

# **A Society Knit as One: The Puritans, Algonkians, and Roger Williams**

A Unit of Study for Grades 5–8

**JIM PEARSON**

**National Center for History in the Schools  
University of California, Los Angeles**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Introduction

Approach and Rationale . . . . .	1
Content and Organization . . . . .	1

## Teacher Background Materials

I. Unit Overview . . . . .	3
II. Unit Context . . . . .	4
III. Correlation to the National Standards for United States History. . . . .	5
IV. Unit Objectives . . . . .	5
V. Introduction to <i>A Society Knit as One: The Puritans, Algonkians, and Roger Williams</i> . . . . .	6
VI. Lesson Plans . . . . .	9

<b>Dramatic Moment</b> . . . . .	10
----------------------------------	----

## Lessons

Lesson One: The City on the Hill . . . . .	12
Lesson Two: The Fifth Commandment . . . . .	25
Lesson Three: A Heart Sensible of Kindness . . . . .	41
Lesson Four: The Wiseest Invention . . . . .	56

<b>Bibliography</b> . . . . .	73
-------------------------------	----

---

## Lesson One

### The “City on the Hill”

#### A. Objectives

- ◆ To examine documents which show the underlying values that guided the formation of the Puritans’ concept of community.
- ◆ To understand the Puritan concept of covenant and appreciate the ways in which this idea continues to influence the way Americans interact.
- ◆ To appreciate the way people’s abstract values affect their material environment.
- ◆ To speculate about the values that students believe necessary for the society they want to create.

#### B. Lesson Activities

1. Ask students what they know about the Puritans. They might know that they were early English settlers of North America. They may also know that they were motivated to come to America for religious reasons.
2. Pass out copies of the **Dramatic Moment**, excerpts from John Winthrop’s “A Model of Christian Charity,” and have students read along as you read it to them. If the text is too difficult, you might let them use the simplified version, **Document A**. Have them discuss and ask questions about the text.
  - a. Divide the class into small groups. Assign each group one paragraph to analyze and pass out “The Model of Christian Charity Worksheet” with questions to guide them in their analysis (**Worksheet 1**).
  - b. When each group has answered their set of questions, have them report their findings to the class. Different groups may have had various responses to the reading. As long as they have not simply misread Winthrop, variations should be accepted, but the reasons for differences should be explored.
  - c. From this activity students should understand that the Puritans of New England lived together on the basis of a dual covenant: their agreement with God to follow the laws they had laid down and their agreement with each other to adhere to those laws. Students should also understand that Winthrop was requiring them to follow these

laws in body and spirit. Thus, there was intense pressure in Puritan society to conform to a shared set of customs, laws, and even beliefs. Rigid enforcement of uniform behavior was a persistent problem for the Puritans.

3. The next activity is intended to show students how beliefs have real consequences on the way people live. It should also give students an opportunity to work with maps and consider some of the factors which determine where people live and how they organize their physical space. Have students brainstorm about the needs, concerns, and technology of the Puritans which helped them decide where to live.
  - a. Ask students what geographical needs helped determine where the Puritans lived. Possible answers include: safe harbor for ships, healthy fresh water, good land for farming, trees for building and fuel, location easily defended from beasts and potential enemies, either European or native.
  - b. After students have speculated about the geographical features, pass out copies of the first map printed in North America—taken from William Hubbard’s “A Narrative of the Troubles with Indians in New England” (**Document B**). Have students find Salem. Not altogether confident that the location of Salem was safe, Winthrop ordered the fleet to sail on until he came to the sites of what became Charlestown and Boston. Have students locate Charlestown and Boston. Students might be able to tell that Boston is on a peninsula that is connected to the mainland by a narrow neck of land. Ask students why a peninsula with a fresh water spring would have been a particularly desirable spot for Winthrop to found his city on a hill.

## Lesson One

---

- c. Then ask students to speculate about the technological factors which helped determine what the Puritans' buildings would look like. To make this question more comprehensible and to remind students of how different the world of the Puritans was from our own, you might ask them the difference between the buildings of today and those the Puritans could build. Divide the chalkboard in half and label one side "Now" and the other side "Then."

