

Lesson Plan Script – The Pilgrims, the Mayflower Compact, and Squanto

Grade Level: 4th–8th

Length: 90-120 minutes

Central Resource: Your Pilgrims/Mayflower/Squanto slideshow

Slide 1 – Title Slide

Teacher Script:

“Today we’re going to explore the incredible true story of the Pilgrims—their journey to America, their struggle to survive, and the agreements and alliances that shaped early colonial history. By the end of this lesson, you’ll be able to explain why the Pilgrims left England, what the Mayflower Compact accomplished, and how Native peoples like Squanto and Massasoit were essential to the colony’s survival.”

Optional Engagement:

- *Quick Think-Pair-Share:* “What do you already know about the Pilgrims or Thanksgiving? Anything you’ve heard before—movies, books, or school activities?”
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Slide 2 – Escaping Persecution

Teacher Script:

“The Pilgrims were originally Puritan separatists living in England. They wanted to practice their religion freely, but the English government demanded that all citizens follow the Church of England. To escape pressure and persecution, they fled to the Netherlands. They did have religious freedom there, but they didn’t have citizenship, meaning they could only take low-paying, unskilled jobs. They were also concerned that their children were starting to adopt Dutch culture instead of their own.”

Elaboration:

“This led them to make a deal with a business group called the Merchant Adventurers. The company would pay for the Pilgrims to travel to America, and in return, the Pilgrims would pay back the debt with work and profits.”

Optional Activity:

- *Pause for a short reflection:* “Imagine leaving your home country because of your beliefs. What might be scary about that? What might be exciting?”

Slide 3 – Journey Toward Virginia... Or Was It?

Teacher Script:

“The Pilgrims boarded the Mayflower in 1620. They were supposed to go to Virginia—near the already existing Jamestown colony. But after a long, stormy, 10-week voyage, the ship ended up far north at Cape Cod, in what is now Massachusetts.”

“Some historians even think this might have been intentional—the ship’s crew may have always planned to go north, where there was no existing English government.”

Optional Pause:

- *Estimation Challenge:* “How long do you think you could handle being on a crowded ship with no showers and very limited food?”

OPTIONAL INTERACTIVE ADD-ON BEFORE THE LANDING SLIDE

Teacher Option:

Before advancing to the next slide, guide students through the **Interactive Mayflower Ship Tour**:



<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/13-colonies/adventures-in-the-life-and-times-of-13-colonies-figures/adventures-on-the-mayflower-tour-the-ship/>

Teacher Script:

“Let’s pause and take a closer look at what life aboard the Mayflower was actually like. This interactive tour will help you understand the conditions the Pilgrims faced and what they experienced day-to-day.”

Student Task Options:

- Explore the ship and write down **three surprising facts**
- Sketch a quick diagram of one section of the ship
- Respond to: “What part of the ship would’ve been most difficult to live in?”

Slide 4 – The Mayflower Compact (Expanded)

Teacher Script:

“When the Pilgrims landed far outside Virginia, some passengers said, ‘Our contract doesn’t apply anymore—we can do whatever we want.’ To prevent chaos, the Pilgrims created the *Mayflower Compact*, the first example of self-government in the colonies.”

“It promised fair laws, equal treatment for settlers, and loyalty to England. This moment is often seen as a foundation of American democracy.”

Optional Discussion Prompt:

“Why do you think people need rules before starting a new community?”

OPTIONAL PRIMARY SOURCE ACTIVITY AFTER THIS SLIDE

Teacher Option:

Use the **Primary Source Mayflower Compact Comprehension** activity:

(Teacher may project or assign to student dashboards.)



<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/13-colonies/primary-source-super-comprehension/the-mayflower-compact-primary-sources-super-comprehension>

Teacher Script:

“Now let’s look at the real document behind this moment. You’ll examine the language of the Mayflower Compact and answer questions to better understand what the settlers agreed to.”

Slide 5 – Should We Stay or Should We Go?

Teacher Script:

“The Pilgrims had arrived too late in the year to plant crops. They had little food and almost no supplies. Some settlers turned back to England immediately. The rest stayed, facing freezing temperatures and a harsh environment.”

“This was a turning point—choosing to stay meant risking their lives to build a new community.”

Optional Group Activity:

- Divide students into two groups:
 - Group A:** Argue why the Pilgrims should go back.
 - Group B:** Argue why they should stay.
- Then share as a class.

Slide 6 – Settling at Plymouth

Teacher Script:

“After exploring the coastline, the Pilgrims chose Plymouth as their settlement location. They saw fresh water, a good harbor, and land already cleared—land that had belonged to Native people who had died from earlier epidemics.”

“They formed the Council of New England and promised 100 acres to any settler who stayed for seven years.”

Optional Reflection:

“Why would promises of land motivate people to stay?”

Slide 7 – Squanto and Massasoit Save the Pilgrims (Expanded)

Teacher Script:

“Half the Pilgrims died during the first winter. But unlike Jamestown, they were not under constant attack. Instead, the Wampanoag people, led by Massasoit, made peace with the Pilgrims.”

“Squanto—who had been kidnapped, taken to Europe, learned English, and returned to find his village gone—became the Pilgrims’ most important ally. He taught them how to farm corn, fish, trap animals, and navigate Native diplomacy.”

Elaboration:

“Squanto’s story is one of tragedy, survival, and extraordinary cultural knowledge. Without him and Massasoit, Plymouth likely would have failed.”

OPTIONAL READING COMPREHENSION ACTIVITY AFTER THIS SLIDE

Use the **Squanto Online Reading Comprehension** activity:



<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/13-colonies/13-colonies-literacy-and-comprehension-activities/squanto-online-reading-comprehension>

Teacher Script:

“Let’s take a deeper look at Squanto’s life and the impact he had on the colony. This reading and question set will help you understand how his experiences shaped Plymouth’s survival.”

Slide 8 – The First Thanksgiving

Teacher Script:

“In the fall of 1621, after learning new farming and survival techniques, the Pilgrims harvested enough food to make it through the winter. To celebrate, they held a three-day harvest feast and invited 91 Wampanoag people.”

“It wasn’t called ‘Thanksgiving’ at the time—it was a celebration of survival, alliance, and a moment of peace between two cultures.”

Optional Activity:

- “List three things the Pilgrims could finally be grateful for at this moment in history.”
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OPTIONAL “FLIP THE NARRATIVE” DEBATE ACTIVITY AFTER THIS SLIDE

Use the debate-based comprehension activity:



<https://learnaboutamerica.com/american-history/13-colonies/flipping-the-narrative-comprehension-debates/the-first-thanksgiving-or-not-so-much-flip-the-narrative-debate-comprehension>

Teacher Script:

“Now we’re going to challenge the traditional story. Was the first Thanksgiving really a ‘Thanksgiving’ at all? This activity helps you look at multiple perspectives and think critically about what truly happened.”

Slide 9 – Discussion Questions

Teacher Script:

“Let’s wrap up with some discussion questions to help us reflect on what we learned.”

(Use the four discussion questions previously generated.)