

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## A Journey to the New World: The Diary of Remember Patience Whipple

by  
Kathryn Lasky

### Book Information

Kathryn Lasky, A Journey to the New World: The Diary of Remember Patience Whipple

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Book Level: 6.0  
Interest Level: MG

Twelve-year-old Mem presents a diary account of the trip she and her family made on the "Mayflower" in 1620 and their first year in the New World.

**Award:** Jefferson Cup Award/Honor

**Topics:** Adventure, Travel; Historical Fiction, Historical Fiction (All); History, Colonial Period; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 3-5; Recommended Reading, Crown/Lamplighter Nominee; Series, Dear America; Transportation/Vehicles, Ships/Boats; U.S. States/Regions, Massachusetts

### Main Characters

Deacon Fuller the doctor who denies Will Butten medicine when Will is burning with fever

Dorothy Bradford William Bradford's wife; a melancholy woman who misses her son, whom she left behind in Europe

Elder Brewster the chief elder of the Saints; he resents the Saints' persecution by bishops in England

Father Mem's father, a highly respected carpenter

Giles Heale the doctor who treats Will Butten

Grace Whipple (Mam) Mem's mother, a gentle but outspoken woman

Hannah Potts a loving woman who speaks few words after the loss of her husband and newborn son; Father marries her after Mam dies

Humility Sawyer (Hummy) Mem's best friend; she returns to Europe with her father a year after arriving in the New World

Mary Chilton (Air Nose) a snobbish girl

Master and Mistress Billington (the Bilgewater) a crude, boisterous couple on the "Mayflower" who have little control over their sons

Remember Patience Whipple (Mem) the principal character of the story; a twelve-year-old Saint who writes about her experiences crossing the Atlantic and life in the New World

Samoset a Native American leader who knows the various tribes of the area and is helpful in negotiating treaties between the pilgrims and various tribes

Squanto a helpful Native American who converts to Christianity

Will Butten Mem and Hummy's friend who is the indentured servant of Deacon Fuller; he dies en route to the New World

William Bradford a respected Saint who is able to bring both Saints and Strangers together to sign a compact for living in the New World

### Vocabulary

**awl** a pointed tool for making holes

**coif** a cap

**hardtack** a hard biscuit

**incredulous** disbelieving, doubtful

**quill** a hollow tube

**scours** diarrhea

**scurvy** a disease caused by a lack of vitamin C, characterized by bleeding gums, bleeding under the skin, and extreme weakness

**shoal** a sandbar that makes navigation hazardous

### Synopsis

Remember Patience Whipple (Mem) is a twelve-year-old girl who is sailing across the Atlantic Ocean aboard the "Mayflower" in the year 1620. She and 101 other passengers are headed for the New World. Mem and her family, Father, Mam, and little sister Blessing, are members of the Saints of the Holy Discipline, who had left England and fled to Holland to avoid persecution by King James. They are part of a group of over forty Saints from Leyden who are seeking religious freedom in the New World. The remaining passengers are from England:

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a few Saints, and the majority Strangers, who do not hold to the Saints' beliefs. Mem chronicles the trip in diary entries that she addresses as "Dear Imp," short for Impatience which, unlike her name, describes her true temperament.

The voyage is a difficult one. Most of the passengers suffer from seasickness and diarrhea; moreover, the quarters are cramped and tempers flare. Mem has made a best friend, Humility, whom she calls Hummy. They pass the time playing word games and assigning people nicknames.

Hummy and Mem enjoy the company of Will Butten, who is an orphan indentured as a servant to Deacon Fuller, a doctor. The girls are charmed by Will's ability to keep the young children entertained. The Billington boys, however, are a mischievous pair who like to cause trouble. Their parents, who are Strangers, are no better than their children, as they have foul mouths and are constantly fighting.

Fever and General Sickness now strike the ship. A sailor is the first to succumb, and then Will falls ill. Deacon Fuller denies Will medicine, but Mem finds a doctor among the Strangers who is willing to help. Will soon dies, and Mem and Hummy mourn him.

