

1621: A New Look at Thanksgiving

Fast Facts

Curriculum Area:	Language Arts and Social Studies
Grade Level:	Grades 5-8 (adaptable for younger and older students)
Suggested Duration:	Four Days
Tribe:	Wampanoag
Place:	Plymouth, MA
Time:	1621

About the Author and Illustrator

This text was a collaborative effort between the National Geographic Society, Plimoth Plantation, and authors Catherine O'Neill Grace and Margaret M. Bruchac (Abenaki). Photographs by Sisse Brimberg and Cotton Coulson.

Text Summary (from inside flap front cover)

1621 A New Look At Thanksgiving provides us with a more accurate understanding of the historical events that surround the popular myth of the first Thanksgiving. Students who engage with this text will be exposed to a more inclusive look at history and gain insight into how some of the common themes and issues associated with Thanksgiving have no factual historical basis but were invented or made up over the years. The authors state the following: "Taking a new look at Thanksgiving means putting aside the myth. It means taking a new look at history. It means questioning what we know. It means recovering lost voices – the voices of the Wampanoag people."

Materials Needed

- Grace, Catherine O'Neill and Margaret M. Bruchac with Plimoth Plantation. *1621: A New Look At Thanksgiving*, Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2001.
- Seale, Doris (Santee/Cree), Beverly Slapin, and Carolyn Silverman (Cherokee), eds. *Thanksgiving: A Native Perspective*, Berkeley, CA: Oyate, 1998.

Essential Understandings and Montana Content Standards

Essential Understanding 3 - The ideologies of Native traditional beliefs and spirituality persist into modern day life as tribal cultures, traditions, and languages are still practiced by many American Indian people and are incorporated into how tribes govern and manage their affairs. Additionally, each tribe has its own oral histories, which are as valid as written histories. These histories pre-date the "discovery" of North America.

Essential Understanding 6 - History is a story most often related through the subjective experience of the teller. With the inclusion of more and varied voices, histories are being rediscovered and revised. History told from an Indian perspective frequently conflicts with the stories mainstream historians tell.

English Language Arts Standards

Montana Content Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy – Sixth Grade

Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies (RH.6-8)

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

RH.6-8.9 Analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic, including sources by and about American Indians.

Social Studies Standards

Standard 1 – Grade 8 – Benchmark 2. assess the quality of information (e.g., primary or secondary sources, point of view and embedded values of the author).

Standard 4 – Grade 8 – Benchmark 6. explain how and why events (e.g., American Revolution, Battle of the Little Big Horn, immigration, Women’s Suffrage) may be interpreted differently according to the points of view of participants, witnesses, reporters, and historians.

Learning Targets

- I can gain some knowledge about the myths commonly associated with Thanksgiving.
- I can learn some history about the Wampanoag people who interacted with the early colonists.
- I can identify and use primary source materials for learning about historical events.
- I understand that history is a story and can be interpreted in different ways.
- I can analyze historical events using multiple perspectives from those involved to gain a more accurate and inclusive perspective of the topic under study.

Assessment

- Use the Guiding Questions based upon the text to assist with formative assessment.
- Participation with in-class reading, assignments, and discussion is required of all students.
- A sample Myth vs. Reality quiz is included for summative assessment.

Learning Plan

Day 1

Have the class quickly brainstorm ways in which their families celebrate Thanksgiving and record on the whiteboard. Guide the discussion to include historic perspectives on the event. Have students review what is written in their Social Studies/History textbook for any information relating to the first Thanksgiving. Have them read their textbooks and make some general notes for use on Day 3. If possible, have students conduct an Internet search for Thanksgiving information. Search items could include “Thanksgiving History,” “Thanksgiving and American Indians,” “Thanksgiving and Wampanoag Indians,” and “Thanksgiving myths.” A good tool for evaluating materials/websites for bias is [Evaluating American Indian Materials and Resources for the Classroom](#).

After students complete the introductory activity, use the simulation activity developed by Oyate to introduce the concept of taking a more inclusive look at the history surrounding the development of what we now call Thanksgiving (see Day 1 activity resource at the end of the lesson, reprinted with permission from Oyate). Students’ written comments in response to the story can be used for reflection later in the week.

Day 2

Introduce the book, *1621 A New Look at Thanksgiving*, and distribute additional copies, if you have them, to the class. Review the text with students and have students read in class. The reading could be done in small groups if there are not enough copies for all students. This activity could also be done as an individual homework assignment if there are enough copies for each student.

Have students answer the Guiding Questions using information from the text (individually or in small groups).

