

Puritanism

LEARNING STATIONS

Puritanism

STATION 4: PURITAN THEOLOGY & THEOCRACY

The Puritans were a group of English Protestants who thought the Church of England was corrupt and too influenced by the Roman Catholic faith. They wanted to "purify" the Church of England and return to a more simple faith. Like the Pilgrims, many of the Puritans chose to escape England and return to a more simple faith. One primary difference between the Pilgrims and the Puritans was that the Pilgrims separated from the church, whereas the Puritans sought to purify it. The Puritans believed they were personally hand-chosen by God to start a new Puritan lifestyle in North America, as part of a covenant, or agreement, to serve as a model community for the rest of the world.

Puritans believed that humans were naturally sinful beings—so sinful, in fact, that they had been born into sin. The Puritans believed in the religious theory of "predestination," which means that God has already predetermined, or chosen, who is saved from the beginning. These "chosen ones" were called "the elect." How an individual behaved and lived did not determine if he or she was saved. (However, good behavior was often taken as "evidence" that the individual might be saved.)

Because of the Puritan covenant with God and the belief in predestination, conformity and the social order was necessary. There was no "separation of church and state" as we know it today. Puritans in Massachusetts lived under a theocracy, a government where the supreme leader, town authorities were essentially religious and their job was to enforce the law of God.

QUESTION: Imagine you were born into the Puritan belief in predestination and theocracy? Explain!

Puritanism

STATION 3: BELIEF IN WITCHCRAFT

Puritans believed in witchcraft—but not in the way we think of witchcraft or witches today. The Puritans' strong belief in an omnipotent God also meant an acknowledgement in the Devil's existence. But they didn't merely acknowledge the Devil; the Puritans genuinely believed that he was constantly "at work" in the world, always looking to corrupt society and individuals. The Puritans thought that an invisible, supernatural world—the realm of the Devil—coexisted with the physical world. When things went wrong in Puritan society, whether it was disease, natural disasters, or other catastrophes, Puritans believed that the Devil was working among them and that God was punishing them. The constant fear of the Devil infiltrating society and of God punishing the colonists contributed to much paranoia. Whereas God would select the "chosen" ones who would receive the blessing of salvation, the Devil would hand-pick individuals to carry out his mission to defeat God.

These individuals, recruited by the Devil, were who the Puritans considered "witches" that had formed a pact with the Devil. The Puritans always had their guard up while they wondered if they were next-door neighbor or the person in the pews next to them at church could secretly be a witch. Although anyone and everyone could have been afflicted, women were considered to be easily tempted by the Devil and therefore more susceptible to witchcraft.

According to the Puritans, afflicted "witches" in allegiance with the Devil exhibited clear physical symptoms. There were also multiple "witch tests" that could supposedly be performed to determine if one was a witch. If an individual was accused of witchcraft and did not admit to the crime, he or she was usually hanged. Admitting to the crime of witchcraft would save one's life, but denying the accusations would result in death (usually hanging).

It is worth noting that the idea of witchcraft did not originate from the Puritans. In fact, it had been around for centuries, and there were many witch hunts in Europe prior to the Salem incident.

QUESTION: There are many theories that attempt to explain the Salem Witch Trials, a tragedy that caused over 200 accusations and 20 deaths. Based upon this information and your own insight, why do you think the Salem Witch Trials occurred?

Puritanism

STATION 2: THE "CITY UPON A HILL"

Excerpt from John Winthrop's famous "A Model of Christian Charity" speech:

The Lord will be our God, and delight to command a blessing upon us in all our wisdom, power, goodness and truth. We shall find that the God of Israel is a thousand of our enemies; when He shall make us a praise unto all eyes of succeeding plantations, "may the Lord make it like that of New England. **we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us.** So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world. We shall open the mouths of enemies to speak evil of the ways of God, and all professors for God's sake. We shall shame the faces of many of God's worthy servants, and cause their prayers to be turned into curses upon us till we be consumed out of the good land whither we are going.

QUESTION: What does Winthrop mean by the lines in bold? What do these lines reveal about the Puritans' beliefs?

Ditch your old introductory PowerPoint for these 4 engaging learning stations to help students learn about the Puritans of Salem

PERFECT AS AN INTRODUCTION TO PURITANISM OR "THE CRUCIBLE"



STATION 1: THE PURITAN CODE OF ETHICS

Read the following Puritan ethics, or moral guidelines.

1. God comes before everything.
2. One should fear God and his punishments.
3. One should always work hard.
4. Men are above women.
5. Women should always marry and bear children.
6. Vanity is sinful.
7. Religious differences should not be tolerated.
8. One should strive to live a simple life.
9. People must conform to maintain order.
10. People must work together for good of the community.
11. There is no time or place for leisure.
12. Children should be seen and not heard.
13. One should repress individual emotions.
14. Education is important (in order to understand God).
15. Any activity not done for God is sinful.

QUESTION: How do these ethics compare to your personal ethics, or moral guidelines? Do you share any ethics with the Puritans? Are there any ethics that are the complete opposite of your moral guidelines or beliefs? Explain the similarities and differences.



STATION 2: “CITY UPON A HILL” SERMON EXCERPT

Excerpt from John Winthrop’s famous “City upon a hill” sermon:

The Lord will be our God, and delight to dwell among us, as His own people, and will command a blessing upon us in all our ways, so that we shall see much more of His wisdom, power, goodness and truth, than formerly we have been acquainted with. We shall find that the God of Israel is among us, when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies; when He shall make us a praise and glory that men shall say of succeeding plantations, “may the Lord make it like that of New England.” **For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us.** So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world. We shall open the mouths of enemies to speak evil of the ways of God, and all professors for God’s sake. We shall shame the faces of many of God’s worthy servants, and cause their prayers to be turned into curses upon us till we be consumed out of the good land whither we are going.

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Because of the Puritan covenant with God and the belief in predestination, conformity and social order was necessary. There was no “separation of church and state” as we know it. Rather, the Puritans in Massachusetts lived under a **theocracy**, a government in which God is viewed as the supreme leader. Town authorities were essentially religious authorities, so people were not allowed to question those in charge. To do so would have been like questioning the bible or God himself.

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QUESTION: Imagine you were born into the Puritan faith. How would you feel about predestination and theocracy? Explain your reaction to both.

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