

# Thanksgiving: Celebrating the Harvest

## Objective

Students will read and discuss primary source accounts of the holiday we celebrate as Thanksgiving and compare the accounts to traditional views of the story of Thanksgiving. Students will identify foods eaten at the first Thanksgiving and compare them with foods traditionally eaten today. Students research harvest customs and traditional feast foods of North American tribes and/or those of other cultures.

## Background

The holiday we celebrate as Thanksgiving is a harvest feast. All over the world, throughout history, people have celebrated the end of the hard work of harvest by feasting on the fruits of their labor. Our tradition is to commemorate the Pilgrims' Thanksgiving feast at Plymouth Plantation in 1621, but before that, Spanish settlers had celebrated a Thanksgiving in 1565, in what is now Saint Augustine, Florida. For thousands of years earlier, the people who were here before either group of settlers arrived had been holding similar feasts to celebrate the harvest.

*Widely dispersed over the great landmass of the Americas, native Americans numbered approximately 75 million people by the time Columbus came, perhaps 25 million in North America. Responding to the different environments of soil and climate, they developed hundreds of different tribal cultures, perhaps 2,000 different languages. They perfected the art of agriculture and figured out how to grow maize (corn), which cannot grow by itself and must be planted, cultivated, fertilized, harvested, husked and shelled. They ingeniously developed a variety of other vegetables and fruits, as well as peanuts, chocolate and rubber. On their own, the Indians were engaged in the great agricultural revolution that other peoples in Asia, Europe, Africa were going through about the same time. (Zinn, Howard, A People's History of the United States)*

A harvest feast that survives today is the Green Corn ceremony, or Busk. Oklahoma's Muskogee, or Creek, were agriculturalists from their earliest days. After coming to Indian Territory they grew small grains and large crops of corn in the rich lands bordering the Canadian and Arkansas rivers and their tributaries. Their success with these crops brought prosperity. The Green Corn dance was celebrated at the end of summer as their thanksgiving celebration. It was a time for renewing life. Men repaired the communal buildings. Women extinguished their hearth fires, cleansed their houses and broke their cooking pots. After a ceremonial Green Corn dance, home fires were rekindled with coals from the ceremonial fire, and village women prepared a sumptuous feast of celebration and thanksgiving.

## Oklahoma Academic Standards

### GRADE 4

Speaking & Listening: R.1,2,3; W.1,2. Reading and Writing Process: R.1,2,3,4. Critical Reading and Writing: R.1,2,6,7; W.1. Vocabulary: R.1,3,4,5. Research: R.1,2,3; W.1,3  
Social Studies Content—  
1.2.D,3,4,5; 2.1,4

### GRADE 5

Speaking & Listening: R.1,2,3; W.1,2. Reading and Writing Process: R.1,2,3; W.1. Critical Reading and Writing: R.1,2,6,7; W.1. Vocabulary: R.1,3,4,5. Research: R.1,2,3; W.1,2,4  
Social Studies Content—  
1.3,5C,D,2.1,4,5,6

## Vocabulary

**abound**—to be present in large numbers or in great quantity

**agriculturalist**—someone who practices the science or occupation of cultivating the soil, producing crops, and raising live- stock

**alliance**—a union between parties for assistance and protection

**arms**—weapons

**blossom**—the flower of a seed plant

**climate**—the average weather conditions of a particular place or region over a period of years

**commemorate**—to mark by a ceremony

**communal**—shared or used in common by members of a group or community

**decrease**—to make or become smaller

**degree**—in a small way

**dispersed**—widely spread

**environment**—the whole complex of factors (as soil, climate, and living things) that influence the form and the ability to survive of a plant or animal or ecological community

**exercise**—the act of putting into use, action, or practice

**feign**—fake

**fowl**—any of several domesticated or wild birds related to the common domestic chicken

One thing the Pilgrims had to celebrate was the generosity of the Wampanoag, the Indians that helped them survive that first year. The Pilgrims had come to the new land ill equipped to provide for their needs. The tools and skills that were useful in the Old World didn't always work in the new land. Tisquantum, or Squanto, was a captive of the Wampanoag who went to live with the Pilgrims and taught them how to grow corn. He could speak English because he had been kidnapped earlier by British sailors and taken to live in Britain for several years. After he made his way back to America, he was captured by the Wampanoag. He is known for teaching the Pilgrims to fertilize their corn with fish, but some historians believe that was a method he had actually learned in Britain. It was not a common practice among the New England tribes.