### **Possible answers under "Now"**

Heavy motor-driven machinery  
Lumber and brick yards  
Glass windows  
Central heating  
Plumbing  
Electricity for cooking and light  
Iron and concrete as building materials

### **Possible answers under "Then"**

Saws, hammers, and axes  
Joined wood with notches because nails were scarce  
Rocks, lumber, twigs, mud, and thatch used as building material  
Candles for light  
Fireplaces for heat and cooking  
No indoor plumbing  
Small windows covered with oiled skins or, later, thick glass windows imported from Europe  
All water hauled in buckets

d. When students have an idea of what to expect, pass out the pictures of Puritan houses, **Document C**. Be sure they understand that these are reproductions of the first English huts—the originals did not survive. Once the urgent need for basic shelter had been satisfied, the Puritans built more substantial homes. A few of these sturdy homes still exist, but, as in the one pictured, most have been modified. Have them look at the picture of the exposed corner and have them consider the skill involved in such carpentry. Ask them how they would like living in such homes, and how they would feel about the lack of privacy. Point out that even after the Puritans were more firmly established and they were building permanent houses, individuals seldom had their own rooms.

e. Using the discussion on privacy as a transition, ask students how Puritan beliefs might have influenced the way they organized their villages. First, ask students to list some of the Puritan's values. These might include:

Devotion to God

Helping each other

Sharing

Keeping an eye on each other

Trying to be good citizens

Working hard

f. Next ask students how each of these values might have been revealed in buildings or the way people organized their towns. If students are still having trouble connecting values to the physical world, they may have to be guided by quite specific questions. Such questions might include:

1. What are some buildings whose functions are revealed by their appearance?
2. Where do you think they would build their meeting houses (their term for church): on the edge of town or in the center?
3. Would people build houses close together or far apart?

## Lesson One

---

- g. Tell students that we have few town maps from this period. However, in journals and the pages of early town records there is often enough information for historians to reconstruct the physical features of seventeenth-century town life. From such records, historians know that Puritans tended to live close together in compact villages. Fields surrounded the village and were divided among individuals according to their social standing. The center of town had a common where villagers let their animals graze and a meeting house where church services and town business were conducted. When villages were built beside rivers, houses tended to be laid out side by side on both sides of a street that ran parallel to the river. Usually meadowlands for grazing livestock were situated between the road and the river. Once students understand the scarcity of seventeenth-century New England town maps, pass out the sketch of the “Proposed Site for the Ipswich Meeting House,” **Document D**.
- h. The Ipswich map and petition both reflect the centrality of religion and the tensions brought about by growth and expansion. Ask students why that site was chosen and why the people who made the petition wanted to show the relationship between their houses and the meeting house. Have students tell you how this can be interpreted as evidence of the centrality of religion in the lives of the Puritans.

### **Teacher Background: Proposed Site for the Ipswich Meeting House**

In 1667, when this petition was written, the town of Ipswich had been so long established that the nearest land available for new settlement was as much as seven-and-a-half miles from the original meeting house. Families had to make this trip each week to attend church services. Understandably these distant settlers were interested in establishing their own church. They drew this sketch to show where they wanted to locate their meeting house. Earlier settlers of Ipswich, who lived closer to the original meeting house, did not want these settlers to break off and form their own meeting house. Such an act was often the first step in establishing a separate community. Although this method of multiplying communities occurred with some frequency in Massachusetts Bay, members of parent communities often resisted what appeared to them to be the fragmentation of their community. The conflict in Ipswich is an instance of this tension between older and newer settlers. Indeed, although the folks living near the Chebacco River managed to have their own church and minister by the end of the seventeenth century, they were not formally incorporated into their own town until 1819.