Guiding Questions:

- Where was the traditional Wampanoag territory?
- How did they view the land?
- What is oral history?
- What is the Wampanoag language called?
- What impact did disease have upon the Wampanoag?
- Why was it so devastating?
- What were the origins of Plymouth Colony?
- Why did the colonists think they could just "take" land?
- What are some of the common myths associated with Thanksgiving?
- What foods were eaten at the 1621 gathering?
- In what ways did the Wampanoag help the early colonists?

Day 3

On the board have the following written: Thanksgiving Myths vs. Fact. Have students take out a blank sheet of writing paper and make two columns with these headings. Based upon new information from the text, have students list common myths in the first column and common facts in the second column. This could be done individually or in small groups. Students should review their notes from Day 1 on their textbook analysis and internet research. Having students identify incorrect information in a textbook is an interesting activity and really gets students to think about the accuracy of information in regard to the study of American Indian history and perspectives.

Have students report out individually or in small groups the Myth vs. Fact. Highlight common themes on the board to reinforce the main learning targets. If time permits, have students reflect on how their comments in response to the simulation on Day 1 relate to this activity.

If there is time in class, have students watch the video "Desperate Crossing, The Untold Story of the Mayflower." (A & E Home Video, 2006)

Day 4

Students complete a quiz based upon Myth vs. Fact regarding the first Thanksgiving. A sample quiz is provided. The Thanksgiving Myths resource developed by Oyate can also be used as a template to make your own assessment questions. A third option is to have students write a short essay about what they have learned about the real history surrounding the "first" Thanksgiving.

Lead a brief class discussion on why it is important to look at historical events from multiple perspectives to gain a better sense of history and have a more inclusive understanding of the events that have helped shape our nation.

Extension Activities

Have students do small group presentations about what they have learned regarding the Wampanoag people and their interactions with early colonists. Present information regarding the development of our current Thanksgiving holiday.

Watch clips from the DVD – "History Made Every Day: Desperate Crossing: The Untold Story of the Mayflower " (A & E Home Video, 2006)

Teacher Background Materials

[The Truth About the First Thanksgiving](#), on-line article by Dr. James Loewen highlights some of the common misconceptions associated with Thanksgiving. It is highly recommended this be read before you teach the lesson.

1621 A New Look at Thanksgiving – Grades 5-8

James Loewen is the author of the book *Lies My Teacher Told Me - Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*, updated version 2007, Touchstone (this book has an excellent analysis of the first Thanksgiving and deconstructs some of the common myths – read chapter 3).

Teacher Resources from [Plimoth Plantation](#). Visit the site for sample lesson plans, information, and teaching ideas.

[National Museum of the American Indian](#) also has resources for teaching about Thanksgiving. The web site has teaching materials that offer rich Native perspectives on the history and contemporary life of many different Native tribes.

[Book review](#) of *1621 A New Look at Thanksgiving*. Visit this link for ideas and activities for teaching about Thanksgiving. The [article](#) has background information and links to other resources that look at Thanksgiving from American Indian perspectives.

1491 New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus (Charles C. Mann, 2006). This book has some excellent background information regarding what we now call the "first Thanksgiving" – read chapter 2 for information on the subject.

Vocabulary

(Some terms were defined by dictionary.com)

Colonist = a person who settles in a new colony or moves into new country.

Myth = an unproved or false collective belief that is used to justify a social institution.

Pilgrim = a traveler or wanderer, esp. in a foreign place. (Please note that dictionary.com incorrectly refers to Pilgrims as being at Plymouth colony – Plimoth settlers did not refer to themselves as pilgrims they called themselves Separatists or Puritans.)

Plymouth (Plimoth) = early colony established in 1620 by the Separatists and Puritans.

Sachem = traditional name for chief in the Wampanoag language.

Wampanoag = means people of the first light.

Explorer = one that explores, especially one that explores a geographic area.

Bibliography

Books

Grace, Catherine O'Neill and Margaret M. Bruchac, with Plimoth Plantation. *1621: A New Look at Thanksgiving*. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2001.

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Loewen, James. *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (revised edition). New York, NY: Touchstone Simon & Schuster, 2007.

Mann, Charles C. *1491 New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*. New York, NY: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Vintage Series, 2006.

Seale, Doris (Santee/Cree), Beverly Slapin, and Carolyn Silverman (Cherokee), eds. *Thanksgiving: A Native Perspective*. Berkeley: Oyate, 1998.

Videos

[History Channel: Thanksgiving](#)

[History Channel: Mayflower Myths](#)

