1. **The difference between Cavaliers, Pilgrims and Puritans**

   The "politics" of New England were quite different than those of the Virginia colony, and they centered on the intersection between church and state. There were four main factions that are important to understanding the cultural politics of the texts we are going to read. The first, most obviously, were the tribes that inhabited the northeast. The other three were:

   - **Cavaliers** — *supporters* of the Church of England, the English State, and English traditions. Valued pleasure-seeking and promoted the interests and values of the aristocracy.

   - **Pilgrims** — *Separatists* who had fled England to Holland, and then set out for Plymouth Colony in New England. They believed that the Church of England was so corrupt it must be abandoned completely.

   - **Puritans** — *Non-conformists* who refused to adhere to the rule of the Church of England, but hoped to be agents of regeneration for it. They sought to purify themselves and their faith, and hoped by so doing to purify the Church and rid it of corruption. They were persecuted in England, and seen as dangerous dissenters. Puritans came from a range of classes, but many of the leaders were from educated and comfortable classes.

2. **Puritan Theology**

   Puritan colonization had religious motivations, and although these were not the sole (or always the primary) factors shaping colonial life, they were almost always central to the way Puritans *represented* themselves and their communities. Therefore, a basic 'literacy' in the doctrines of Puritanism can be quite helpful in interpreting the work of Puritan writers. Here are a few (admittedly simplified) elements of Puritan theology:

   - Faith in God did not assure salvation, and even the faithful could be damned. This was because human nature, as a consequence of the Fall from Eden, was depraved and self-deceived. No matter how vigilant, a human could never avoid sinfulness, and no amount of good works could ever outbalance that innate sinfulness. Therefore, it was not possible to imagine that a person could ever "earn" salvation. Only God’s grace could save a human soul from damnation. If one was saved, it was a free and unmerited gift from God.

   - Salvation and Damnation were pre-determined. God had chosen a set number of the **Elect**, or **Saints**. These souls were part of a covenant with God. This was a covenant of Grace. Remember that salvation was not earned; if we understand that premise, the notion of *predestination* makes more sense. The gift of salvation is given at birth; you were given one of the souls that is to be saved.
The only way to know whether or not you were saved was through the experience of conversion. Conversion was an intense, even mystical experience through which God revealed signs that you were one of the saved. To be a member of the Puritan church (at least in its early years), you had to convince the members that you had experienced conversion.

Because human nature was depraved and self-deceived, even after conversion, there was always doubt. How could you be sure your conversion was real, and not self-deception? For this reason, Puritanism fostered a culture of intense self-scrutiny. Events of everyday life were to be examined constantly for signs of confirmation of one’s Election. We see this element in almost all Puritan writings. It fostered a certain suspicion of "affections" or "emotions", and tended to instead rely on the intellect.

Even though one could not earn salvation, (that would be a covenant of Works), it was important to cultivate good works and strive to become a more spiritual person. Puritans argued that Works helped prepare an individual to receive Grace, if it was so predestined. Many also argued that anyone who had received God's grace would naturally be inclined to good works; the grace of God's gift would inspire that soul to act in giving and loving ways toward others.

3. Puritan ideas of Community
The early goals of Puritan colonization are best understood as utopian. The idea was to build a more perfect society that could be a model that inspired the reformation of European societies. Puritans wanted to design their new communities around the values they felt were most important. The colony that resulted was patriarchal, theocratic, and strongly communitarian. While hierarchy was quite important to the Puritans, in certain respects they were far more egalitarian than other contemporary English societies. Their emphasis on the power of local congregations was a radical challenge to the traditional authority of the King as the head of both the Church and State. Puritans encouraged literacy among all, since reading the Bible was necessary if one was to take responsibility for one’s own spiritual progress.

Individual and community are organically linked in the Puritan ideology. We see this in John Winthrop's classic sermon, "A Model of Christian Charity", delivered to his shipmates during the crossing to America. Winthrop uses the metaphor of the body to describe the community of Christians united in love (298-9). This metaphor is Biblical, and originates from the concept that Christians are part of "the body of Christ." But this metaphor also shapes how Winthrop and other Puritans thought about the boundaries between individuals and their society. Private matters can have public importance, because the community is interconnected (299). In fact, Winthrop suggests that public matters take precedence over private concerns; in other words, private matters have effects on the entire community, much like an illness that afflicts one part of the body, if ignored, can infect the body as a whole (302). Ministers can circulate freely through homes within their jurisdiction. Individual signs of grace and doubt reflect on the status
of the larger community of the Elect, since all are bound to God in the same covenant.

God holds them to a higher standard because of the covenant; they alone are espoused to God. They carry his special commission, so he observes their actions with greater strictness and more expectation of fidelity. Winthrop plays on the fate of the Israelites, who (in their view) broke the Covenant and lost God's special favor. We see in Winthrop's conclusions a strong and urgent argument for cohesion — we must be "knit together" in this great work, or we will all fail. This emphasis on cohesion was what made the Puritans such successful colonists. Compare how they weathered starvation and war with the early attempts to set up colonies in Virginia, for instance.

Nevertheless, while the ideology of the colony represented the individual and the community in organic harmony, in practice and in politics, there was a deep tension between Individualism and Communalism. This tension, many critics have noted, is rooted in the ideology itself. Because Puritanism was founded on a radical break from authority, it had within it the possibilities of talking that rejection of authority to even more radical conclusions. This was a great fear for many of the colony leaders, and the anxiety over taking the rejection of hierarchy and authority too far can be seen in the Antinomianism controversy provoked by figures like Anne Hutchinson. The Antinomians argued that every saved soul had a direct relationship to God, via reading scripture, and hence they advocated that the individual was the true authority on spiritual truth, not the minister. Antinomianism took certain elements of Puritanism to an uncomfortable extreme; it was too Individualistic, and too extreme in its view of Grace. The colony leaders were convinced it would destroy the cohesion necessary for the colony to survive, and so, much as one must sever a diseased limb to save the rest of the body from the infection, antinomians were tried and exiled. As the cohesion of the community continues to erode, these tensions will erupt again in an even more disturbing form in the Witch trials.

4. **Puritan literary styles**
   All of the features of Puritan belief mentioned above shaped Puritan literary tastes. Puritanism favored literary styles of introspection and self-examination, especially spiritual autobiographies and sermons. Because individual states of grace and doubt could be read as signs of the state of the larger community, there was both great interest and great need for interpreting everyday experiences for signs that confirmed the idea that this was a community of the Elect, or saved.

Puritans also favored what is called "plain style," More elaborate literary forms were suspect, so Puritan writing is "plain" and unornamented. Poetry was acceptable, as long as it was used as a medium for spiritual meditation. The spiritual autobiography becomes a significant influence for later American writers, as does the Puritan captivity narrative.