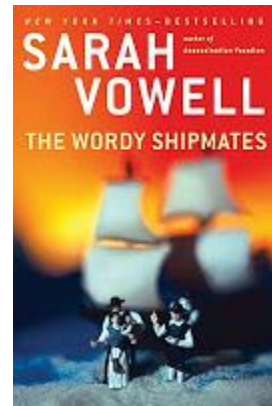


## Reading Guide:

### ***The Wordy Shipmates***

Sarah Vowell



### Thought Questions:

1. What would you say the author's main arguments about the Puritans were? What does *she* want you to take away from the book? Did you see her strong opinions as an asset to the book, or a detriment?
2. Did you change your perspective on the Puritans after reading this book? How?
3. Did you find Sarah Vowell's approach interesting and insightful, and if so, how does she achieve this? Did you feel that her references to contemporary culture and politics added to or took away from her discussion of the Puritans? Her use of humor? Do you think the book will hold up over time?
4. Roger Williams and John Winthrop are contrasted in this book, both personally and in terms of their religious and political beliefs. Did you find one or the other more sympathetic?
5. This book has an unusual structure, being written without traditional chapters. Did you find this affected your understanding or enjoyment?
6. What is the most important or memorable thing you will recall from having read this book? What surprised you most?
7. Would you recommend this book to others? Who do you think would enjoy it?
8. Are there related books, museum exhibitions, websites, or other resources that you would like to share with fellow readers of this book?

**Author Biography (excerpted from Daily Show biography)**

Sarah Vowell is the *New York Times* bestselling author of five nonfiction books on American history and culture. By examining the connections between the American past and present, she offers personal, often humorous accounts of everything from presidents and their assassins to colonial religious fanatics, as well as thoughts on American Indians, utopian dreamers, pop music and the odd cranky cartographer.

Vowell was a contributing editor for Public Radio Internationals *This American Life* from 1996-2008. She was one of the original contributors to McSweeney's and has been a columnist for Salon.com, Time, San Francisco Weekly and has written occasional essays for the opinion page of the New York Times. Vowell has made numerous appearances on the Late Show with David Letterman, Late Night with Conan O'Brien and the Daily Show with Jon Stewart. She was the voice of teen superhero Violet Parr in Brad Bird's Academy Award-winning *The Incredibles*, a Pixar Animation Studios film.

Clips of her Daily Show appearances can be viewed here: <http://www.thedailyshow.com/news-team/sarah-vowell>

**If you liked *The Wordy Shipmates*, you may enjoy the following books:**

***Assassination Vacation* by Sarah Vowell (2006):**

In this book, the author takes a road trip across America to the sites of various American political assassinations, with a particular focus on the plot to kill Abraham Lincoln. She visits museums, historic sites, statues, libraries, anything remotely relevant to successful presidential assassins, and a few of those not so successful. Vowell infuses her unique humor into the fascinating story of how these assassinations have been represented by popular culture, including literature, architecture, sculpture, and the historical tourism that springs up at the sites of these crimes.

***Building a New Jerusalem: John Davenport, a Puritan in Three Worlds* by Francis J. Bremer (2012):**

A brand new book that focuses on John Davenport and the founding of New Haven published by Yale University Press. Francis J. Bremer restores the clergyman to importance by examining Davenport's crucial role as an advocate for religious reform in England and the Netherlands before his emigration, and his significant contributions to colonial America. Davenport was in many ways a remarkably progressive leader for his time, with a strong commitment to education for both women and men, a vibrant interest in new science, and a dedication to upholding democratic principles in churches at a time when many other Puritan clergymen were emphasizing the power of their office above all else.

***In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692* by Mary Beth Norton (2003):**

Cornell historian Norton offers fresh and provocative insights into the much-studied Salem witchcraft trials. Using newly available materials from the trial records, letters and diaries, she argues that a complex of political, military and religious factors led to the outbreak of hysterical fits and other behavior that ended in the infamous trials. Part of the originality of this study lies in Norton's refusal to read events through the lens of contemporary psychology, offering instead a lively account of the ways 17th-century men and women would have thought about them.