



# THE REAL STORY OF THANKSGIVING

## TEACHER'S GUIDE

**Turkey dinners, football games and parades — these are the modern-day trappings of the holiday celebrated on the fourth Thursday of November each year. But Thanksgiving is more than just a day of food and festivity. This new one-hour special traces the history of the holiday, from its origins in the early American colonies through the family feasts Americans enjoy today. *The Real Story of Thanksgiving* gives viewers a new understanding of how this much-loved holiday has changed over time.**

How did Americans start to associate Thanksgiving with cooperation between Native Americans and European settlers, and what really happened in Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1621? What role did Thanksgiving play during the Civil War, and why was it finally declared a national holiday in 1941? This program untangles fact from fiction, dispelling myths about the holiday and sharing new stories about how Thanksgiving traditions have developed. Viewers will also learn about the role Thanksgiving plays in popular culture, from the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade through the ever-present turkey dinner. After watching this program, students will have new insights into the meaning of Thanksgiving in our society today.

### Vocabulary:

Using a dictionary, encyclopedia, or other resource, students may want to define the following terms before or after watching this program. Students may also want to write down their own list of words to define as they are watching.

**Abundant**  
**Discreet**  
**Hostile**  
**Indispensible**  
**Puritan**  
**Spectacle**

**Communal**  
**Excess**  
**Idyllic**  
**Providence**  
**Quirky**  
**Tryptophan**

### Curriculum Links:

*The Real Story of Thanksgiving* would be useful for U.S. History, American Culture, and Social Studies courses. It is appropriate for 6th grade and above. Families may want to watch this program together and discuss the history of the Thanksgiving holiday.





### Discussion Questions:

1. Although feasts to give thanks had been celebrated for hundreds of years, the holiday was not officially celebrated in the U.S. until what year? Why do you think Thanksgiving was established as a national holiday?
2. The Pilgrims' survival depended on knowledge they gained from the Wampanoag people. What were relations like between the British in Plymouth and the Wampanoag? How did this change over time?
3. Today, many people still believe the myth that the Pilgrims and the Wampanoag shared one large feast together in 1621 to celebrate their cooperation and relationships. What did you learn from this documentary about the real story behind the meal they shared?
4. Who was Sarah Josepha Hale and what role did she play in establishing Thanksgiving as a national tradition? What were her goals for the Thanksgiving holiday?
5. What role did Thanksgiving play during the Civil War era? Why do you think President Lincoln encouraged everyone to participate in this tradition?
6. Why was Thursday chosen for Thanksgiving? Why did President Roosevelt move Thanksgiving from the fourth Thursday of November to the third Thursday of November and how did the nation respond?
7. The Macy's parade is associated today with Thanksgiving Day. How and when did the parade become a Thanksgiving tradition? How did Macy's contribute to WWII through its parade resources?
8. What kinds of food were most likely served at the feast between the Pilgrims and the Wampanoag? How does this compare with your family feast?
9. When did the tradition of playing and watching football games on Thanksgiving Day first start?
10. How do you think more people could learn about the history behind Thanksgiving?

## Primary Source:

### *Excerpt from Edward Winslow's 1621 account of the feast at Plymouth*

"...our harvest being gotten in, our governor sent four men on fowling, that so we might after a special manner rejoice together, after we had gathered the fruits of our labors; they four in one day killed as much fowl, as with a little help beside, served the Company almost a week, at which time amongst other Recreations, we exercised our Arms, many of the Indians coming amongst us, and amongst the rest their greatest king Massasoit, with some ninety men, whom for three days we entertained and feasted, and they went out and killed five Deer, which they brought to the Plantation and bestowed on our Governor, and upon the Captain and others. And although it be not always so plentiful, as it was at this time with us, yet by the goodness of God, we are so far from want, that we often wish you partakers of our plenty."

(Modern translation excerpted from Dexter, Henry M., ed. *Mourt's Relation or Journal of the Plantation in Plymouth: With an Introduction and Notes*. Boston: J. K. Wiggin, 1865.)

