



OF PLYMOUTH PLANTATION

NON-FICTION
William Bradford
1630-1651

INTRODUCTION

In December, 1620, about 100 settlers disembarked the *Mayflower* near a site they named Plymouth, after the town in England where they had set sail. They were Separatists, a religious group looking to break away from the Church of England and find religious freedom in the Americas. Now known as the Pilgrims, the colonists arrived at the onset of winter, with little food and no wilderness survival skills. Though nearly half died of scurvy, pneumonia, fever, or starvation, the colony survived, and under William Bradford's leadership grew into a thriving community. In 1630, Bradford began writing *Of Plymouth Plantation, 1620-1647*, which exists today as the single most complete story of the Pilgrims.

“...brought safe to land, they
fell upon their knees and blessed
the God of Heaven...”



FIRST READ

NOTES

From Chapter 9: Of Their Voyage, and How They Passed the Sea; and of Their Safe Arrival at Cape Cod (September, 1620)

- 1 In **sundry** of these storms the winds were so fierce and the seas so high, as they could not bear a knot of sail, but were forced to hull for divers days together. And in one of them, as they thus lay at hull in a mighty storm, a lusty young man called John Howland, coming upon some occasion above the gratings was, with a seele of the ship, thrown into sea; but it pleased God that he caught hold of the topsail halyards which hung overboard and ran out at length. Yet he held his hold (though he was sundry fathoms under water) till he was hauled up by the same rope to the brim of the water, and then with a boat hook and other means got into the ship again and his life saved. And though he was something ill with it, yet he lived many years after and became a profitable member both in church and commonwealth. In all this voyage there died but one of the passengers, which was William Butten, a youth, servant to Samuel Fuller, when they drew near the coast.
...
- 2 Being thus arrived in a good harbor, and brought safe to land, they fell upon their knees and blessed the God of Heaven who had brought them over the vast and furious ocean, and delivered them from all the perils and miseries thereof, again to set their feet on the firm and stable earth, their proper element. And no marvel if they were thus joyful, seeing wise Seneca was so affected with sailing a few miles on the coast of his own Italy, as he affirmed, that he had rather remain twenty years on his way by land than pass by sea to any place in a short time, so tedious and dreadful was the same unto him.
- 3 But here I cannot but stay and make a pause, and stand half amazed at this poor people's present condition; and so I think will the reader, too, when he well considers the same. Being thus passed the vast ocean, and a sea of



troubles before in their preparation (as may be remembered by that which went before), they had now no friends to welcome them nor inns to entertain or refresh their weatherbeaten bodies; no houses or much less towns to repair to, to seek for succor. It is recorded in Scripture as a mercy to the Apostle and his shipwrecked company, that the barbarians showed them no small kindness in refreshing them, but these savage barbarians, when they met with them (as after will appear) were readier to fill their sides full of arrows than otherwise. And for the season it was winter, and they that know the winters of that country know them to be sharp and violent, and subject to cruel and fierce storms, dangerous to travel to known places, much more to search an unknown coast.

From Chapter 11: The Starving Time (Winter, 1620–1621)

- 4 But that which was most sad and lamentable was, that in two or three months' time half of their company died, especially in January and February, being the depth of winter, and wanting houses and other comforts; being infected with the scurvy and other diseases which this long voyage and their inaccommodate condition had brought upon them. So as there died some times two or three of a day in the foresaid time, that of 100 and odd persons, scarce fifty remained. And of these, in the time of most distress, there was but six or seven sound persons who to their great **commendations**, be it spoken, spared no pains night nor day, but with abundance of toil and hazard of their own health, fetched them wood, made them fires, dressed them meat, made their beds, washed their loathsome clothes, clothed and unclothed them. In a word, did all the homely and necessary offices for them which dainty and queasy stomachs cannot endure to hear named; and all this willingly and cheerfully, without any grudging in the least, showing herein their true love unto their friends and brethren; a rare example and worthy to be remembered. Two of these seven were Mr. William Brewster, their reverend Elder, and Myles Standish, their Captain and military commander, unto whom myself and many others were much beholden in our low and sick condition. And yet the Lord so upheld these persons as in this general calamity they were not at all infected either with sickness or lameness. . . .

Indian Relations

- 5 All this while the Indians came **skulking** about them, and would sometimes show themselves **aloof** off, but when any approached near them, they would run away; and once they stole away their tools where they had been at work and were gone to dinner. But about the 16th of March, a certain Indian came boldly amongst them and spoke to them in broken English, which they could well understand but marveled at it. At length they understood by discourse with him, that he was not of these parts, but belonged to the eastern parts where some English ships came to fish, with whom he was acquainted and

could name sundry of them by their names, amongst whom he had got his language. He became profitable to them in acquainting them with many things concerning the state of the country in the east parts where he lived, which was afterward profitable unto them; as also of the people here, of their names, number and strength, of their situation and distance from this place, and who was chief amongst them. His name was Samoset. He told them also of another Indian whose name was Squanto, a native of this place, who had been in England and could speak better English than himself.

