



DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR EARLY MODERN WEEK 6:

Puritans and Separatists; Plymouth Colony

- Make sure your students know what John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* was— the collected stories of hundreds of Christians who died for their faith, especially the Marian Martyrs who died under Bloody Mary. Point out that Protestants and Catholics responded very differently to Foxe's tales of Catholic-on-Protestant torture and murder: Catholics believed that Foxe embellished his stories with anti-Catholic exaggerations and lies.
- Make sure your students know who the Puritans were: strict English Protestants who sought to purify the Anglican Church.
- Review some of the Puritans' complaints against the Anglican Church: (1) that the Anglican Church followed traditions found nowhere in the Bible; (2) that it filled its church services with chants and incense, rather than Biblical preaching; (3) that it followed king-appointed bishops, not church-appointed elders; and (4) that greedy Anglican bishops grew rich off church donations.
- Review some of the Anglican practices that Puritans considered too Catholic or too superstitious: (1) Puritans considered the communion service in the Book of Common Prayer too much like the Catholic Mass; (2) Puritans didn't approve of letting midwives baptize stillborn babies; (3) Puritans didn't approve of the fancy vestments and surplices Anglican priests wore to set themselves apart from other believers; and (4) Puritans didn't approve of superstitious gestures such as crossing oneself for prayer.
- Ask your students: why did Martin Marprelate have to print his tracts on roving printing presses? Remind your students that Englishmen of Martin's day did not enjoy freedom of speech. Explain that in Martin's day, to criticize the state church was as dangerous as criticizing the state itself, or even the queen.
- Review the requirements in Queen Elizabeth's Act against Puritans—how she insisted that all Englishmen regularly attend Anglican services, take Holy Communion without complaint and avoid conventicles. Ask your students: Can you imagine living in a country where it is a crime to prefer a different sort of church? Remind your students why Elizabeth passed such laws against both Puritans and Catholics: because in her view, a strong Anglican Church was essential to a strong England.
- Ask your students: Were the Puritans right to insist that their way of worship was right, not the Anglican way? Or should they have been more willing to compromise? Remind your students of the Puritans' strong conviction that the Bible was the Word of God, and that they considered Anglican worship anti-Biblical.
- Ask your students: Imagine that you are a Puritan, and that Queen Elizabeth has just imprisoned you for refusing to swear loyalty to the Anglican Church. Will you swear Elizabeth's oath from your jail cell? Or will you stand by your Puritan faith, and remain in jail? Why?
- Explain why Puritans preferred presbyterian church polity to episcopal church polity: (1) because they considered it more Biblical; and (2) because church-elected elders were more accountable to their congregations than king-appointed bishops.
- Explain why King James preferred episcopal church polity to presbyterian church polity: (1) because appointing Anglican bishops gave James more control over the church; and (2) because James had already battled presbyterian elders as King of Scotland, and didn't relish battling them in England too.
- Make sure your students know who the Separatists were— Puritans who separated themselves from the Anglican Church because they were convinced that the Anglicans would never change.

- Make sure your students know that the Pilgrims who settled Plymouth Colony were Separatist Christians from around Scrooby, Nottinghamshire, England whose faith journeys led them first to the Netherlands in 1607, and then on to Plymouth, New England in 1620.
- Explain who Robert Brown was— an early Separatist leader whose name became a synonym for disloyalty to Church and King. Ask your students: Why did so many Englishmen associate disloyalty to the Anglican Church with disloyalty to England? Explain that most Englishmen believed as Queen Elizabeth and King James believed— that a strong Anglican Church was essential to a strong England.
- Make sure your students know who William Brewster was— the beloved elder who helped lead the Pilgrims first to Holland, and then to Plymouth.
- Make sure your students know who William Bradford was— the younger Pilgrim leader who would serve as Governor of Plymouth Colony for more than 30 years.
- Ask your students: If you had been a Separatist living in Scrooby, England in 1607, would you have moved to the Netherlands with the Pilgrims? Or would you have remained in England and endured mistreatment from English officials? Why? Remind your students that going with the Pilgrims meant leaving behind family, friends, property, jobs and every sort of home comfort, along with everything familiar.
- Ask your students: In leaving behind everything familiar, were the Pilgrims placing their faith in these words of Christ from Mark 10:29-30:

“...no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields— along with persecutions— and in the age to come, eternal life.”