## Extended Activities:

- 1. Proclaiming Thanksgiving.** President George Washington issued a Thanksgiving Proclamation in 1789, and President Lincoln issued one in 1863. Online or at the library, ask students to locate these proclamations and compare and contrast them in class discussion or in a short essay. Students should note the context in which each proclamation was written and its relevance at the time.
- 2. What's on the Menu?** Working in small groups, ask students to research the menu at the 1621 Thanksgiving feast, and a typical 19th century Thanksgiving menu. Then, ask each group to create visual presentations on poster board, using PowerPoint, or in any other format about these menus. Students may also want to include their typical Thanksgiving menu today.
- 3. Thanksgiving Remembered.** Ask students to interview an older family member about the Thanksgiving traditions that he or she grew up with. Are these the same traditions that your family upholds today? Ask students to share the results of these interviews with their classmates.
- 4. A Time to Give Thanks.** Thanksgiving is a great time for everyone to remember what they are thankful for and share their time and resources with others. Ask students to write "thank you" notes to someone in their life or write short essays about giving thanks. Students may also want to get involved in community projects in which they can actively give thanks by helping others.



### Fill in the Blanks as you watch!

Thanksgiving is celebrated on the \_\_\_\_ Thursday of November each year throughout the U.S. Each year, \_\_\_\_\_ turkeys are produced in the U.S., and many of them are consumed at Thanksgiving dinners! Though another bird, the \_\_\_\_\_, is the national symbol, Ben Franklin once joked that it should be replaced with the turkey. Today, many Americans refer to the feast in Plymouth which took place in the year \_\_\_\_ as the first Thanksgiving. That fall, the Puritans joined with the \_\_\_\_\_ people for a feast. The traditional story has it that the Puritans invited these guests, though in fact they happened upon the feast, eventually bringing \_\_\_\_\_ along as a contribution to the meal. Some of the other foods the group may have eaten included \_\_\_\_\_. For hundreds of years, this feast was forgotten, yet a long tradition of giving thanks for the fall harvest continued. Thanksgiving also had roots in the Protestant tradition of thanking God; this was often a solemn day but over time it morphed into the time of feasting Americans enjoy today. In the 19th century, a woman named \_\_\_\_\_ advocated that Thanksgiving be declared a national holiday. Her efforts were unsuccessful, but she did help strengthen Thanksgiving traditions. President \_\_\_\_\_ issued a Thanksgiving proclamation in 1863 encouraging all Americans to gather together and give thanks, even in the midst of Civil War. Thanksgiving was finally declared a national holiday in \_\_\_\_ by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade is the largest in the country, it takes place in \_\_\_\_\_ City each year. During World War II, the parade balloons were used to help the war effort because they were made out of a valuable material which was \_\_\_\_\_. Thanksgiving is also a time to give thanks by giving back to others, a tradition which has lasted for hundreds of years up through today.

### Websites:

**Read more about Thanksgiving on History.com:**  
<http://www.history.com/topics/thanksgiving>

**Visit Plimoth Plantation online:**  
<http://www.plimoth.org>

**Resources for younger students from HMH:**  
<http://www.eduplace.com/monthlytheme/november/thanksgiving.html>

**Primary sources from the Library of Congress:**  
<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/thanksgiving/>

### Books:

Baker, James W. *Thanksgiving: The Biography of a Holiday*. (New Hampshire, 2009).

Bradford, William. *Of Plymouth Plantation: Bradford's History of the Plymouth Settlement*. (Dover, 2006).

Josephy, Alvin. *500 Nations: An Illustrated History of North American Indians*. (Gramercy, 2002).

Philbrick, Nathaniel. *Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community, and War*. (Viking, 2006).

Smith, Andrew F. *Eating History: Thirty Turning Points in the Making of American Cuisine (Arts and Traditions of the Table: Perspectives on Culinary History)*. (Columbia University Press, 2009).

Waters, Kate. *Sarah Morton's Day: A Day in the Life of a Pilgrim Girl*. (Scholastic, 1993).