

# Colonization and American Indian Perspectives

## Fast Facts

Curriculum Area: Social Studies  
Grade Level: Grades 7-8  
Suggested Duration: 2 – 3 class periods

Original lesson written by Jennifer Holladay for *Teaching Tolerance* and is adapted with permission from the author.

## Stage 1 Desired Results

### Established Goals

#### **Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians**

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 American Indian perspectives frequently conflicts with the stories mainstream historians tell.

#### **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**

(4) The history content standards for fifth grade are that each student will:

(d) understand the unique historical perspectives of American Indians.

(4) The history content standards for sixth through eighth grade are that each student will:

(c) analyze how, since European contact, historical events and policies have mutually impacted American Indian and European societies;

(f) understand that there are multiple perspectives and interpretations of historical events;

(g) analyze how people's perspectives shaped the historical narratives they created;

(h) identify limitations and biases in primary and secondary sources, specifically regarding misinformation and stereotypes.



## Understandings

- History told from American Indian perspectives frequently conflicts with the stories mainstream historians tell. (Essential Understanding # 6)
- European diseases greatly impeded the Indians' abilities to defend their homelands.
- Relationships between Europeans and Indians varied from place to place and among European groups (Spanish, French, English, Dutch).

## Essential Questions

- What have you learned about the first Thanksgiving?
- Why is it important to look at issues from multiple perspectives?
- What are some of the reasons American Indians might have a different view regarding how Thanksgiving has been traditionally taught and celebrated in our schools?

## Students will be able to . . .

- examine how diverse groups can perceive shared experiences differently.
- make inferences and draw conclusions based on written information.

## Students will know . . .

- for many Native Americans, Thanksgiving is no cause for celebration, but instead serves as a reminder of colonization's devastating impact on indigenous peoples.

## Stage 2 Assessment Evidence

### Performance Tasks

1. Students will review commentary from indigenous writers about Thanksgiving.
2. Students will have an opportunity to learn about multiple perspectives and further their understanding of this holiday.
3. Students will write a sample blog post sharing what they learned.

## Stage 3 Learning Plan

### Perspective

Much of the mythology that surrounds Thanksgiving focuses on the peaceful, cross-cultural exchange between the "Pilgrims and Indians." While it is true the Wampanoag and the Planters shared in a harvest celebration, within fifty years the Wampanoag would no longer be a free people. For some Native Americans, Thanksgiving is no cause for celebration, but rather serves as a reminder of colonization's devastating impact on indigenous peoples.

In this activity, students will review two written works by Native American authors. The first -- a speech written by Wamsutta James in 1970 -- gave birth to the National Day of Mourning, which is observed on Thanksgiving by some indigenous people. To them, Thanksgiving is "a reminder of the genocide of millions of their people, the theft of their lands, and the relentless assault on their culture." The Day of Mourning, on the other hand, is a day of remembrance and spiritual connection, as well as a protest of the racism and oppression Native Americans continue to experience.

The second document is an essay by Jacqueline Keeler, a member of the Dineh Nation and the Yankton Dakota Sioux; she works with the American Indian Child Resource Center in Oakland, Calif. Unlike some of her Native peers, Keeler celebrates Thanksgiving. And unlike most non-Native Americans, she does so through a distinctly indigenous lens.

### Learning Activities

Ask students to describe the origin of the Thanksgiving holiday. Write key words and images on the board. If necessary, draw out elements of the origin story that relate to Native Americans. Where did students learn these stories? What ideas or values do students think of when they celebrate Thanksgiving? Examples students may provide are thanks, charity, generosity, being good neighbors, welcoming, and appreciation.

Before you distribute the reading materials, share information from the "Perspective" section. This could be via lecture or by utilizing other instructional strategies in the suggested resources (see Teacher Background for more in-depth study).

Allow students time to read the materials. As a class, discuss the following items.

- Reflect back on the values of Thanksgiving students described at the start of the activity. Did the Pilgrims uphold these values in their treatment toward the Indians? Why or why not?
- What was new to you in the authors' descriptions of the first Thanksgiving? Why do you think these details are sometimes omitted from popular culture's take on Thanksgiving?
- Why does Keeler refer to Native Americans as a "very select group of survivors"? Is her characterization consistent with James's perception? Why?
- Wamsutta James' speech inspired some Native Americans to boycott Thanksgiving and instead observe a National Day of Mourning. Keeler takes a slightly different approach. Which approach makes the most sense to you? Why?
- Keeler sees present-day Thanksgiving celebrations as a tool for healing. What are ways this can happen? Does the Day of Mourning advance or hinder healing? Why?
- In what ways are James' and Keeler's perspectives gifts to our nation?

As a potential closing activity, ask students to write a short Thanksgiving blog post. Encourage students to identify specific things they have learned and explain how this new knowledge impacts their own understanding of Thanksgiving. They could also include examples of how their families offer thanks during Thanksgiving.

## Materials/Resources Needed

- James, Wamsutta Frank B. (**Wampanoag**). ["The Suppressed Speech of Wamsutta \(Frank B.\) James, Wampanoag,"](#) from the United American Indians of New England, to have been delivered in Plymouth, Massachusetts, 1970.
- Keeler, Jacqueline (**Dineh/Yankton Dakota-Sioux**). ["Thanksgiving: A Native American View."](#) *Pure Water Gazette*

## Teacher Background

For a more in-depth study about Thanksgiving and for other teaching strategies check out these excellent resources. If time permits, have students read the 2 articles from Smithsonian Magazine and/or prepare a short lecture summarizing the articles.

[National Museum of the American Indian: American Indian Perspectives on Thanksgiving](#)

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

*Lies My Teacher Told Me - Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* by James Loewen  
This book, revised 2007, has an excellent analysis of the first Thanksgiving and deconstructs some of the common myths (chapter 3).

["Everyone's history matters: The Wampanoag Indian Thanksgiving story deserves to be known,"](#)  
Smithsonian Magazine

["The Myths of the Thanksgiving Story and the Lasting Damage They Imbue,"](#) Smithsonian Magazine