

Sample Answers to the Questions on the Mayflower Compact

Why do the authors make reference to God and King James?

The reference to God shows the religious purpose of the colony. The Pilgrims were dissenters from the Church of England and came to the New World to practice their form of Christianity, Puritanism. For them, an agreement as significant as the Mayflower Compact would naturally reference God because religion was such a major part of their society.

The Mayflower Compact established a government for the Plymouth Colony. The Pilgrims agreed to rule themselves and be bound by those laws. They still considered themselves loyal subjects of King James I and made that very clear in the text. Even if they did not consider themselves subjects, they would still want to say they were or they might be accused of treason.

Why is this document called the Mayflower Compact?

A compact is an agreement, or a contract. This was a contract among the people who sailed on the Mayflower. They agreed to form a new government, which would make laws for the good of the colony. In return, the individual people would follow the laws. The men on the Mayflower formalized the compact like any other contract; they signed it.

What did the compact accomplish for Plymouth society?

In the short term, it created a new government and helped the Plymouth colony survive and ultimately thrive in the New World. The people in Plymouth were facing a harsh New England winter and were an ocean away from home. They needed a government to provide order and a means for everyone to get along. Rather than have someone impose that order on everyone else, like a dictator, they all peacefully agreed to submit to this new form of government.

Why is this document important today?

This document is important today because it is one of the earliest examples of a group of people in the New World choosing to rule themselves. The Pilgrims were subjects of King James, but he was an ocean away in London. The day-to-day laws the Pilgrims would actually follow would be the ones they created. They would elect their own leaders and determine what needed to be done for the good of the colony. The principle of self-government is embedded in the Mayflower Compact with the word "we." The Constitution of the United States begins with the words "We, the people."