

Thanksgiving Readers Theater from the September 5, 2005 issue of *Junior Scholastic* magazine.

Roles:

1. *William Brewster, a Separatist leader
2. *Mary Brewster, his wife
3. *Patience Brewster, 12, their daughter
4. *Jonathan Brewster, 14, their son
5. Ship captain
6. William Bradford, a Separatist leader
7. Thomas Weston, a London businessman
8. Separatist men
9. Francis Billington, a teen Stranger
10. Desire Minier, a teen Separatist Stranger
11. John Carver, a Separatist leader
12. Squanto, a Patuxet (pah-TUCK-et) Indian
13. Narrators A-E

*starred names are major roles

SCENE 1

NARRATOR A: It is a moonless night in the fall of 1608, on a lonely English shoreline on the North Sea. Dozens of Separatist families stand on the dock.

WILLIAM BREWSTER: Jonathan, put these tools in my bag.

MARY BREWSTER: Be careful, Jon. They're heavy.

NARRATOR A: The Brewsters and other families are waiting for a ship that will take them to Amsterdam, the largest city in Holland.

PATIENCE BREWSTER: It's so dark, Father. I'm scared.

BREWSTER: The ship will be here soon.

NARRATOR A: A thick fog covers the sea.

JONATHAN BREWSTER: I think I see a light.

PATIENCE: At last, the ship is here!

JONATHAN: Quiet, Patience. If the King hears us, we'll all be hanged.

PATIENCE: Is that true, Mother?

MARY: Jonathan has a big imagination. But we must be careful. If any of the men are caught, King James will have them imprisoned.

SHIP CAPTAIN: Come aboard, everyone!

NARRATOR A: English soldiers approach on horseback. The King has sent them to stop the Separatists from escaping.

BREWSTER: Jonathan, hand me my musket [gun]!

NARRATOR A: Mrs. Brewster turns to her husband.

MARY: The soldiers have found us! We Saints will all be killed!

NARRATOR A: The Separatists call themselves Saints. In their eyes, they are God's chosen people.

BREWSTER: Be strong, Mary. The ship is here.

SHIP CAPTAIN: Lift the anchor, men! We're off.

NARRATOR A: Wind fills the sails, and the ship leaves the dock. The Brewsters are safely on board.

PATIENCE: Now the King's men can't hurt us anymore!

BREWSTER: Soon we will be free to practice our own religion, as pure and simple as we like. All men are free in Holland.

NARRATOR A: A cold wind blows across the deck, and rain begins to fall.

SCENE 2

NARRATOR B: After a stormy voyage, the ship arrives in Amsterdam.

PATIENCE: The canals are so pretty here, and I love the clatter of wooden shoes!

NARRATOR B: But because of a conflict with other English settlers, the Separatists decide to move to Leyden [LY-dun], a small town in Holland.

JONATHAN: Look at all of these windmills!

BREWSTER: The most important thing is that we can worship God in peace.

PATIENCE: Yes, Father, and I've made new Dutch friends.

JONATHAN: We can even speak Dutch! Goede morgen.

PATIENCE: That means, "Good morning."

NARRATOR B: Mr. and Mrs. Brewster look at each other. Later, they talk quietly.

MARY: If we stay in Holland, our children will forget the English language and all of our customs.

BREWSTER: Yes, and it is difficult to make a living here.

NARRATOR B: Most of the Separatists grew up on farms. In Leyden, they must work in the cloth mills.

NARRATOR B: A dozen years pass. The Separatist group now numbers almost 600.

BREWSTER: William Bradford is on his way over.

NARRATOR B: Bradford, a young man, has become a leader of the group.

MARY: I hear him at the door.

BREWSTER: Welcome, Mr. Bradford.

WILLIAM BRADFORD: Good evening, sir. We have important business to discuss. As you know, life here is difficult. Some of us think it is best to leave Leyden.

MARY: Where can we go?

BRADFORD: Let us try our luck in the New World.

NARRATOR B: The Separatists negotiate with businessmen in London for financial support for their journey. Patience and Jonathan, now grown up, decide to stay in Holland.

SCENE 3

NARRATOR C: The Separatists need a large ship and enough supplies to make the long voyage.