- Comment on one of the pitfalls of Separatism the Pilgrims observed among the Ancient Brethren in Amsterdam: that when churches have no bishops, they have no one to break up their arguments. Ask your students: Why are there so many Protestant denominations in modern times? Would there be fewer denominations, and more Christian unity, if more Protestant churches were willing to obey bishops? What are the possible pitfalls of obeying bishops?
- Review some features of the Holy Discipline. Ask your students:
 1. Were the Pilgrims right— do husbands, wives and children worship with fewer distractions if they sit separate from one another in church?
 2. Were the Pilgrims right— is it more respectful to stand for prayer than to sit? Is kneeling for prayer idolatry?
 3. Were the Pilgrims right— do instruments, harmony and other ways of making beautiful music distract believers from focusing on God?
 4. Were the Pilgrims right— are regular church holidays like Christmas and Easter anti-Biblical? Remind your students that the Old Testament instituted several holy days for the Hebrews, including Passover and Purim. Ask: does this change your answer?
- Review the Pilgrims’ reasons for leaving the Netherlands— (1) because they feared that Dutch language and culture were ruining their children; (2) because many of them hadn’t prospered in the Netherlands; and (3) because they didn’t want to be in the Netherlands if Catholic Spain defeated the Dutch Revolt.
- Point out that Captain John Smith’s “A Description of New England” was a key factor in the Pilgrims’ decision to settle in New England, rather than South America, Virginia or New Netherland.
- Make sure your students know who the Strangers were— non-Separatists who sailed with the Pilgrims aboard *Mayflower*. Explain why the Pilgrims needed the Strangers— because the Pilgrims could only afford

to send 41 people, and the investors who backed their expedition insisted on sending at least 100. Point out that Strangers outnumbered Pilgrims aboard *Mayflower* by about half, 61 – 41.

- Retell the story of *Mayflower* and *Speedwell*. Make sure your students know that *Speedwell* was the only ship the Pilgrims owned; and that *Speedwell* sprang so many leaks that the poor Pilgrims finally had to leave her behind. Also explain the consequences of the delay caused by *Speedwell*: (1) it pushed the Pilgrims' journey deeper into the Atlantic storm season; and (2) it pushed the Pilgrims' arrival closer to winter, leaving them little time to build shelters in their new home before deadly cold set in.
- Review the Native American peoples the Pilgrims met, and where each people lived: (1) the Nauset on Cape Cod; (2) the Wampanoag Confederacy around Plymouth Harbor; (3) the Massachusett around Boston Harbor; and (4) the Narragansett around Narragansett Bay.
- Make sure your students know what the Great Plague of the 1610s was— a devastating plague that wiped out a staggering number of Native Americans just before the Pilgrims reached New England, leaving villages like Squanto's completely empty. Ask your students: Imagine that you are a Native American who has just survived the Great Plague of the 1610s. How will you greet the Pilgrims: with suspicion, or with friendship?
- Review the remarkable story of Squanto's life, from his kidnapping at the hands of rogue sea captain Thomas Hunt to his fishing trips to Newfoundland to his return to New England. Review the shock Squanto must have felt upon seeing his native village wiped out by disease. Ask your students: if you had lived Squanto's life, how would you have felt about Englishmen?
- Explain why the Saints and Strangers wrote the Mayflower Compact: because unlike the London Company, the Pilgrims possessed no royal charter for their colony, and thus had no firm legal basis for any laws their colony might need. Point out why the Strangers had good reason to be concerned about law— because they feared that the Saints might try to set up a theocracy based on their fanatical beliefs.
- Point out the surprising new power the Mayflower pioneers claimed in the Mayflower Compact: the power of self-government. Impress upon your students the uniqueness of Plymouth's founding: in a time when kings dictated everything from law to faith, the Pilgrims achieved self-government and religious freedom.
- Review the story of how the Pilgrims offended the Nauset on their first landing: how they dug into Nauset burial mounds and granaries, disturbing grave goods and stealing corn. Point out that later, when the Pilgrims understood how they had offended and robbed the Nauset, they repaid them. Ask your students: What does this say about the Pilgrims' character?
- Review the events of the remarkable day when the Pilgrims first tangled with the Nauset, then got caught in a storm that snapped both their rudder and their mast. Ask your students: Does the way the mast-less, rudderless Pilgrims happened upon Plymouth Bay indicate God's divine intervention?
- Make sure your students know how many Pilgrims and Strangers died over the deadly winter of 1620 – 1621: 55 of the original 102.
- Make sure your students know what the Peace of Massasoit was— a 40-year peace between Pilgrim and Wampanoag, negotiated by John Carver and Massasoit in the spring of 1621.
- Review the benefits of the Peace of Massasoit— how it relieved the Pilgrims' fear of the natives, allowed them to trade with the natives, and allowed them to learn from the natives. Also review what Squanto taught the Pilgrims— how to plant, fertilize and tend the corn they needed to survive. Impress upon your students the great debt the Pilgrims owed Squanto and the Wampanoag for their survival.
- Review the story of the First Thanksgiving. In light of this story, compare Plymouth's relationship with the Wampanoag to Jamestown's relationship with the Algonquians. Ask your students: Did the Pilgrims' Christian character contribute to the Peace of Massasoit? Or were the Pilgrims really no kinder to the Wampanoag than Captain John Smith was to the Algonquians? Review the story of the Pilgrims' raid on Nemasket. Ask: Does this story change your answer?