

★ The History of Thanksgiving Day ★

Purpose

The purpose of this lesson is to teach students about the religious origins of Thanksgiving and the roles of Presidents Washington and Lincoln in making it a national holiday. While learning about the origin and meaning of Thanksgiving, students should also be asked to consider the meaning of this holiday for contemporary American society. Students complete a reading comprehension and vocabulary activity and then plan a Thanksgiving celebration.

Objective

The student will explain the origin and meaning of Thanksgiving Day.

Theme-Unity

Thanksgiving is a time when people unite to remember the colonists' celebration for the harvest and share their bounty with others in the community.

NCSS Standards

1e. articulate the implications of cultural

diversity, as well as cohesion, within and across groups.

IIIh. examine, interpret, and analyze physical and cultural patterns and their interactions....

IVe. identify and describe ways regional, ethnic, and national cultures influence individuals' daily lives.

IVf. identify and describe the influence of perception, attitudes, values, and beliefs on personal identity.

Time

60 minutes

Materials

- ★ "The History of Thanksgiving Day" handout and activity sheet
- ★ T-Chart Worksheet
- ★ Dictionaries
- ★ Website - www.americanheritage.org

Preparation

- ★ Copy "The History of Thanksgiving Day" handout and activity sheet for students.

Focus

Discuss the question, "Why do we celebrate Thanksgiving?" Assess student knowledge of the origin, traditions, and religious meaning of the holiday. Ask if students know how long Thanksgiving has been a national holiday and what day/month we celebrate it.

Activity

1. Have students read "The History of Thanksgiving Day" either individually or in groups and complete the vocabulary and questions. (See Links on www.americanheritage.org for additional resources on Thanksgiving and its history.)
2. Have students work in groups to plan their own Thanksgiving celebration. When planning the food, students should include foods native to America (corn, potatoes, etc.) and foods eaten by their own families and cultures at Thanksgiving. Students should include the way

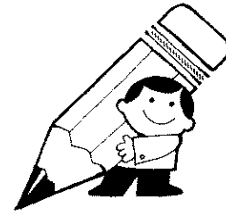
they will “give thanks” in their celebration. When they are finished planning, students present their plan to the class. You may have groups or the class as a whole bring their selected foods and have them participate in their own Thanksgiving celebration.

Closure

Discuss with students the differences between the historic celebration and the contemporary (modern) celebration of Thanksgiving using the T-Chart worksheet as an overhead transparency.

Assessment

The student will design a Thanksgiving Day parade float that incorporates the historical and contemporary ideas of Thanksgiving.





The History of Thanksgiving Day

The Pilgrims of Plymouth Colony landed in Massachusetts on the *Mayflower* in the fall of 1620. They did not have time to build proper shelter or to plant and **harvest** crops before the brutal winter arrived. During that first winter, nearly half of the Pilgrims died from disease or starvation. The following year, with the help of local Indians, the Pilgrims had a good harvest. They thanked God for the harvest with three days of prayer and feasting in the fall of 1621.

Later, after the colonists had won their independence from Great Britain, the new Congress of the United States asked President George Washington to “recommend to the people of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness.” On Thursday, November 26, 1789, President Washington issued the first Thanksgiving **proclamation**:

*Whereas it is duty of all Nations to **acknowledge** the **providence** of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to **implore** his protection and favor, I do recommend and assign Thursday the 26th day of November next to be devoted by the People of these States to the Service of that great and glorious Being who is the **beneficent** Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be.*

President Washington proclaimed another Thanksgiving Day in 1795. Later the governors of the states proclaimed Thanksgiving Days.

In 1863, during the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln made Thanksgiving a national annual holiday to be celebrated the last Thursday in November. His proclamation said, “I invite my fellow citizens of the United States to observe the last Thursday of November as a day of Thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in heaven.” Since 1863, except for two years (1939 and 1940) when President Franklin D. Roosevelt moved the holiday to the third Thursday of November, Thanksgiving has been celebrated every year on the fourth Thursday in November.



The History of Thanksgiving Day

1. *Define:*

★ *harvest*

★ *proclamation*

★ *acknowledge*

★ *providence*

★ *implore*

★ *beneficent*

2. *Describe the problems facing the Pilgrims in the fall of 1620.*

3. *Why did the Pilgrims have three days of prayer and feasting in the fall of 1621?*

4. *Why do you think the colonists would want to have a day of thanksgiving after the war with Great Britain?*

5. *What war was the United States fighting when Abraham Lincoln made Thanksgiving a national holiday in 1863?*

6. *What day and month was finally chosen to celebrate Thanksgiving Day?*

Thanksgiving Day T-Chart Worksheet

Historical America	Contemporary (Modern) America
How was it celebrated? 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.	How do we celebrate? 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
Why was it celebrated? 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.	Why do we celebrate? 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