THOMAS WESTON: I'll give you a ship and supplies-under one condition: For the first seven years, you must send me everything you earn.

BRADFORD: Seven years! We'll have nothing to show for our work.

SEPARATIST MEN: Forget it. We're staying here.

NARRATOR C: Most Separatists decide not to make the journey.

WESTON: Why should I finance your trip if so few of you are going? I'll find others to accompany you.

BRADFORD: We Saints can't travel with strangers. What if they're bad people?

WESTON: You heard my condition. Either you travel with the others or you stay here.

NARRATOR C: Like the Saints, most of the people they call "Strangers" are seeking a better life in the New World.

SCENE 4

NARRATOR D: After many delays, the Pilgrims depart on their ship, the Mayflower, from Plymouth, England, in September 1620. The group plans to settle in English territory controlled by the Virginia Company.

BRADFORD: God bless this journey.

NARRATOR D: Only 37 Saints from the Leyden community are aboard. Of the more than 100 passengers, about 30 are children. Below deck...

FRANCIS BILLINGTON: It stinks in here!

Desire Minter: You stink, Francis!

NARRATOR D: Mice scurry at their feet.

FRANCIS: I'm gonna puke.

DESIRE: Don't puke on me!

NARRATOR D: Storms rock the Mayflower, and many passengers get seasick.

FRANCIS: This lousy biscuit chipped my tooth! It's as hard as a rock.

DESIRE: Stop your complaining. My biscuit was filled with bugs.

NARRATOR D: The Strangers and the Saints try to get along, but tensions run high during the 65-day voyage.

STRANGER: We're almost there. Soon we can abandon these so-called Saints.

BRADFORD: Watch what you say. We must work together in the New World.

NARRATOR D: During the journey, the Mayflower is blown off course. In November, the weary passengers find themselves off the coast of Cape Cod.

BRADFORD: Winter is approaching, and we're almost out of food. Why don't we stay here?

BREWSTER: All right, but we had better establish some laws. Don't forget, we're on our own. Who knows how much we can trust these Strangers?

NARRATOR D: The leaders of both groups come to an agreement.

JOHN CARVER (reading): "In the presence of God, and one another, we combine ourselves together into a civil body politic [organized group], for our better ordering and preservation."

NARRATOR D: Forty-one men sign the Mayflower Compact. They elect Carver as their first Governor.

BRADFORD: We are all in this together.

SCENE 5

NARRATOR E: In December, the Pilgrims find a hilly stretch on the mainland, near present-day Boston, where they build Plymouth Colony.

DESIRE: Winters here are miserable!

FRANCIS: I'll say. I miss London.

NARRATOR E: For weeks, there is nothing but rain, sleet, or snow.

BRADFORD: At least we've built a meeting room and a few small houses.

NARRATOR E: The men work quickly. Some of the children help.

FRANCIS: Carrying all those logs has made me tired and thirsty.

DESIRE: Too bad the well water froze.

NARRATOR E: During the first winter, more than half of the Pilgrims die, many from starvation.

BREWSTER: If we don't get help soon, we will lose all of our people.

BRADFORD: We must continue to pray.

NARRATOR E: In March, an Indian named Samoset arrives at the colony.

FRANCIS: Imagine, a real, live Indian!

DESIRE: The men were afraid Indians would attack us. But he's friendly.

NARRATOR E: Samoset doesn't speak much English. He promises to send his friend, Squanto, to help the Pilgrims.

BRADFORD: At last, Squanto is here!

SQUANTO: Greetings. I have known other Englishmen before you. They taught me your language.

BRADFORD: We are glad to see you. Our people are suffering greatly.

NARRATOR E: Squanto shows the Pilgrims how to plant corn in a new way. In each row, he buries small fish.

DESIRE: Will the corn smell bad?

SQUANTO: Not at all. The fish will help the corn grow. It's a fertilizer.

NARRATOR E: Thanks to Squanto, many crops grow-corn, beans, and squash. He also builds a bear trap.

BRADFORD: We owe you a huge debt. Bring your people here for a feast.

NARRATOR E: The Pilgrims and the Indians play games together at their harvest celebration. They eat corn, deer, fish, and goose.

SQUANTO: First, the white men must talk to the Great Spirit. Then we can eat.