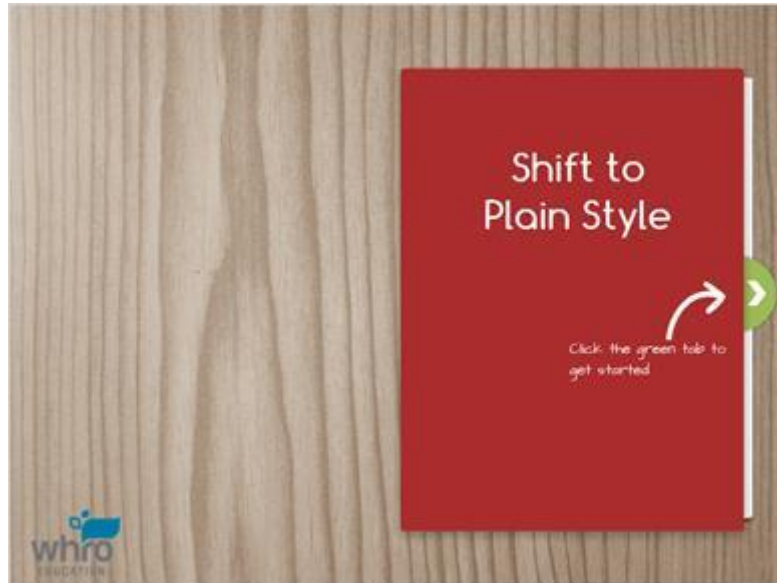


**Module 3: The Influence of Faith on Colonial American Literature**  
**Topic 3 Content: Shift to Plain Style Notes**

**Shift to Plain Style**

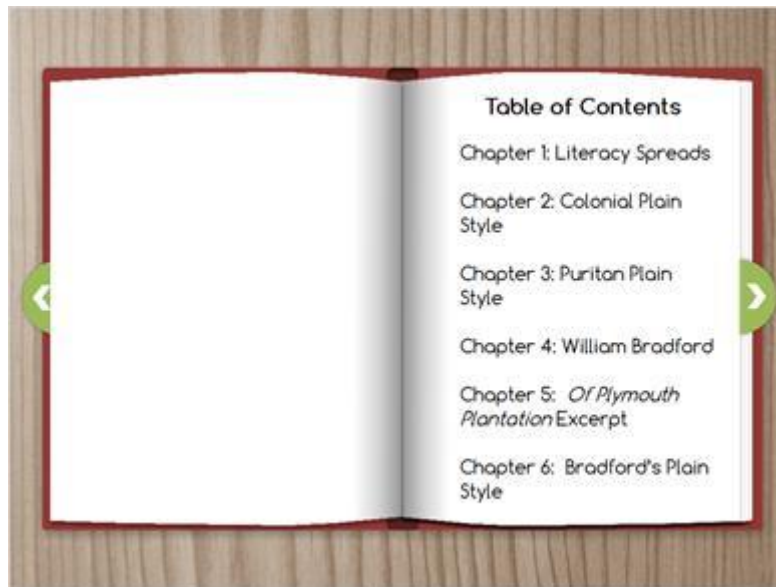


**Shift to Plain Style**

## Module 3: The Influence of Faith on Colonial American Literature

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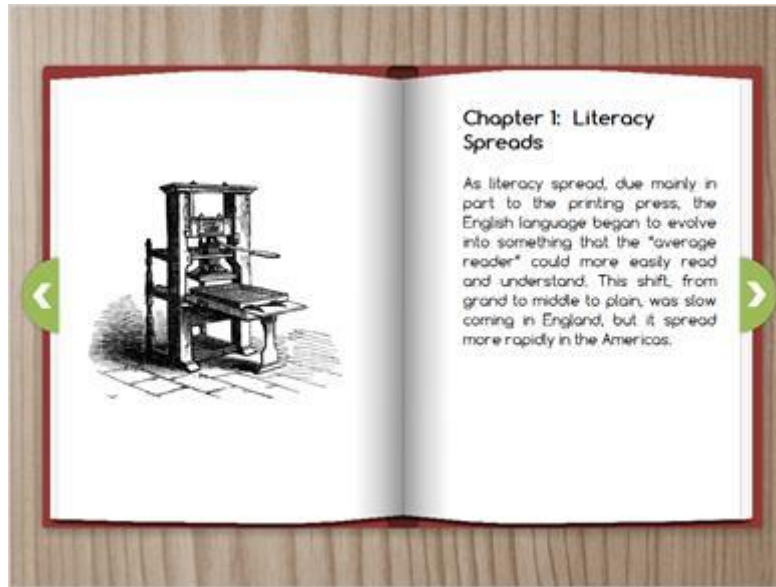


Click the green tabs in the book to move through the interactivity and learn more about how the English language in America shifted away from grand style.