- 6 Being, after some time of entertainment and gifts dismissed, a while after he came again, and five more with him, and they brought again all the tools that were stolen away before, and made way for the coming of their great Sachem, called Massasoit. Who, about four or five days after, came with the chief of his friends and other attendance, with the aforesaid Squanto. With whom, after friendly entertainment and some gifts given him, they made a peace with him (which hath now continued this 24 years) in these terms:
1. That neither he nor any of his should injure or do hurt to any of their people.
 2. That if any of his did hurt to any of theirs, he should send the offender, that they might punish him.
 3. That if anything were taken away from any of theirs, he should cause it to be restored; and they should do the like to his.
 4. If any did unjustly war against him, they would aid him; if any did war against them, he should aid them.
 5. He should send to his neighbors confederates to certify them of this, that they might not wrong them, but might be likewise comprised in the conditions of peace.
 6. That when their men came to them, they should leave their bows and arrows behind them.
- 7 After these things he returned to his place called Sowams, some 40 miles from this place, but Squanto continued with them and was their interpreter and was a special instrument sent of God for their good beyond their expectation. He directed them how to set their corn, where to take fish, and to **procure** other commodities, and was also their pilot to bring them to unknown places for their profit, and never left them till he died.

From Chapter 12: First Thanksgiving (Fall, 1621)

- 8 They began now to gather in the small harvest they had, and to fit up their houses and dwellings against winter, being all well recovered in health and



NOTES

strength and had all things in good plenty. For as some were thus employed in affairs abroad, others were exercised in fishing, about cod and bass and other fish, of which they took good store, of which every family had their portion. All the summer there was no want; and now began to come in store of fowl, as winter approached, of which this place did abound when they came first (but afterward decreased by degrees). And besides waterfowl there was great store of wild turkeys, of which they took many, besides venison, etc. Besides they had about a peck of meal a week to a person, or now since harvest, Indian corn to that proportion. Which made many afterward write so largely of their plenty here to their friends in England, which were not **feigned** but true reports.



THINK QUESTIONS

1. How do the Pilgrims demonstrate their values in their daily effort to survive in a harsh environment? Cite one example from the text and explain how this reflects the Pilgrims' beliefs and values.
2. How does Bradford's diction (choice of words) reveal his own thoughts and feelings about the events or the individuals described in the excerpt? Cite one example from the text and explain how this reflects Bradford's point of view.
3. How did Bradford initially view the Native Americans? Do you think that his first impressions were completely accurate? Remember to cite evidence from the text to explain your response.
4. Use context to determine what Bradford means by the word **feigned** in the last paragraph. How might you define this word? Explain what context clue helped you determine the meaning.
5. The word *commend* is a verb that means "to praise formally or officially." The addition of the suffix *-tion* changes the part of speech. Write a definition and identify the part of speech for the word *commendations*, as it is used in paragraph 4. Explain how breaking down the word into its word parts helped you determine the meaning.





CLOSE READ

Reread the excerpt from *Of Plymouth Plantation*. As you reread, complete the Focus Questions below. Then use your answers and annotations from the questions to help you complete the Writing Prompt.



FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. In the first paragraph of Chapter 9, Bradford tells the story of John Howland. Annotate some of the language that distinguishes this account from a simple, fact-based retelling of the tale. How does Bradford's analysis of the events relate to the purpose of the book? Use the annotation tool to write your response to this question.
2. How does the clause "that which was most sad and lamentable" build upon the idea of the chapter title, "The Starving Time"? To what, exactly, is Bradford referring? How does this compare to the mood of the start of Chapter 9? Highlight evidence in the text that addresses these questions. Use the annotation tool to write your response to the questions.
3. What enabled the Pilgrims to survive "the Starving Time"? What do Bradford's comments reveal about the Pilgrims' character and beliefs? Highlight evidence in the text that addresses these questions. Use the annotation tool to write your response to the questions.
4. In the chapter "Indian Relations," highlight words and phrases that Bradford used to describe Squanto. Which of these provide evidence of the Pilgrims' religious perspective of his arrival? Use the annotation tool to write your response to this question.
5. Did Bradford think that the peace agreement between the Pilgrims and the native peoples was favorable or detrimental? Highlight evidence in the text that addresses this question. Use the annotation tool to write your response to the question.
6. Reread the final paragraph and think about the reports the Pilgrims sent back to England. What effect might these letters have had on their friends and relatives overseas? How might their reports have shaped America's early identity?

WRITING PROMPT

Write a response in which you describe two distinct themes, or central ideas, in *Of Plymouth Plantation*. Cite evidence from the text to support your understanding of these themes. In your response, include examples of rhetoric from the text and explain how the use of rhetoric helps to support the themes.

