

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