

# American Government - The Mayflower Compact

by ReadWorks



*The Mayflower Compact, 1620*

You have probably heard about the Pilgrims and how they celebrated America's first Thanksgiving. But, did you know the Pilgrims left our country another important legacy as well?

It all began in November 1620. The Pilgrims were on board their ship, the *Mayflower*. After many days at sea, they finally saw land. Even though everyone was happy to see the new land, some of the families on the ship were arguing. They disagreed on how to do things.

The Pilgrims were landing in an area that was not controlled by England. To survive, the Pilgrims would have to work together and create a colony. They would have to build houses, find food, and take care of themselves. Everyone would need to get along and help.

Before they landed, the Pilgrims found a way that they would be able to work together. The 41 men aboard the *Mayflower* met and signed the Mayflower Compact. The compact organized the Pilgrims into a "body politic." This political body, or government, would act with one purpose. It would work to create "just and equal laws" for everyone to obey.

There is little doubt that the Mayflower Compact created order and helped the Pilgrims to survive. Its legacy, however, continues to this day. The document is the first example in the New World of a constitution. The Mayflower Compact was written *by* the Pilgrims and meant to be *for* them as well. This principle of government being "by, of, and for the people" is one of the main ideas of democracy. Later, this principle would become a cornerstone of American government and the United States Constitution.

# constitution

con · sti · tu · tion

## Definition

noun

1. the system of basic laws that govern a nation, state, or other organization.

*Members of the new government wrote a new constitution for the nation.*

2. (sometimes capitalized) the written record of the basic laws of a country.

*The Constitution of the United States tells the rights of citizens.*

## Advanced Definition

noun

1. the process or act of establishing, setting up, or constituting; composition.

*A resigning prime minister may not give up his or her duties until the constitution of a new government is complete.*

*She has been a member of the council since its constitution ten years ago.*

2. that which makes up something, or the way that something is put together or composed.

*In order to date the painting, they analyzed the constitution of the paint.*

3. the set of basic laws and principles by which a nation, state, or other organization is governed.

*These rights are guaranteed by the country's constitution.*

*They were forced to change the club's constitution so that women could be allowed membership.*

4. (sometimes cap.) the written record of such a set of laws and principles.

*The U.S. Constitution was signed by thirty-nine delegates.*

5. one's physical make-up.

*He's always had a strong constitution.*

6. one's mental character or condition; temperament.

*It's just not part of my constitution to complain about small things.*

## Spanish cognate

*constitución*: The Spanish word *constitución* means constitution.

### These are some examples of how the word or forms of the word are used:

1. The **Constitution** was written by hand.
2. The **Constitution** promises important rights to the American people.
3. The **Constitution** also says that the United States must have a Congress and a Supreme Court.
4. According to the **Constitution**, an election for president must be held every four years.
5. The United States **Constitution** is the highest law in the nation.

# democracy

de · moc · ra · cy

## Definition

noun

1. a government in which the people have power in a direct way or through representatives whom they elect.

## Advanced Definition

noun

1. a form of government in which power ultimately rests with the people, either directly or through elected representatives.

*The dictator was forced out of power and democracy was established.*

2. a state or government embodying the principles of democracy.

*Japan is a democracy.*

3. the principles of social equality as exercised by the people in a society.

*The country is ruled by democracy.*

## Spanish cognate

*democracia*: The Spanish word *democracia* means democracy.

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## These are some examples of how the word or forms of the word are used:

1. The Constitution is the document that defines our American **democracy**.
2. Communism is different from **democracy**, the type of government the United States has.
3. In a **democracy**, the people elect, or vote for, the people they want to run their government.
4. This principle of government being "by, of, and for the people" is one of the main ideas of **democracy**.
5. Some rights, such as freedom of speech and the press, support **democracy**.
6. This idea of protecting free speech helps strengthen our **democracy**.
7. In a **democracy**, the people choose their rulers.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. According to the text, what was the Mayflower Compact the first of in the New World?

- A. celebration
- B. constitution
- C. meeting
- D. English ship

2. The author explains what the Mayflower Compact did. What does the author do after that?

- A. explains why the Mayflower Compact is similar to the U.S. Constitution
- B. discusses constitutions that came before the Mayflower Compact
- C. explains why the colony could not survive without the Mayflower Compact
- D. describes the men who wrote the Mayflower Compact

3. Read this paragraph from the text.

Before they landed, the Pilgrims found a way that they would be able to work together. The 41 men aboard the Mayflower met and signed the Mayflower Compact. The compact organized the Pilgrims into a "body politic." This political body, or government, would act with one purpose. It would work to create "just and equal laws" for everyone to obey.

What can you conclude about the Pilgrims from this information?

- A. There were many different versions of the Mayflower Compact, so the Pilgrims combined all the versions together.
- B. The Pilgrims felt that having everyone follow the same just laws would help them work together.
- C. After they landed, the Pilgrims had a lot of trouble following the laws that they agreed to.
- D. There were 50 men on board, but only 41 men worked on creating the compact.

4. Based on the text, what might have happened to the Pilgrims without the Mayflower Compact?

- A. They would have won independence from England sooner.
- B. Their ship would have never reached the Americas.
- C. They would have never set sail from England.
- D. They might have fought too much to be a successful colony.

5. What is this text mostly about?

- A. how the Mayflower Compact is important in American history.
- B. how the Pilgrims decided where to start a colony.
- C. the man who came up with the idea for a constitution.
- D. why the Mayflower Compact was better than the Constitution.

6. Read these sentences from the text.

The Mayflower Compact was written \_\_\_\_\_ by the Pilgrims and meant to be *for* them as well. This **principle** of government being "by, of, and for the people" is one of the main ideas of democracy.

As used in the text, what does the word "**principle**" mean?

- A. argument against something
- B. first of a kind
- C. belief, an idea
- D. government employee

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

At first, the Pilgrims were arguing, but \_\_\_\_\_ they had a document they agreed on.

- A. before
- B. as a result
- C. never
- D. soon

**8.** According to the text, how did the Mayflower Compact organize the Pilgrims?

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**9.** Explain why having a government "by, of, and for the people" might have helped the Pilgrims get along? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

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