The Wampanoag had more productive farm fields and ate more calories per capita than the typical person in Europe at the time. They had religious beliefs that called for charity to the helpless and hospitality to anyone who came to them with empty hands. They were also hoping to form an alliance with the Pilgrims to help them fight the Iroquois.

The foods eaten at the Pilgrim's feast included maize (corn) and a few other crops they had planted along with deer meat and game birds. Many of our traditional foods were not included.

Those attending the Pilgrims' Thanksgiving feast didn't sit at a table. They stood, squatted, or sat on the ground as they clustered around outdoor fires. The deer and game birds turned on wooden spits, and pottages, or stews, made of varieties of meats and vegetables, were simmered in pots.

## English Language Arts/Social Studies

1. Students share their prior knowledge of the first Thanksgiving.
  - Read and discuss background and vocabulary.
  - Identify and discuss words in the reading that have different meanings than those to which students are accustomed (e.g., “want,” “store”).Note: Definitions found in the vocabulary list for this lesson are of the words as used in this lesson.
  - Discuss differences in traditional stories of Thanksgiving and those included in the background.
2. As a class read the primary source accounts of the Pilgrims' first Thanksgiving included with this lesson.
  - Students underline unfamiliar words and look them up in a dictionary.
  - Discuss the unusual sentence structure and other elements that make the primary source accounts difficult to read.
  - Students list the foods mentioned in the primary accounts.
  - Students list traditional Thanksgiving foods.
  - Students compare the two lists.
  - Students write summaries of the primary source accounts in their own words.
  - Each student will write an account of a personal Thanksgiving memory.

3. As a class read and discuss the information sheet “How Reliable Are Your Sources?” included with this lesson.
- Students will use online search engines or library references to research harvest customs and traditional feast foods of North American tribes and/or those of other cultures.
  - Students follow the guidelines in “How to Write a research Paper,” included with this lesson, to write reports from the research.

### Extra Reading

- Bowen, Gary, *Stranded at Plimoth Plantation, 1626*, Sagebrush, 1998.
- Grace, Catherine O’Neill, *1621: A New Look at Thanksgiving (I Am American)*, National Geographic, 2004.
- Ichord, Loretta Frances, *Hasty Pudding, Johnnycakes, and Other Good Stuff: Cooking in Colonial America*, Millbrook, 1998.
- Ortiz, Simon, *The People Shall Continue*, Children’s, 1977.
- Smith, Cynthia Leitich, *Indian Shoes*, HarperCollins, 2002.
- Waldman, Stuart, *We Asked for Nothing: The Remarkable Journey of Cabeza de Vaca*, Mikaya, 2003.
- Waters, Late and Russ Kendall, *Giving Thanks: The 1621 Harvest Feast*, Scholastic, 2001.

### Vocabulary (cont.)

- fowling**—hunting, catching, or killing wildfowl
- harvest**—the gathering of a crop
- hospitality**—generous and friendly treatment of visitors and guests
- increase**—something added
- indifferent**—having or showing no special liking for or dislike of something
- meal**—ground seeds of a cereal grass
- parch**—to wilt with heat
- partake**—to take a share or part
- peck**—a unit of measure equal to 9.092 liters
- pottage**—a thick soup of vegetables or vegetables and meat
- proportion**—the size, number, or amount of one thing or group as compared to the size, number, or amount of another
- recreation**—refreshment of mind or body after work or worry
- sow**—to plant seed for growth especially by scattering
- spit**—a thin pointed rod for holding meat over a fire
- store**—accumulated supplies (as of food)
- traditional**—based on custom
- venison**—the flesh of a deer used as food
- want**—to be without

# Two Primary Source Accounts

EDWARD WINSLOW

Our corn [what the colonists called wheat back then] did prove well, and God be praised, we had a good increase of Indian corn, and our barley indifferent good, but our peas not worth the gathering, for we feared they were too late sown. They came up very well, and blossomed, but the sun parched them in the blossom. 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 fruit 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 among 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.

WILLIAM BRADFORD

They began now to gather in the small harvest they had, and to fit up their houses and dwellings against winter, being all well recovered in health and strength and had all things in good plenty. For as some were thus employed in affairs abroad, others were exercising in fishing, about cod and bass and other fish, of which they took good store, of which every family had their portion. All the summer there was no want; and now began to come in store of fowl, as winter approached, of which this place did abound when they came first (but afterward decreased by degrees). And besides waterfowl there was great store of wild turkeys, of which they took many, besides venison, etc. Besides they had about a peck of meal a week to a person, or now since harvest, Indian corn to that proportion. Which made many afterwards write so largely of their plenty here to their friends in England, which were not feigned but true reports.

