

The Mayflower Compact (1620)

In 1620, the passengers aboard the Mayflower found themselves for nine stormy weeks in the Atlantic Ocean. They were headed for the warm climate and fertile land of the Virginia colony, but they landed instead far to the north of this desired colony. The passengers consisted of a group of 35 Pilgrims — a religious group that had separated from the Church of England—and 70 others. On November 11, 1620, the boat reached Cape Cod, in present-day Massachusetts. The non-Pilgrims claimed that because the ship had not landed in Virginia, the charter for a colony was not valid. Moreover, the non-Pilgrims claimed that they did not have to obey the Pilgrim leaders. In an effort to keep the group together and to maintain order, the Pilgrim leaders drew up the Mayflower Compact. While still on board, most of the adult men in the group signed the document. A month later, the passengers went on land, creating the first permanent English settlement in New England, at Plymouth, Massachusetts. The Mayflower Compact became the basis for government of the Plymouth Colony.

In The Name of God, Amen. We, whose names are [below], the Loyal Subjects of our [awe-inspiring] Lord King James, by the Grace of God, of Great Britain, King, defender of the Faith, etc. Having [taken upon ourselves] for the Glory of God, and Advancement of the Christian Faith, and the Honor of our King and Country, a Voyage to [create] the first colony in the northern Parts of Virginia; Do . . . [formally] and mutually in the Presence of God and one another, [promise] and combine ourselves together into a [political body], for our better Ordering and Preservation and Furtherance of the [just-mentioned goals]; And do enact, constitute, and frame, just and equal Laws, Ordinances, Acts, Constitutions, and Offices, from time to time, as shall be thought [necessary] and convenient for the general Good of the Colony: unto [these] we promise all due Submission and Obedience. IN WITNESS whereof we have written our names at Cape Cod the eleventh of November, the fifty-fourth. Anno Domini, 1620.

Mr. John Carver, Mr. William Bradford, Mr Edward Winslow, Mr. William Brewster, Isaac, Allerton, Myles Standish, John Alden, John Turner, Francis Eaton, James Chilton, John Craxton, John Billington, Joses Fletcher, John Goodman, Mr. Samuel Fuller, Mr. Christopher Martin, Mr. William Mullins, Mr. William White, Mr. Richard Warren, John Howland, Mr. Steven Hopkins, Digery Priest, Thomas Williams, Gilbert Winslow, Edmund Margesson, Peter Brown, Richard Britteridge George Soule, Edward Tilly, John Tilly, Francis Cooke, Thomas Rogers, Thomas Tinker, John Ridgdale Edward Fuller, Richard Clark, Richard Gardiner, Mr. John Allerton, Thomas English, Edward Doten, Edward Liester.

1. According to the Mayflower Compact what was the purpose of the voyage?
2. Where did the voyagers intend to land? Where did they end up?
3. What do the signers promise?
4. What is the most important idea in this document?
5. Is the Mayflower Compact a democratic document? (of or for the people in general).