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#### Literacy Spreads

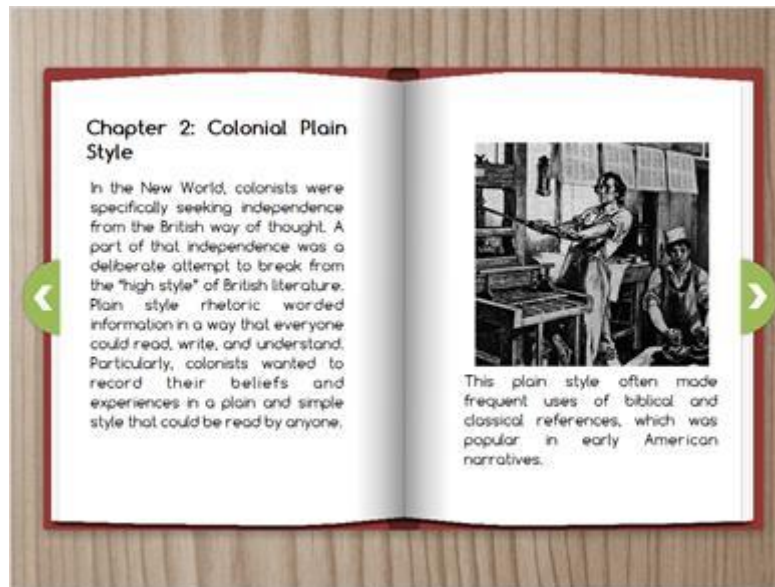


As literacy spread, due mainly in part to the printing press, the English language began to evolve into something that the "average reader" could more easily read and understand. This shift, from grand to middle to plain, was slow coming in England, but it spread more rapidly in the Americas.

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#### Colonial Plain Style

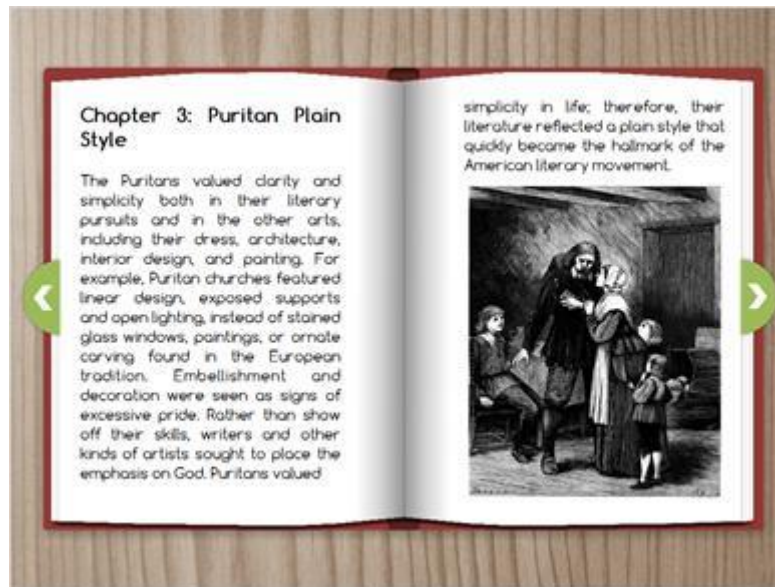


In the New World, colonists were specifically seeking independence from the British way of thought. A part of that independence was a deliberate attempt to break from the "high style" of British literature. Plain style rhetoric worded information in a way that everyone could read, write, and understand. Particularly, colonists wanted to record their beliefs and experiences in a plain and simple style that could be read by anyone. This plain style often made frequent uses of biblical and classical references, which was popular in early American narratives.

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#### Puritan Plain Style

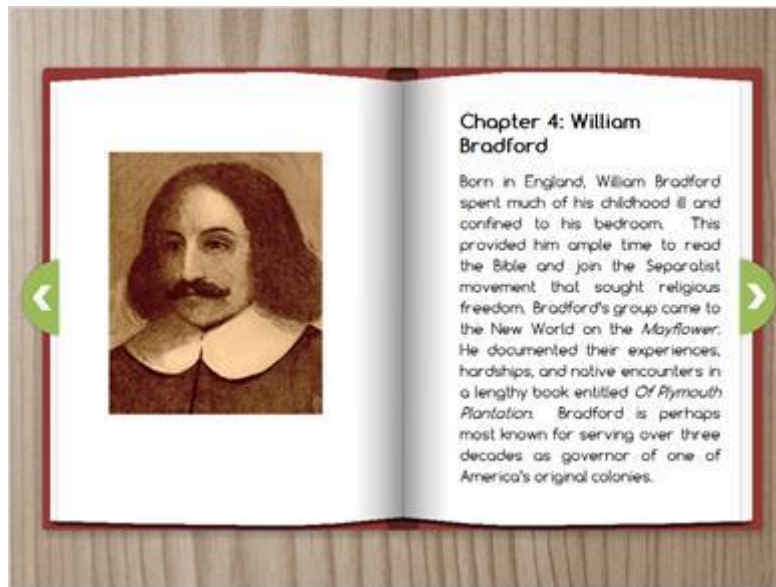


The Puritans valued clarity and simplicity both in their literary pursuits and in the other arts, including their dress, architecture, interior design, and painting. For example, Puritan churches featured linear design, exposed supports and open lighting, instead of stained glass windows, paintings, or ornate carving found in the European tradition. Embellishment and decoration were seen as signs of excessive pride. Rather than show off their skills, writers and other kinds of artists sought to place the emphasis on God. Puritans valued simplicity in life; therefore, their literature reflected a plain style that quickly became the hallmark of the American literary movement.

