The Pilgrims’ journey to the New World was a long and difficult one. Read the following selection about the Pilgrims’ search for a new home and answer the questions that follow.

Saints and Strangers on the Ship of Hope
by Pam Cannon

The two sturdy ships sat moored to the dock, water lapping against their hulls. John Alden, the barrel maker hired for the trip, checked the barrels of salted beef, fish, biscuits, peas, cheese, and dried fruit as they were stored in the hold. Master William Brewster, magnificent in his purple coat, loaded the last of his books.

Small knots of people huddled on the dock, exchanging tearful good-byes. When the passengers were safely on board, the Mayflower and her smaller companion, the Speedwell, creaked toward the open sea. The Pilgrims’ journey to the new world had begun.

Two separate groups dared to risk the trip to America. Only about fifty Pilgrims, or Saints as they called themselves, sought religious freedom. They were led by William Bradford. The rest, like John Alden, were seeking fortune and adventure. The Saints called those passengers the Strangers. They nicknamed the Mayflower the Ship of Hope.

In the weeks before they set sail, the groups argued over money, supplies, and leadership. Thomas Weston, a London businessman who had loaned the Saints money, became disgusted with the fighting and refused to give them more to pay for additional supplies. “We are forced to sell . . . provisions,” one Saint wrote.

What could they do without? The food had to last a year because it would take that long to grow crops. But they could sacrifice the butter, so they sold two tons of it to pay for the remaining supplies.

This was just the beginning of the groups’ troubles. After only three days at sea, the Speedwell sprung dangerous leaks, and both ships turned back. “If we had stayed at sea three or four hours more,” wrote Robert Cushman, one of the Saints, “she would have sunk right down.”

A week of precious good weather was wasted while the ship was repaired in England, then they set out once again. But three weeks into the trip, the Speedwell started leaking again.

The two ships limped back to Plymouth, England, and the voyagers now made an agonizing decision: They would leave the Speedwell and twenty of her passengers behind. All of her supplies and her remaining twenty passengers boarded the Mayflower, already crowded with more than eighty passengers, sailors, and crew.

The Mayflower finally left England’s shores for the last time. “September 6. These troubles being blown over and all being compact together in one ship, they put to sea again with a prosperous wind,” wrote William Bradford in his journal.

Life on board the ninety-foot Mayflower was loud and uncomfortable. There was no privacy, and most people slept side by side anywhere they could find a space. The lack of water for washing forced everyone to wear the same clothes day and night, and everyone reeked of sweat, dirt, and seawater. Buckets served as the only toilets.

But the people managed. In calm weather, they could walk in the fresh air. Children played on the water-slick deck.

No one looked forward to mealtime. The passengers choked down the same food day after day—salted beef or fish and biscuits as hard as dog biscuits. After a few weeks, most of the food was crawling with maggots, weevils, and other insects. The water was even worse—it stunk and had a slimy, oily feel. After a while it settled and
became drinkable, but most passengers drank beer instead. They believed that water was unhealthy.

A hot meal was a rare treat. Since fire was a constant danger on a rolling, moving ship, only one small box filled with sand was available for building a cooking fire. Each family took turns using the box, and the women usually made a salt-beef stew called **loblolly**. Most people liked the soup because they were able to soften their biscuits in it! Also, any insects in the biscuits and the beef rose to the top of the soup and could be easily skimmed off.

Each day the captain, Master Jones, worriedly watched for storms. The delays had forced the group to travel during the Atlantic storm season. The slow pace of the ship made the chances of hitting a storm much greater.

After several weeks of calm sailing, the cold Arctic storms finally hit. Below decks, passengers huddled in the stinking darkness as waves pounded the ship.

“Even the sailors prayed. Many of us want to turn back,” a passenger later wrote. The *Mayflower*’s wooden hull creaked and groaned as the angry ocean slammed into it. For days the passengers believed that every roll and toss meant their deaths.

Then, amid their prayers and screams of fright, a deafening crack split the air. The main beam had broken and crashed into the deck above, and water cascaded into the hull. The men rushed to the deck and tried to push the enormous timber back into place. It was impossible.

Then the captain remembered the "great iron screw" the passengers had brought to raise houses in the new world. Sailors heaved the screw up and braced it under the beam. It held! Everyone was safe—for now.

Week after week, the captain and his crew fought the ocean as the passengers became sick and restless below. One Stranger, John Howland, managed to get to the deck and was immediately washed into the sea.

But luck was with John. “He caught hold of the topsail halyards which hung overboard and . . . held his hold (though he was sundry fathoms underwater) till he was hauled up,” William Bradford wrote. “His life was saved.” A few days later, the seas calmed.

One dark morning everyone was awakened by a sound many thought they’d never hear: a sailor shouting “Land ho!” Everyone rushed to get their first glimpse of land in sixty-five days.

“They fell upon their knees and blessed the God of Heaven,” William Bradford wrote. It was November 11, 1620, and the Saints and Strangers had found their new home.

1. What is the **main** purpose of this selection?
   
   A to compare the two different groups who sailed on the *Mayflower*
   
   B to tell what the *Mayflower* was like when it sailed for the New World
   
   C to describe the journey that the *Mayflower* took to the New World
   
   D to explain how people aboard the *Mayflower* cooked their food

2. In the first two paragraphs, which of the following is proved false by facts that come later in the selection?
   
   A John Alden was a barrel maker hired for the trip.
   
   B Both the *Mayflower* and the *Speedwell* were sturdy ships.
   
   C The *Mayflower*’s hold was filled with food for the trip.
   
   D The *Mayflower* was bigger than the *Speedwell*.

3. Which of the following statements about the Strangers is supported by the selection?
   
   A They did not want to leave England.
   
   B They argued with the Saints for the entire trip.
   
   C They had more money for supplies for the trip.
   
   D They had different goals than the Saints had.

4. Based on the selection, why was the *Mayflower* loaded with enough food to last a year?
   
   A The travelers would need food while their crops grew in the New World.
   
   B A trip across the Atlantic Ocean took about that long in the 1600s.
   
   C The travelers had extra food in case they got lost going to the New World.
   
   D The travelers planned to use the extra food to trade for supplies in the New World.
5. What was the **most likely** reason that having a cooking fire on the *Mayflower* was considered dangerous?

   A. The ship could roll, and the fire could burn the ship.

   B. The ship could roll, and the fire would be lost overboard.

   C. The ship could roll, and a passenger’s clothes could burn.

   D. The ship could roll, and the food being cooked might be lost.

6. Based on the selection, what was **most dangerous** about the trip?

   A. the lack of privacy

   B. the quality of the food

   C. the lack of space

   D. the bad weather

**End of Set**

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## Answers to

### Grade 6 Reading Comprehension Sample Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Passage Title</th>
<th>Question Number</th>
<th>Correct Answer</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Thinking Skill</th>
<th>Objective Number</th>
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<td>Cognition</td>
<td>Analyzing</td>
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<td>Analyzing</td>
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