Much of your knowledge about past events comes from primary and secondary sources. William Bradford’s *Of Plymouth Plantation* is a primary source. It offers first had information on the Pilgrims. In 1933, genealogist Alicia Crane Williams wrote on the same topic. Unlike Bradford, however, Williams did not experience the events firsthand. Her article is a secondary source.

from *Women and Children First: The Mayflower Pilgrims*  
by Alicia Crane Williams

When the ship *Mayflower* sailed from Plymouth, England, in September 1620 on her voyage into history, she carried 102 passengers, of which nearly half were women and children. Eighteen of the passengers were wives accompanying their husbands to the New World; with them, they brought thirty-one children ranging in age from a nursing infant to teenagers. In addition, at least three of the women were pregnant during the voyage...

Elizabeth Hopkins gave birth to her son Oceanus at sea while also mothering her two-year-old daughter Damaris and her stepchildren, thirteen-year-old Constance and ten-year-old Giles. Miraculously, all survived the voyage and the first winter, although Oceanus and Damaris did not live to adulthood. Five more children were eventually born to the Hopkinses in this inhospitable new land...

In early December 1620, Susanna White gave birth to her son Peregrine on board the *Mayflower* while it was anchored in the shelter of Cape Cod. Two months later, her husband William died, leaving her with the baby and their five-year-old son Resolved. In May, Susanna married Edward Winslow, whose first wife had died during the winter. Susanna and Edward's marriage, the first performed in the new colony, produced five children, although only two survived their childhoods. Resolved and Peregrine lived to adulthood, married women of the colony, and fathered fifteen children between them.

Dorothy Bradford, William's wife, left behind her only child, two-year-old John, when she accompanied her husband to the New World. She fell overboard from the *Mayflower*, anchored near Cape Cod, while William was away searching for a settlement site. Although Bradford and his contemporaries recorded the event as accidental, rumors persist to the present day that Dorothy actually committed suicide...

Forty-one-year-old Elinor Billington and her family numbered among the “Strangers” aboard the *Mayflower*. Bradford called the Billingtons “one of the profanest families among us” and could not imagine how they “shuffled into [our] company.” John Billington constantly quarreled with the Bradford and other leaders and kept company with troublemakers. In 1630 he was convicted of murder, gaining the distinction of being the first person executed by hanging in the New World.

The Billingtons’ two sons---John, sixteen years old, and Francis, some years younger---apparently terrorized the other passengers throughout the voyage. Francis endangered the ship by firing his father’s fowling piece, igniting a fire that almost spread to nearby
barrels of gunpowder. And young John got lost in the woods in May 1621, only to be rescued by Indians and returned to a ten-man search party sent from the colony. The troublesome youth died a few years later, but Francis survived to marry and father nine children.

Priscilla Mullins---today probably the best-known of all the Mayflower colonists---would have been about sixteen years old when she supposedly attracted the simultaneous attention of friends John Alden, a cooper hired by the company in Southhampton, and Miles Standish, a man of military experience who looked after the colony’s defense. Priscilla had arrived in New England with her parents, William and Alice, and her brother Joseph, all of whom perished during the first winter. Captain Standish, who was one of only two people not afflicted with the illness that took so many lives, had lost his wife Rose to the epidemic.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s poem *The Courtship of Miles Standish* immortalized the legend of how Standish asked Alden to carry his marriage proposal to Priscilla, who replied, “Why don’t you speak for yourself, John?” Married soon after, John and Priscilla had ten children, who produced sixty-nine grandchildren and nearly four hundred. Miles Standish found a bride elsewhere and fathered seven children.

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**On a separate word document, answer the following questions about this reading. Type and submit your answers to Turnitin.com.**

1. Bradford himself would have known most of the details that Williams provides about Elizabeth and her children. What information does Williams give that Bradford may not have known?

2. Williams has chosen to focus on the women and children among the Pilgrims. What can infer about her choice, based on the details she provides?

3. The Billingtons, Williams quotes from Bradford, are “one of the profanest families among us.” What does the quotation from Bradford’s account add to our own account of the Billington family?

4. Bradford’s narrative comes alive with interpretive commentary based on his observations of events, while Williams’s is an objective, factual narrative. How would you account for the differences in tone between the two narratives?

5. After reading Bradford’s account and William’s narrative, what is your reaction to the experiences of the Plymouth colonists? Did you find one of the accounts more informative than the other? More interesting? More moving? Record your responses.