

**Topic:**

The Mayflower Compact

**Time:**

½ to 2 class  
period

**Historical**

**Period:**  
November,  
1680

**Core:**

US I 6120 - 0601  
US II 6250 - 0102  
Gov. 6210 - 0102

**Objectives:**

Students will understand what is included in the Mayflower Compact and that its principles are the basis for the Declaration of Independence and our Constitution.

**Procedure:**

1. Have the students read the Mayflower Compact.
2. Discuss why it was written and what it does.
  - a. Declares a belief in God.
  - b. Declares the settlers legal subjects of King James.
  - c. Declares the people's will to write just and equal laws.
  - d. Declares the promise to obey such laws.
3. In small groups, have the students write a "Compact" or agreement that they would use to govern themselves if they were to settle a new land or a new colony in space.

**Handouts/Worksheets:**

1. Introduction
2. The Compact

**Author:**

Nancy Mathews and  
Paula Olsen



## INTRODUCTION

After the Pilgrims explored Cape Cod, but before they left the Mayflower, they drafted a plan for the new government and for their first settlement. The Mayflower Compact was a solemn recognition that people wanting a fresh start had to create their own laws and form their own government. Every man — women were not allowed to vote — was given a right to take part in the government in exchange for the promise to obey the laws that were passed. This lesson helps students to understand the difficulty in designing laws that are fair and acceptable to all. The experience and this short document are significant because the Mayflower Compact established a pattern of self-government in America.

### The Mayflower Compact

The date of November 21<sup>st</sup> on our calendar corresponds with the date of November 11<sup>th</sup>, old style, which was the calendar in use at the time of the signing of the Compact. Therefore, when we speak of Compact Day, we use November 21<sup>st</sup>.

This instrument, signed by forty-one men of the Mayflower passengers before they made a permanent landing, is very brief, less than two hundred words with no attempt to spell out any detail, yet its influence has been as far reaching as any document ever written. It does just four things: it declares a belief in God; it declares them legal subjects of King James; it declares their will to write just and equal laws; it declares their promise to obey such laws.

What does this all mean? First, they believed in God and believing in God, they believed in the equality of all men before God. Therefore, without other precedent, they made all men equal before the law. Here was the birth of popular constitutional liberty, foreshadowing our Declaration of Independence and our American Constitution. Though they set forth that they were subjects of King James, it should be noted he was not a party to the Compact.

They came without a charter. Their application for one had been refused, so they were thrown upon their own resources to provide a government for themselves. It is clear they had a far-reaching purpose in mind; otherwise it would have been very natural in the circumstances simply to provide that they should be governed by the laws of England. Following through a little further, we find they established the public recording of deeds and mortgages, the probating of wills and recording of births, marriages, and deaths by towns. None of these had existed anywhere as applicable to all the people. The laws they made were the most liberal of any known in their time. In England, there were 149 capital crimes. They established only five. In England, the jury system applied only to the nobility, but they extended it to include all men. Instead of the oldest son inheriting all of his father's estate, they provided it was to be divided among all the children. Their laws and practices have, for the most part, become characteristic throughout our country.



## HANDOUT 2

### THE COMPACT

IN THE NAME OF GOD, AMEN. We whose names are underwritten, the loyal subjects of our dread sovereign Lord, King James, by the grace of God, of Great Britain, France, and Ireland King, Defender of the Faith, etc.

Having undertaken, for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith and honor of our King and Country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the northern parts of Virginia, do by these presents, solemnly and mutually, in the presence of God, and one of another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politic, for our better ordering and preservation and furtherance of the ends aforesaid; and by virtue hereof to enact, constitute and frame such just and equal laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions and offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general good of the colony: unto which we promise all due submission and obedience.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF we have hereunder subscribed our names at Cape Cod, the 11 of November, in the year of the reign of our sovereign Lord King James; of England, France and Ireland the eighteenth, and of Scotland the fifty-fourth. Ano. Dom. 1620.

John Carver  
William Bradford  
Edward Winslow  
William Brewster  
Isaac Allerton  
Myles Standish  
John Alden  
Samuel Fuller  
Christopher Martin  
William Mullins  
William White  
Richard Warren  
John Howland,  
Stephen Hopkins

Edward Tilly  
John Tilly  
Francis Cooke  
Thomas Rogers  
Thoms Tinker  
John Rigdale  
Edward Fuller  
John Turner  
Francis Eaton  
James Chilton  
John Crackston  
John Billington  
Moses Fletcher  
John Goodman

Degory Priest  
Thomas Williams  
Gilbert Winslow  
Edmond Margeson  
Peter Brown  
Richard Britteridge  
George Soule  
Richard Clarke  
Richard Gardiner  
John Allerton  
Thomas English  
Edward Daty  
Edward Leister



Thus these men became the First Americans. They believed that God created all men equal; therefore, *without other precedent*, they made all men equal before the Law. Here was the birth of popular constitutional liberty, foreshadowing our Declaration of Independence and our American Constitution, which guarantees freedom to all of us today. Tremendous suffering was endured as they grappled with the great unknown. Half of their number perished in the struggle of that first terrible Winter. On that sarcophagus, which contains their remains, is this inscription:

*This monument marks the first burying-ground in Plymouth of the Passengers of the Mayflower. Here under cover of darkness, the fast dwindling Company laid their dead; leveling the earth above them lest the Indians should learn how many were the graves.*

READER, History records no nobler venture for Faith and Freedom than that of this Pilgrim band. In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and cold, they laid the foundations of a State wherein every man, through countless ages, should have liberty to worship God in his own way. May their example inspire thee to do thy part in perpetuating and spreading, throughout the World, the lofty Ideals of our Republic.