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# How Reliable Are Your Sources?

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When conducting research, make sure you use reliable information from legitimate sources. Reliable information is well researched from sources that are well respected and as objective, or neutral, as possible. The best way to find legitimate sources is to go to the library and use scholarly journals, reference books and other well researched sources.

Another place to find information is the Internet. Conducting research on the Internet is convenient, but it can also be tricky. There are many thousands of Web pages that have little actual content and are mainly links to other pages, which may be links to other pages, and so on. Anyone can post anything to the Internet. To make sure you have found a reliable source of information, ask yourself these questions:

1. Who is responsible for the Web site? Is the Web page associated with a reliable organization, such as a university or a government agency? What interest does the organization responsible have in the information presented? For example, will the organization profit from the information presented?
2. Who wrote the information? If the author is not listed or has no credentials, it may not be a credible source. Pay attention to the author's credentials or experience. Is the source really an authority on this particular matter or someone with an impressive title that has no connection to the subject matter?
3. When was the information written? Is it current? Is it still relevant?
4. Are there other sources that agree with statements made on the site, or do other sources contradict this source? In that case you may need to search further. It's always a good idea to gather more than one source.
5. Are any sources cited? If the author does not document anything, then the information may simply be someone's opinion. If statistics used come from a survey, how was the data gathered? Who conducted the survey or poll? Was the sample representative of the population? How many were surveyed? What percent of the population?

When choosing between the library and the Internet keep in mind that up to 90 percent of the contents of college library collections are not on the Internet. Because of copyright laws it is too expensive to put all scholarly work on the Internet. This means that the most comprehensive source of information is still the library.

# How to Write a Research Paper

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1. Select a topic for research.
  - Gather ideas through class discussion, reading, thinking, free writing, brainstorming, etc.
  - Choose a topic, which interests and challenges you.
  - Narrow the topic down. Select a subject you can manage. Avoid subjects that are too complicated or for which there are not enough source materials available.
  - Get your teacher’s approval for your topic.
  - If you are not sure what is expected, reread your assignment sheet or ask your teacher.
2. Find information.
  - Use search engines to find sources online. Make sure your sources are reliable.
  - Use a card catalog to find books in the library that relate to your subject.
  - Look at other print materials available from the library—encyclopedias, magazines, newspapers, etc.
  - Use note cards or a journal to write down important information along with full bibliographical information (author, title, place of publication, publisher, date of publication, page numbers, URLs, creation or modification dates on Web pages and your date of access to the Web page).
3. Create an outline.

The purpose of the outline is to help you think through your topic carefully and organize it logically. Check your outline to make sure the points covered flow logically from one to the other. Include the following.

  - I. Introduction: State your thesis and the purpose of your research paper. Explain briefly the major points you plan to cover and why readers should be interested.
  - II. Body
    - A. Supporting details (three or more)
  - II. Conclusion: Restate or reword your thesis. Summarize what you have learned. Explain why you have reached this conclusion.
4. Organize your notes according to your outline.
  - Choose the best of your sources.
  - Make sure your information is up-to-date and factual. (Is it backed up by at least one other source?)
  - Do not include information that is not related to your topic.
  - Do not include information that you do not understand.
  - Make sure the information you have noted is carefully recorded and properly credited.
5. Write your first draft.
  - Explore your topic without worrying about grammar, spelling or punctuation.
  - Start with the first topic in your outline. Read all the notes that relate to that topic. Summarize, paraphrase or quote directly for each idea you plan to use.
  - Make sure you are using your own words. Give credit for ideas you are borrowing or quoting.
6. Revise your outline and draft. Be your own critic.
  - Add, delete, or rearrange the material to follow your outline. Reorganize your outline if necessary, but always keep the purpose of your paper in mind.
  - Locate and correct errors in punctuation, capitalization, spelling, usage, and sentence structure.
  - Share your writing with peers for proofreading.
7. Type your final paper.
  - Read the assignment sheet again to make sure your paper meets the requirements.
  - Proofread again for spelling, punctuation, missing words or duplicated words.
  - Make sure your final paper is clean, tidy, neat and attractive.