

Puritans Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question:
Were the Puritans selfish or selfless?

Materials:

- Copies of Puritans Documents A and B
- Copies of Puritans Guiding Questions

Plan of Instruction:

1. Warm-Up: Ask students what they know about the Puritans and their beliefs. [Students may have learned about the Puritans in middle school, or in reading the *Crucible* or *The Scarlet Letter* in English class].
2. Mini-lecture:
 - The Puritans were a group of people who criticized (wanted to “purify”) the corruption and hierarchy in the Church of England. The Church of England was the official church in England that everyone automatically belonged to.
 - [Optional: *It may be useful at this time to remind students of the Protestant Reformation, a massive movement in the 16th century to reform the Catholic Church. Many Protestant denominations came out of this movement, though Henry VIII’s decision to break from the Catholic Church was more political, and as a result the Church of England had many similarities to Catholicism.*]
 - Puritans believed that the final authority came from the Bible, not from church officials, and therefore, every individual had direct access to the word of God.
 - Some Puritans wanted to completely separate from the Church of England (they were called Separatists). The group of Pilgrims who came on the *Mayflower* in 1620 were Separatists.
 - 10 years after the *Mayflower*, a group of Puritans, led by John Winthrop landed in New England and established the Massachusetts Bay Colony. They were still loyal to the Church of England, but believed they could purify the behavior of individuals (purify the Church from within).
 - Today we’re going to read two speeches by the leaders of the Puritans who formed the Massachusetts Bay Colony to see if we can figure out how they believed they should act in the New World.
 - Our historical question for the day is *Were the Puritans selfish or selfless?*

3. Hand out Documents A and B and Guiding Questions. Be sure to tell students to answer the sourcing questions before reading the document.
 4. Review student answers to Guiding Questions. Further discussion questions:
 - Based on these documents, how might the Puritans' religion shape their actions in the New World?
 - How do you think Puritans would have reacted to someone who strayed from the religion? Why?
 - Based on these documents, how do you think the Puritans reacted to the Native Americans they encountered?
 - Using evidence from the documents, how did you answer the question: *Were the Puritans selfish or selfless?*
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Citations:

John Winthrop, "City Upon a Hill," 1630.

<http://religiousfreedom.lib.virginia.edu/sacred/charity.html>

John Cotton, "The Divine Right to Occupy the Land," 1630.

http://www.pragmatism.org/american/docs/cotton_divine_right.htm

Document A: 'City upon a Hill' (Modified)

The only way to provide for our posterity is to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God. We must be knit together in this work as one man; we must take care of each other with brotherly affection.

We shall be united in the bond of peace, the Lord will be our God and delight to dwell among us, so that we shall see much more of his wisdom, power, goodness and truth.

We shall be as a City upon a Hill, the eyes of all people are upon us; so that if we shall [behave badly] and cause God to withdraw his help from us, we shall [invite] the mouths of enemies to speak evil of the ways of God, and cause their prayers to be turned into curses upon us.

Therefore let us choose life, that we, and our [children], may live; by obeying his voice, for he is our life, and our prosperity.

Vocabulary:

Posterity: future generations

Prosperity: wealth

Source: John Winthrop (1588–1649), lawyer and leader of the 1630 migration of English Puritans to Massachusetts Bay Colony, delivered this famous sermon aboard the Arbella to settlers traveling to New England.

Document B: 'The Divine Right to Occupy the Land' (Modified)

The Bible says: "I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and I will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more."

The settling of a people in this or that country is the Lord's decision.

Now, God makes room for a people in three ways: First, He drives out the heathens before them by waging war on the inhabitants.

Second, He gives a foreign people favor in the eyes of any native people to come and sit down with them.

Third, He makes a country empty of inhabitants where the people will live. Where there is an empty place, the sons of Adam and Noah are free to come and live there, and they neither need to buy it nor ask permission.

Vocabulary:

Heathen: a term used at this time to describe anyone uncivilized and who did not believe in God

Appoint: assign; decide on

Inhabitants: people who live in a certain place

Source: Puritan leader John Cotton gave the following sermon to members of his congregation who were immigrating to America in 1630. Cotton became a respected and influential clergyman in the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

Name _____

Puritans Guiding Questions

Document A:

1. **Sourcing:** Who was John Winthrop speaking to in this sermon? What do you think is the purpose of this sermon?
2. **Contextualization:** Imagine what his audience might have been thinking and feeling as they listened to him on the ship. Describe it below.
3. **Close reading:** What is the main idea of this speech? What do you think Winthrop means when he says, “We shall be as a City Upon a Hill?”

Document B:

1. **Sourcing:** Who was John Cotton speaking to in this sermon? Why is he speaking about settling in a new land?
2. **Contextualization:** In this sermon, who are the ‘inhabitants’ in the new land? Who are the ‘foreign people?’
3. **Close reading:** What does Cotton say that God will do for the foreign people when they arrive in the new land?

Corroboration: Using evidence from Document A and Document B, answer the question below:

Were the Puritans selfish or selfless?