Mem and Hummy are allowed to sleep in the longboat on deck to get out of the stuffy hold. It is from this vantage point that they first see land on the horizon after 65 days at sea. The ship lands near Cape Cod in early November, many miles north of their original destination of northern Virginia. The "Mayflower" attempts to sail south, but is caught in shoal water and tides, so it returns to Cape Cod.

No one disembarks from the ship, though, until the Saints and Strangers create a compact, or agreement, for living in the area. Master Bradford is instrumental in achieving the Mayflower Compact, and John Carver is chosen as governor. A party is sent to explore and returns that night with wood and news that no natives were spotted. Two days later, the women and children are brought to shore to do laundry, and the children's spirits soar because they are allowed to frolic on the sand. They return to the

safety of the ship that evening.

The men leave to explore the coast again for a good place to settle. They see Native Americans and find corn and fresh water. In early December, after men set out again to find a suitable place to build a settlement, Mrs. Bradford slips on the ice-covered deck, falls overboard, and drowns.

The men return and describe their journey. At one place, feathered men shot arrows at them, but the "Mayflower" men moved on and found a place with a good harbor and fertile land that they call Plimoth. The "Mayflower" weighs anchor and heads for Plimoth Harbor. The pilgrims go ashore as often as they can to build. First they construct a common house and then their individual homes.

Sickness takes its toll on the settlers; six people die in December, and scurvy plagues the living. January brings more illness and problems. Master Bradford, John Carver, and Mam are sick, two men are lost as they explore (although they finally return safely), and the Common House catches fire but is saved. The Whipples finally move into their own house in late January. Mem spends her days working with other women in the sick shed. More people are dying, and by mid-February Mam is also a patient in the sick shed. Seventeen people die in February.

March comes and signs of spring are in the air. Mam returns home, and although she is not well, her spirits rise. Hummy's father is melancholy, for he misses his dead wife, whom he buried in England. In mid-March a lone Native American, Samoset, comes into the settlement and converses with the leaders in English. On subsequent visits he brings other natives, and soon a treaty is signed between the pilgrims and surrounding tribes.

The presence of Samoset and especially his friend, Squanto, is a godsend to the pilgrims. They teach the pilgrims to fish for eel and give them tips on planting crops and gathering plants for medicinal purposes. Because of the excitement over Samoset and Squanto, Mem does not realize how sick her mother truly is. Her mother dies in early April, and

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only two days later, Hummy sails back to England with her father. Mem is devastated by the loss of her mother and best friend, and feels that her heart will forever remain in a dark, cold winter.

Mem does not write again in her diary until June. John Carver, the governor, has died and now William Bradford is governor. The pilgrims are already harvesting rye and tending their gardens. Talk begins about a major exploration to the Massachusetts province where the Indians are said to have many furs. The adults know they must soon send goods back to England to repay the people who financed their passage.

Meanwhile, Mem notices that Father is attracted to Hannah Potts, a recent widow. Mem is concerned because Hannah is so different from Mam -- Hannah hardly ever speaks. After Mem complains to Hannah about the annoying tsk sound Hannah makes with her tongue, Hannah writes Mem a note explaining that her behavior is caused by her profound grief over the loss of her husband and son. Mem feels guilty and gives Hannah a bouquet of wild flowers.

As summer progresses, Mem sees native children swimming and vows to learn to swim. Crouching among bushes, Mem watches the children several times. Squanto finds Mem one day and brings her into the natives' village, where she enters a wigwam and learns many things.

The time for Father to join the major exploration draws near, and Father tells Mem he would like Hannah to be his wife. Mem wonders if she will ever get used to Hannah. Several weeks after Father's return, Father and Hannah are married in a simple ceremony.

The harvest season is soon completed and William Bradford announces plans for a feast in which both pilgrims and Native Americans will gather to celebrate the fruits of their labor. Cooking and other preparations begin, and ninety Native Americans come to celebrate with the approximately fifty remaining pilgrims for three days of festivities. Mem

does not remember the last day of the feast, for she becomes deathly ill and does not regain consciousness for three weeks. Mem gains strength with the passing days. She walks a few days later to the top of the hill after a ship has been spotted on the horizon. The ship holds many dreams for her, but mostly the hope that Hummy has returned.