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#### William Bradford

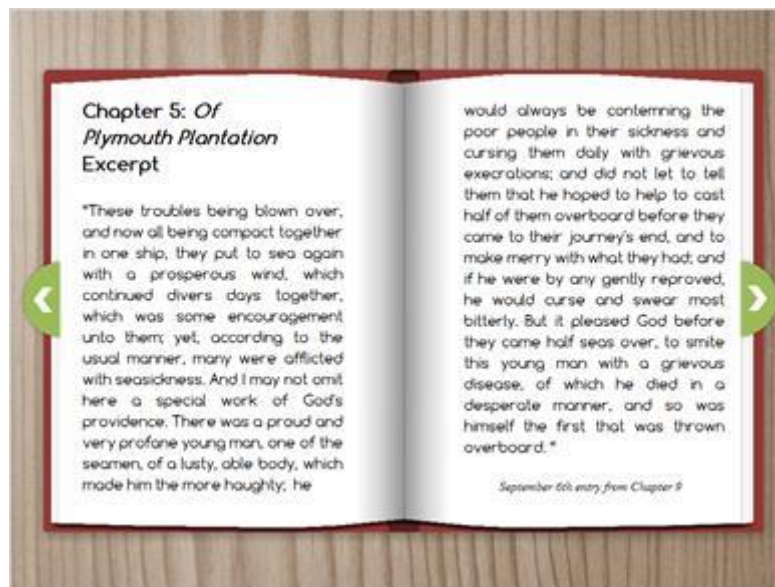


Born in England, William Bradford spent much of his childhood ill and confined to his bedroom. This provided him ample time to read the Bible and join the Separatist movement that sought religious freedom. Bradford's group came to the New World on the *Mayflower*. He documented their experiences, hardships, and native encounters in a lengthy book entitled *Of Plymouth Plantation*. Bradford is perhaps most known for serving over three decades as governor of one of America's original colonies.

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#### *Of Plymouth Plantation* Excerpt



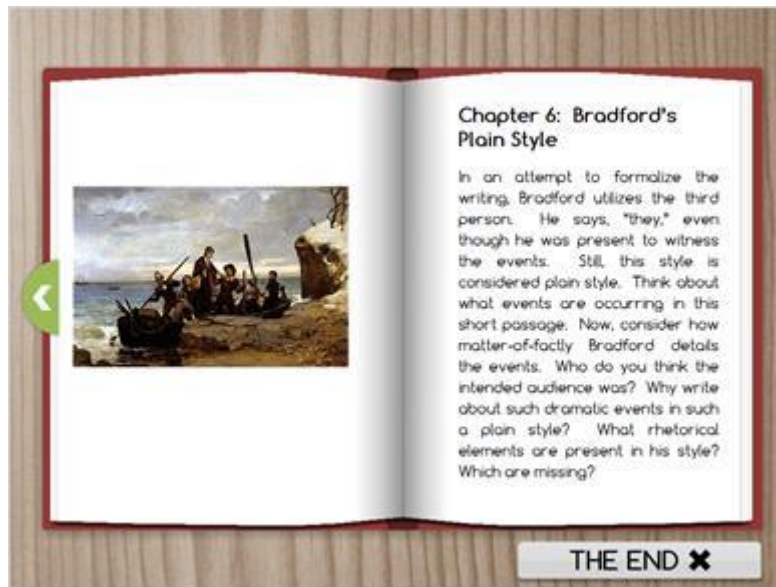
"These troubles being blown over, and now all being compact together in one ship, they put to sea again with a prosperous wind, which continued divers days together, which was some encouragement unto them; yet, according to the usual manner, many were afflicted with seasickness. And I may not omit here a special work of God's providence. There was a proud and very profane young man, one of the seamen, of a lusty, able body, which made him the more haughty; he would always be contemning the poor people in their sickness and cursing them daily with grievous execrations; and did not let to tell them that he hoped to help to cast half of them overboard before they came to their journey's end, and to make merry with what they had; and if he were by any gently reprov'd, he would curse and swear most bitterly. But it pleased God before they came half seas over, to smite this young man with a grievous disease, of which he died in a desperate manner, and so was himself the first that was thrown overboard. "



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#### Bradford's Plain Style



In an attempt to formalize the writing, Bradford utilizes the third person. He says, “they,” even though he was present to witness the events. Still, this style is considered plain style. Think about what events are occurring in this short passage. Now, consider how matter-of-factly Bradford details the events. Who do you think the intended audience was? Why write about such dramatic events in such a plain style? What rhetorical elements are present in his style? Which are missing?