

The Mayflower Compact

by The Pilgrims

The Mayflower Compact was a document written and signed by the Pilgrims as they arrived in the New World in 1620. The group had originally planned to go to the Hudson River area, which was part of the Virginia Colony. Bad weather, however, put them farther north, near the coast of Massachusetts. Since they had did not have permission to start a colony in Massachusetts, and therefore had no governing laws, the Pilgrims decided to set up their own society and rules while they waited for permission from England. The document is named for the Pilgrims' ship, the Mayflower. *The original document has been lost.*

Below is the text as written by William Bradford, one of the signers, in 1646.

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 Honour 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 in 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 11th 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. Anno Domini 1620.

1) Based on the context of the passage, what does “Covenant and Combine ourselves together in a Civil Body Politic” mean?

2) The passage refers to laws being passed “as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general good.” What does “general good” mean?

3) The document refers to the King as "our dread Sovereign Lord King James." Today, dread as an adjective means frightful or terrible. It meant something different in the Pilgrims' time. What do you think it might have meant?

4) Why do you think the Pilgrims talked about adding laws "from time to time"?

Vocabulary List

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. loyal
2. solemnly
3. preservation
4. just
5. submission
6. subscribed
7. reign

Context Clues

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1) "...The **loyal** subjects of our dread Sovereign Lord King James, by the Grace of God of Great Britain..."

- a. devoted b. creative c. helpful d. disrespectful

2) "...do by these presents **solemnly** and mutually in the presence of God and one of another..."

- a. cooperatively b. religiously c. carefully d. seriously

3) "...for our better ordering and **preservation** and furtherance of the ends aforesaid..."

- a. organization b. clarity c. protection d. understanding

4) "and by virtue hereof to enact, constitute and frame such **just** and equal Laws..."

- a. fair b. simple c. unfair d. strong

5) "...unto which we promise all due **submission** and obedience."

- a. interpretation b. compliance c. non-compliance d. freedom

6) "In witness whereof we have hereunder **subscribed** our names at Cape Cod, the 11th of November..."

- a. changed b. erased c. eliminated d. signed

7) "In the year of the **reign** of our Sovereign Lord King James, of England, France..."

- a. dominance b. inclement weather c. downfall d. submissiveness