**DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING**

The extracts from William Bradford and Dee Brown both describe the life of the early English settlers in America. How are the two accounts similar? How do they differ?

Consider how each text describes:

* The colonists’ view of the native Americans;
* The Native Americans’ view of the colonists;
* The land and its resources.

William Bradford and Dee Brown both describe the life of the English colonists in America, but even if they tell about the same event, their books are very different from each other because they adopt different points of view. Many differences are highlighted in the two extracts: “Hardship of the First American Settlers” (from “History of Plymouth Plantation” by William Bradford) and “The Colonization of North America” (from ““Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee” by Dee Brown).

The main difference is that William Bradford, one of the Pilgrim Fathers who left England in order to escape religious persecution, narrates the colonization of America from the English colonists’ point of view and he focuses on the problems and difficulties that they had to deal with when they first settled in America; while Dee Brown, who has not lived the experience in a direct way since he has lived in the twentieth century, narrates the arrival of the colonists from the Native Americans’ point of view after a work of historical research based both on native Americans’ documents and European colonists’ ones.

In the extract from “History of Plymouth Plantation”, dated back to 1650-51, William Bradford describes the colonists’ conditions of privation and loneliness when, crossed the ocean, they came to the New World. He insists on their need to be self-sufficient and highlights his negative approach to the new land using repeatedly the absolute negation. The text is also filled withBiblical references which reveal that their Puritan beliefs were the cause of their racist attitude and prejudices about the Native Americans and the new land they were going to colonize. Indeed they expect to be attacked by the Natives as the Apostles had been attacked by the barbarians in an episode narrated in the Acts of Apostles and since the Pilgrims arrived in America during the winter, which is a “sharp and violent” season, they find a “hideous and desolate wilderness (…) full of woods and thickets” that reinforced their negative idea of the new land.

All that revulsion against the “wilderness” is significant because it reveals the English settlers felt still part of the civilized world they had left behind them and they didn’t consider the natives as their equals, but as “barbarians”.

Their sense of desolation and hopeless is also conveyed by the affirmation of the impossibility to “go up to the top of Pisgah”, the mountain in Palestine, also called Mount Jordain, where Moses got a view of the Promised Land. So in William Bradford’s thinking the “Promised Land” remains a mirage for the Puritans who can only trust in the God’s grace.

In the extract from “Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee”, published in 1971, Dee Brown informs the reader that English colonists would not survive at the first winter without the help of the natives who looked at them as “helpless children”. Indeed the Natives fed them with corn from their tribal stores and decided to share with the “white men” their knowledge about fishing and cultivating. So he insists on the fact that not only the natives had been welcoming, but also they accepted to give their land to the colonists and still they lived in peace.

The action of deforestation initiated by the colonists is also presented as a terrible thing since they were destroying the Pemaquid’s land, that actually belonged (in their beliefs) to the Great Spirit.

Dee Brown underlines that, while the Natives Americans have chosen to help the Pilgrim Fathers when they needed, the colonists ignored their needs when the Englishmen’s colonization spread farther and the Native Americans were forced to go back in the wilderness. So in his book the narrator tells about the colonization of North America focusing on the insensibility of the colonists towards the fate of the Native Americans.