**C. Supplementary Activities**

1. Have students draw maps or pictures of a Puritan town. A more ambitious project would be to have students build models of Puritan homes which you may combine to make a Puritan village. Have students write a paragraph explaining why the village looks as it does.
2. Have students construct their own communities predicated on a set of values of their own choosing. This will develop students' imaginations and give them a grasp of the key concept that values affect environment. Begin by asking students for examples of contemporary buildings or other material objects that reflect particular values. Once the class has a sense of the rich diversity of artifacts which can reveal values, have students design their own communities. Each student should design a community that reflects the values he or she is interested in promoting. For instance, if athletic activity is highly valued by the community planner, a town might be designed with playing fields, a sports stadium, and gymnasium in the center of town. In addition to roads, there might be bike paths and running trails. Each house could be equipped with a gymnasium. Similar sorts of communities might be designed for people interested in ecology, computers, or individual privacy.



### Modern Version of “A Model of Christian Charity”

1. The way we live will prove that we really believe the religious ideas that most people only say they believe. We must truly love each other, without just pretending to care about one another. We must help each other. We should not just take care of our problems; we should also take care of our neighbors' problems.
2. This is how our relationship with God works: We have joined with Him in a covenant [a mutual agreement like a contract]. We made the agreement with God, but He is letting us decide the rules for that agreement. We have promised that each of us will obey these rules. Because we have promised to act in certain ways, we are hoping that God will be generous and bless us. If God chooses to hear our prayers and brings us safely to the New World, it is because He has approved the terms of the agreement with Him that we have made and begun to follow. But if all of us do not obey these rules, God will be angry, get revenge for our lies, and make sure we understand what happens to people who break their agreement with Him.
3. Now the only way to avoid making God angry and to protect our future children and grandchildren is to follow the advice of Micah [an Old Testament prophet]: to be just, to love mercy, and to be humble believers in God. To behave this way, we must be knit together in this work as one man [we must work together so well that we become like one person]. We must behave with each other like loving brothers and sisters. We must be willing not to take more than we need, if there are people who are without life's necessities. We must treat each other humbly, gently, patiently, and generously. We must enjoy each other, share all things—good and bad—with each other: rejoice together, mourn together, and labor and suffer together. In all the work we do, we must always remember the rules of our agreement with God and our places in the community, acting together to make one whole. In this way, all of us working together as one person in a spirit of peace, we will enjoy the continued blessing of God, who will enjoy filling our spirit with His goodness and making us His own people. He will bless us so that we will understand more of God's wisdom, power, goodness, and truth than we did in the past. With God on our side, ten of us will be as strong as a thousand of our enemies. He will give us glory and make others praise us so that men in future colonies will say: “The Lord make it like that of New England.” For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill, the eyes of all people are upon us.

**Worksheet for “The Model of Christian Charity”**

1. Rules for Puritans (questions on paragraph one):
    - a. How does Winthrop want Puritans to act?
    - b. Does this mean that he believes that Puritans are better than others?
    - c. Winthrop is telling his followers to do more than just help each other; he wants them to watch each other. Why?
    - d. How do you feel when people try to help you when you do not ask for it? Do you always want that help?
    - e. What do we call people who give advice or help when we do not ask for it? Are the names we use for such people compliments or insults? Do you think the Puritans were so different from us, that they always welcomed such behavior?
    - f. Examine the paragraph and explain why it is so important that Puritans monitor each other’s behavior.
  
  2. The special quality of Puritans (questions on paragraph two):
    - a. What does Winthrop think is special about Puritans?
    - b. Who makes the rules for the agreement between God and the Puritans?
    - c. How do Puritans know if their rules are correct?
    - d. If the rules are correct what does that mean the Puritans must do in the new world?
    - e. Historians believe that Winthrop is telling the Puritans that there are really two covenants: one covenant between the Puritans and God; one covenant between each Puritan and the group. What in this paragraph makes historians believe this? Hint: what happens if some Puritans begin to ignore their covenant with God?
    - f. Explain how Winthrop plans to have the Puritans keep their agreement with God.
-

3. How to follow the rules and the reward for obeying (questions on paragraph three):
  - a. What must Puritans do to keep their contract with God?
  - b. Why would obeying these rules be more difficult for some people than others?
  - c. What will happen if they succeed?
  - d. How is what Winthrop is asking the Puritans to do different from just obeying the rules? Hint: your parents can make you eat all your dinner, but can they make you enjoy a food you do not like?
  - e. Explain why you think it was possible or impossible to achieve what Winthrop was requiring the Puritans to do.