

American Government - The Mayflower Compact

by ReadWorks



The Mayflower Compact, 1620

You have probably heard about the Pilgrims and how they celebrated America's first Thanksgiving. But, did you know the Pilgrims left our country another important legacy as well?

It all began in November 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 new land, 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 controlled by England. 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 politic." This political body, or government, would act with one purpose. It would work to create "just and equal laws" for everyone to obey.

There is little doubt that 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. 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. Later, this principle would become a cornerstone of American government and the United States Constitution.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. The Mayflower Compact was the first

- A. celebration of what we call Thanksgiving.
- B. constitution in the New World.
- C. a meeting to decide where to settle.
- D. English ship to come to America.

2. The author explains what the Mayflower Compact did and then

- A. explains why it is similar to the U.S. Constitution.
- B. discusses constitutions that came before it.
- C. explains why the colony could not survive.
- D. describes the men who wrote the document.

3. Based on the passage, what might have happened to the Pilgrims without the Mayflower Compact?

- A. They would have won independence from England sooner.
- B. Their ship would have never reached the Americas.
- C. They would have never set sail from England.
- D. They might have fought too much to be a successful colony.

4. Read the following sentences: "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."

The word **principle** means

- A. an argument against something
- B. the first of a kind
- C. a belief, an idea
- D. a government employee

5. This passage is mostly about

- A. how the Mayflower Compact is important in American history.
- B. how the Pilgrims decided where to start a colony.
- C. the man who came up with the idea for a constitution.
- D. why the Mayflower Compact was better than the Constitution.

6. Explain how the Mayflower Compact organized the pilgrims.

7. Explain why having a government "by, of, and for the people" would have helped the Pilgrims get along?

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the answer 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. Vocabulary Word: legacy: how someone or something is remembered, or the effects of someone or something long afterward.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence:
