The *Mayflower* and the Gulf Stream

Read the information below independently or in small groups.

Those aboard the *Mayflower* didn't know it, but the strong Atlantic Gulf Stream current delayed their voyage. Weather patterns that the current caused also made the trip dangerous.

Have you ever walked on a moving walkway like those at airports? People on the walkway move faster than people who are walking off of it. The Gulf Stream current is a bit like a moving walkway in the ocean. It flows faster than surrounding waters. It begins off the coast of Florida and flows north along the East Coast before turning toward Europe near Newfoundland. A strong current, the Gulf Stream slows down any ship trying to sail against it.

The warm waters of the Gulf Stream also affect weather and climate. Ireland, England, the Netherlands, and Norway have mild climates because of the current, even though they are so far north. But the warm waters also cause the formation of tropical storms and hurricanes, especially in late summer and early autumn.

It took nearly 150 years after the *Mayflower* crossing before Benjamin Franklin named and mapped this current. He based his map upon the observations of whalers and other seafarers. Once mariners accepted Franklin's findings, they realized that they could make the transatlantic voyage two weeks faster. They did this by crossing the current rather than trying to sail against it.

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