

## Introduction

Download the LearnEnglish Themes podcast. You'll find more information on this page:  
<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-podcasts-themes.htm>

This support pack contains the following materials:

- the article that you can listen to in the podcast
- an optional comprehension activity based on the article
- links to other activities on the LearnEnglish website on this theme (Pilgrims).

## Read the article

### Pilgrims

by Claire Powell and Dave Collett

#### Who were the pilgrims?

There are many legends surrounding the pilgrims. In fact they were real people: English men and women who wanted to escape the religious controversies and economic problems of their time by emigrating to America.

The pilgrim story begins in England in the 16th century. A congregation of religious dissidents in Nottinghamshire believed the Church of England did not act in accordance with the teachings of the Bible so they established a church of their own in 1606. At that time the church and state were one, so being a separatist was considered an act of treason. The congregation had no choice but to leave their motherland. They fled to the city of Leiden in Holland where they could worship as they liked.

Unfortunately life was hard there, so they decided to emigrate to the English colonies in North America, then known as 'Virginia'. Other pilgrims also came for the economic opportunity although they remained loyal to their national church.

#### Finance

The voyage and settlement was financed by a group of English investors known as the 'merchant adventurers'. They formed a partnership with the colonists whereby the merchants agreed to risk their money, and the settlers to invest their labour for seven years. Land and livestock were jointly owned and the company would dissolve and divide its assets after the seven years.

#### Departure to New England

On September 6, 1620, aboard a ship called the Mayflower, 102 passengers set sail across the

Atlantic. The crossing was smooth at first but then came many storms, which damaged the ship. Two people died on board and one baby, named Oceanus, was born. Eventually after 66 days of travelling the emigrants arrived in Cape Cod in southeastern Massachusetts. The pilgrims chose to stay here as it was too late to go to the northern part of Virginia.

#### The first winter

The pilgrims went ashore to explore the wilderness. They had carried a small boat in sections below decks on the Mayflower, and this had to be assembled before groups could go and explore the coastline. Exploration began with a small group of sixteen men. They discovered a buried cache of corn and a kettle, signs that the native Americans had a camp there.

Later on, in December, the pilgrims discovered a sheltered bay, called Plymouth Harbour, a place which was protected and good for them to live permanently. Their first winter was much colder than the English winters they had experienced before, but all the same, the pilgrims continued exploring. They found a native American burial ground and unoccupied homes. After a cold night camping, the pilgrims came face to face with the native Americans at dawn. The pilgrims fled back to their boat and sailed home to Plymouth Harbour.

The pilgrims began building houses, but the weather conditions were terrible, meaning that the building took longer to complete. Some of the thatched houses caught fire, due to pilgrims cooking and trying to keep warm. The pilgrims sheltered from the snowstorms in the Mayflower ship. About half the group died from the bitter

cold and from malnutrition, although happily, a baby, Peregrine, was also born. The pilgrims persevered and finally finished their village in February.

The native Americans met the pilgrims on March 16th. A native American, Samoset, from present day Maine, welcomed the pilgrims in English. Samoset had learnt English from fishermen. He explained how previous explorers had kidnapped some native Americans, and said he hoped they

would be able to live peacefully together. Massasoit, the regional leader of the Wampanoag also visited the pilgrims and they exchanged gifts. They signed a peace treaty, which would last for over 50 years.

The first Thanksgiving festival was held in the autumn of 1621, and Massasoit was invited. Together, they celebrated the harvest and the success of their peace with feasting and dancing. This festival is now a public holiday in the USA.

## Glossary

**assemble** (v): to build or make something.

**assets** (n): (in business) buildings, equipment and land owned by a company.

**cache** (n): a hidden store.

**controversy** (n): a lot of argument or disagreement about something, usually because it affects or is important to many people.

**dawn** (n): when the sun rises in the morning.

**dissident** (n): a person who publicly disagrees with and criticises their government.

**dissolve** (v): to end an official organisation or legal arrangement.

**flee, fled** (v): to run away from something / somebody.

**loyal** (adj): not changing your friendship, support for a person or an organisation.

**malnutrition** (n): a poor condition of health caused by a lack of food or a lack of the right type of food.

**merchant** (n): a person whose job is to buy and sell products in large amounts, especially by trading with other countries.

**persevere** (v): to continue to work hard at something, even if it is very difficult.

**separatist** (n): someone who is a member of a racial, religious or other group. within a country who believes that this group should be independent.

**thatched house** (n): a house where the roof is made of dried straw or thick grass.

**treason** (n): (the crime of) lack of loyalty to your country, especially by helping its enemies or attempting to defeat its government.

**unoccupied** (adj): an adjective describing an empty place that nobody lives in.

## After reading

### Exercise 1

Below are 10 events from the article, but they are in the wrong order. Can you put them in the right order?

- a) A baby, called Oceanus, was born.
- b) A peace treaty was signed on March 16th.
- c) The first Thanksgiving took place in the Autumn of 1621.
- d) They arrived at Cape Cod in south-eastern Massachusetts.
- e) They built a small boat to explore the coastline.
- f) They discovered a sheltered bay which they called Plymouth Harbour.
- g) They found empty houses and a burial ground.
- h) They left England, and went to Holland.
- i) They met native Americans at dawn.
- j) They set sail on the Mayflower from Holland.

**More activities on this topic**

You'll find links to all the following activities connected to the theme of Pilgrims at:

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-central-themes-pilgrims.htm>

- **Word game: Holy places.** Match the names of religions to the names of their holy places, the locations of these, and the name of a monument which can be found there.
- **Story: In my father's footsteps:** Today was a pilgrimage. Today – for Andy – was a day like going to Rome, or sick people to Lourdes, or the people walking to Santiago de Compostela, or even Mecca. But Andy is a different type of pilgrim ...
- **In History:** Mecca deaths
- **Trivia:** Everything you (n)ever wanted to know about pilgrims.
- There is also a pilgrim-related cartoon and some carefully selected external links.

**Answers to comprehension activity:** 1. (h); 2. (j); 3. (a); 4. (d); 5. (e); 6. (f); 7. (g); 8. (i); 9. (b); 10. (c)

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