

1. What beliefs and character traits that typified the Pilgrims enabled them to survive in the hostile environment that greeted them in the New World? Did some of the same traits that helped them survive limit them in other ways? How so?
2. In *Of Plymouth Plantation*, a work quoted in *Mayflower*, William Bradford attributes the death of a “proud and very profane” sailor aboard the *Mayflower* to “the just hand of God” (pp. 30–31). What does this almost jubilant response to another person’s suffering suggest about the nature of Bradford’s religious beliefs? How did this attitude continue to reveal itself in the other experiences of the Pilgrims and the Puritans?
3. Philbrick shows us that many of the classic images that shape our current view of the Pilgrims—from Plymouth Rock to the usual iconography of the first Thanksgiving—have been highly fictionalized. Why has America forsaken the truth about these times in exchange for a misleading and often somewhat hokey mythology?
4. The Pilgrims established a tradition of more or less peaceful coexistence with the Native Americans that lasted over fifty years. Why did that tradition collapse in the 1670s and what might have been done to preserve it?
5. Discuss the character of Squanto. How did the strengths and weaknesses of his personality end up influencing history, and why did this one man make such a difference?
6. The children of the Pilgrims were regarded in their own time as “the degenerate plant of a strange vine,” unworthy of the legacy and sacrifices of their mothers and fathers (p. 198). Why did they acquire (and largely accept) this reputation? Was it deserved? Were the denunciations of the second generation a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy?
7. The Pilgrims and Puritans thought that the greatest gifts they could give the Indians were spiritual. The Indians, to the contrary, tended to be most impressed by the things the Europeans brought with them. How did this lack of agreement help to undermine relations between the two peoples? What were some of the other key misunderstandings that drove a wedge between the natives and the Europeans?
8. Compare Philbrick’s portrayals of natives in *Mayflower* with the ways in which they have been represented in popular culture, for instance, in Hollywood movies. How does *Mayflower* encourage us to rethink those representations? On the other hand, are there some popular images of Native Americans that seem to be somewhat rooted in what actually happened in the seventeenth century?
9. In the chaotic, atrocity-filled conflict known as King Philip’s War, does anyone emerge as heroic? If so, what are the actions and qualities that identify him or her as a hero?
10. As *Mayflower* shows, the American Indian tribes of New England were not a monolith, either culturally or politically. However, the English were not consistently able to think of them as separate tribes with different loyalties and desires. How did misconceptions of racial identity complicate the politics of King Philip’s War?
11. During King Philip’s War, significant numbers of Native Americans sided with the English. How do you regard those who took up arms against their fellow natives? Do you see them as treacherous, opportunistic, or merely sensible? If you had been a native, which side would you have taken, and why?

12. Philbrick shows that the English, as well as the American Indians, engaged in barbaric practices like torturing and mutilating their captives, as well as taking body parts as souvenirs. Could either side in King Philip's War make any legitimate claim to moral superiority? Why or why not?
13. Mary Rowlandson, who wrote a memoir of her abduction during the burning of Lancaster, Massachusetts, often used the word "strange" when trying to explain why God seemingly strengthened the "heathens" in their fight against the God-fearing English. Why was it so hard for Rowlandson to understand the political events going on around her? Why was it so important for her to see them in terms of divine justice?
14. Philbrick likens the story of King Philip to Greek tragedy. Is this a useful way of thinking about Philip and the war that bears his name? Why or why not?
15. One reviewer of *Mayflower* asserted that Nathaniel Philbrick "avoid[ed] the overarching moral issues [of his subject] and [took] no sides." Do you find this to be true? Are there moral lessons Philbrick wants us to learn? If so, what are they?
16. History often reveals as much about the time in which it was written as it does about the time it narrates. What aspects of *Mayflower* mark it as a book written in the early twenty-first century?
17. Philbrick says that the conditions that led to the outbreak of King Philip's War "remain a lesson for us today" (348). How do you think this may be true?