the colony. And in any case, the critics claim the colony changed and lost the religious or political ideals these first settlers may have had.

Are these critics correct? Some historians say they are. However, others say the earlier myths are closer to the truth than these new views. Are the new views as much a myth as the older views?

Historian Jeremy Bangs thinks they are. He claims that the Pilgrims really did hold a deeply religious Thanksgiving Day celebration in 1621. They did invite Indians to it. And they generally did treat the Wampanoags honorably. As for the *Mayflower Compact*, Bangs says it did give ordinary freemen a say in forming the colony’s government. And for decades, that government was based on it. Bangs’s essay on all this is called “Re-Bunking the Pilgrims.” He ends it this way: “We all think we know about Plymouth Colony and the Pilgrims, but have we been getting it wrong—again and again? Does political fashion require that we exchange old bunk for new?”

The documents in this booklet will help you make up your own mind about this debate. It’s not an easy matter to decide. For that reason, we give you more documents than are normally found in other *Debating the Documents* booklets. Here you get two groupings of four documents each. Each grouping includes a painting and a written document adding to that painting’s meaning, along with two other contrasting written sources. Four documents per grouping, eight documents in all.

These will help you discuss and debate the Pilgrims and the myths about them.

The Pilgrims Time Line

1608

A group of Separatists leaves England seeking religious freedom in Holland. They are called Separatists because they reject the rules of the official Church of England and seek to separate from it completely. They want to found a church that is simpler and stricter. The Separatists who move to Holland are the group we now call the Pilgrims.

1609–1620

In Holland, the Pilgrims soon begin to fear that their children will turn away from their parents' strict beliefs. A group of merchants offers to help them emigrate to America. In return, the settlers agree to work for this company of merchants for seven years.

1620

On September 16, 1620, about 102 Pilgrims sail for America on the *Mayflower*. On November 11, just after land is sighted, 41 men sign the *Mayflower Compact*. On December 8, a few settlers meet some American Indians on Cape Cod for the first time. Shots are fired, but no one is hurt. On December 21, the Pilgrims establish Plymouth along the coast of what is now southeastern Massachusetts.

1621

Less than half of the people who left England survive the first terrible winter at Plymouth. In March, an American Indian named Squanto arrives. Days later, Plymouth's governor and the Wampanoag chief Massasoit agree to a treaty of peace. Squanto teaches the Pilgrims to plant corn and helps them in other ways. The October harvest is good. The Pilgrims share a day of thanksgiving with Squanto, Massasoit, and 90 braves.

1620s

More settlers arrive. In 1627–28, the colony's leaders divide up property and land among many of the settlers.

1630s–1640s

Plymouth Colony expands greatly beyond the single village of Plymouth. New towns are formed. The settlers do well supplying the larger colony of Massachusetts Bay, founded in 1630. The Pequot wars break out. This affects Plymouth, though Plymouth Colony is not directly involved.

1650s

Quakers arrive in the colony, and this angers many in Plymouth. Laws against the Quakers are passed. In 1657, William Bradford dies. He was governor of the colony for many years.

1670s

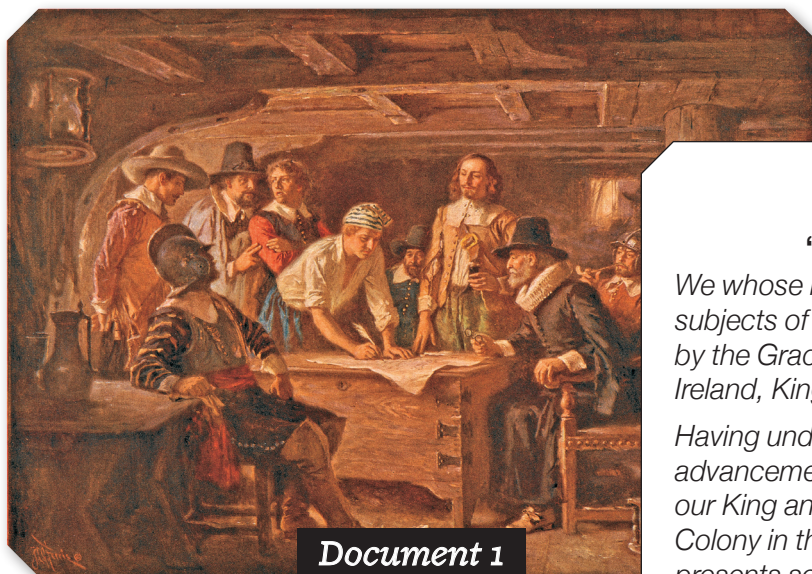
Anger grows between Plymouth and the Wampanoags. In 1675–76, a huge conflict involving many tribes breaks out. It is known as King Philip's War, and it spreads throughout New England.

1691

England incorporates the Plymouth and Maine colonies into Massachusetts Bay.

DOCUMENTS 1 & 2

Primary Source Documents 1 & 2



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZC4-7155.

Document 1

Document 2

“In the Name of God, Amen”

We whose names are underwritten, the loyal subjects of our dread Sovereign Lord King James, by the Grace of God of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith, etc.

Having undertaken, for the Glory of God and advancement of the Christian Faith and Honour of our King and Country, a Voyage to plant the First Colony in the Northern Parts of Virginia, do by these presents solemnly and mutually in the presence of God and one of another, Covenant and Combine ourselves together into a Civil Body Politic, for our better ordering and preservation and furtherance of the ends aforesaid; and by virtue hereof to enact, constitute, and frame such just and equal Laws, Ordinances, Acts, Constitutions, and Offices, from time to time as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general good of the Colony, unto which we promise all due submission and obedience.

Information on Documents 1 & 2

The painting here, by Jean Leon Gerome Ferris, shows passengers of the *Mayflower* signing the *Mayflower Compact*. This reproduction appeared in a series called *The Pageant of a Nation*,

published by the Foundation Press, Inc., in 1932. Next to this painting is the text of the actual *Mayflower Compact* itself, signed by 41 passengers on board the *Mayflower* on November 11, 1620.