In the epilogue the reader learns that Mem never sees Hummy again. Mem marries at the age of nineteen and soon moves to Boston. She has twin girls, whom she names Humility and Grace. Blessing marries and she, too, moves to Boston, as does Hannah after Father dies. Mem's diary is discovered in 1850 by a great-great-great-granddaughter.

### Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

#### Initial Understanding

Why does Samoset boldly walk alone into the pilgrim village one day?

*Samoset already knows the ways of the English, for he can speak their language. No doubt word has reached him from the various tribes that a new group has arrived in Massachusetts and is building homes, indicating that the people are planning to stay. Samoset probably feels that it is wise to meet these new settlers and work out a treaty with the surrounding tribal people. He walks alone into the village because he knows it will be much less threatening to the settlers than if he were to arrive with a whole group of men. His boldness shows that he is confident and has nothing to hide. If he moves stealthily, he will cause suspicion. Once he gains the trust of the villagers, he is able to bring more Indians into the village and make a treaty.*

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### Literary Analysis

At one point in the story, after seeing all of the illness, Mem wonders if it would have been better to wait until the following spring to make the voyage, thereby avoiding winter in the New World. How might the story have changed if this were the case?

*Answers will vary. The pilgrims arrived in the fall chilled, sick, and undernourished. They established their village as storms and cold weather descended. Many died of various illnesses. If the pilgrims had arrived in spring or early summer, perhaps they would have had time to get crops in the ground and harvested before winter. Also, the group may have been able to explore more easily to find a settlement, thereby reducing their hardship and isolation.*

### Inferential Comprehension

Why was William Bradford so insistent that the passengers of the "Mayflower" create a compact, or agreement, before they went ashore?

*Bradford realized that because they had landed in an area not under the jurisdiction of law, they needed to create their own law. He understood the tension between the Saints and Strangers and the potential for conflict. He anticipated that disagreements would certainly arise within the group. Therefore, they needed a system in place for decision-making and peaceful resolutions so they could work together and survive in the new land.*

### Constructing Meaning

At the end of the diary, Mem is climbing a hill to gaze over the horizon to see a ship coming. It is a "ship of hopes and dreams" for her. As a student today, what does your "ship of hopes and dreams" hold?

*Answers will vary. Students should state their wishes for the future and what they envision for themselves, their families and friends, and their community.*

**Recognizing Feelings** Grieving is a normal process for someone who has lost or been separated from a loved one. However, grief can advance to depression. Depression is a common emotional disorder, but in Mem's day, little could be done to help depressed people. Most likely, both Master Sawyer and Dorothy Bradford suffered from this condition. Today, depression is a recognized illness that can be treated. Ask students to research this disorder. Students should use their research to prepare a pamphlet or poster listing the warning signs of depression and what options are available for help. Perhaps a school counselor or other mental health professional can talk to the class about this illness.

**Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning** Mem loves naming places, people, and things by using words that fit her impressions of them. For instance, she names her diary "Imp," and the site of battle with the Indians "The Place of Fire and Arrows." Ask students to compile a list of places, people, and things that are part of their everyday lives and assign nicknames to these items based on their impressions or interactions with them. Perhaps their lists will include nicknames for their school, family car, home, siblings, friends, and treasured possessions.

**Recognizing Detail** When the pilgrims arrive in the New World, they learn about the medicinal uses of native plant life. Herbal medicines and remedies have once again become popular. Have students compile a chart listing various herbs, roots, and leaves and how these plants maintain or restore health. The students should also list the places where the plants are found. If any of these plants grow wild in the area, perhaps some can be gathered for illustration.

**Understanding Hist/Cultural Factors** Will Batten and the More children are indentured servants. They are expected to pay the cost of their passage and room and board by acting as servants to their benefactors for a specific period of time. Although it may seem archaic, some people immigrating to the United States today come as indentured servants. Ask the students to

## Teachable Skills

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become news reporters and research this phenomenon. Then have them present their findings in a newspaper article or newscast.