

The First Thanksgiving

A Reading A-Z Shared Reading Book
Word Count: 955

Shared
Reading

THE FIRST Thanksgiving



Home Connection: Past- and present-tense verbs

Your reader is learning to identify past-tense and present-tense verbs. As you read the book with your reader, have him or her identify some of the verbs and say whether they are in the past or present tense. Then ask your reader to choose one section of the book, for example, *The Wampanoag* or *The Feast*. Help your reader make a list of past-tense verbs and present-tense verbs from the section to share with the class.

 Reading A-Z

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Level 3
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Thanksgiving

A family **gathers** around a table. They carve a large turkey, roasted golden brown. They pile their plates with gooey sweet potatoes, tart cranberry sauce, and creamy pumpkin pie.

They may believe that they are keeping the **traditions** started on the first Thanksgiving. Yet that first Thanksgiving was very different from the way many Americans **celebrate** the holiday today.



The Wampanoag

The story of the first Thanksgiving begins with a group of people called the Wampanoag, which means “People of the Dawn.” Four hundred years ago, they lived in the area that is now Massachusetts and Rhode Island. They had lived there for at least ten thousand years.

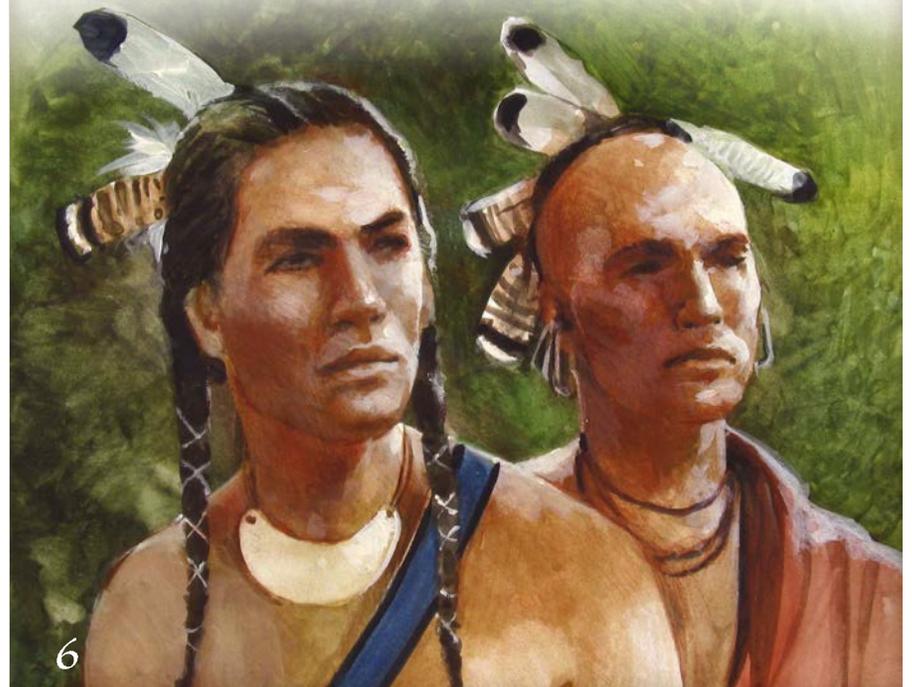
The Wampanoag lived in *wetus*, which are round houses made of wood and bark. They hunted animals for food and skins. They fished in streams and in the ocean. They grew crops such as corn, beans, and squash.



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The *sachem*, or leader, of the Wampanoag was a man named Massasoit. He and another man named Tisquantum are part of the Thanksgiving story.

Tisquantum was from a tribe called *Patuxet*. When he was young, he was kidnapped by an English ship captain and taken to Europe. There, he learned to speak English. When Tisquantum returned years later, he found that everyone in his Patuxet village had died of illness. Later, Tisquantum lived in Massasoit’s village.

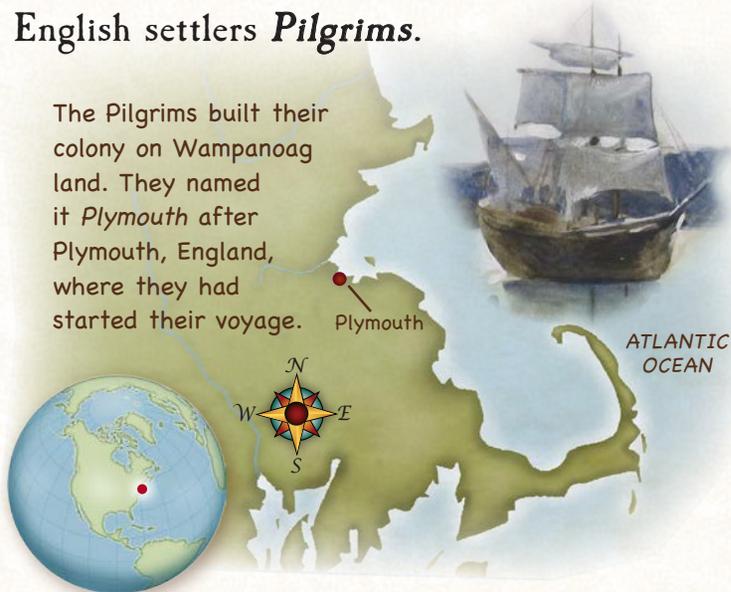


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The Settlers

In December 1620, a small ship called the *Mayflower* anchored off the coast of what is now Massachusetts. About one hundred passengers were on board. They had come from England so they could practice their religion freely. They built a settlement named *Plymouth*. Today we call these English settlers *Pilgrims*.

The Pilgrims built their colony on Wampanoag land. They named it *Plymouth* after Plymouth, England, where they had started their voyage.



When they arrived, it was bitterly cold. The Pilgrims suffered illness. They didn't have enough food. Half the Pilgrims did not make it through that first winter.

In the spring, Massasoit went to visit Plymouth with Tisquantum and other Wampanoag men. The Pilgrims were surprised that Tisquantum spoke English.

During this visit, Massasoit met Pilgrim leaders, including William Bradford, Myles Standish, and Governor John Carver. Massasoit and the Pilgrim leaders signed a peace treaty.

Tisquantum stayed with the Pilgrims. He showed them how to grow crops that would survive in the new land. He taught them the best ways to hunt, trap, and fish.



The Feast

In the fall of 1621, the Wampanoag heard gunshots. Massasoit took ninety Wampanoag to the Plymouth colony. They found that the Pilgrims were hunting fowl. The Pilgrims wanted the fowl for a celebration feast.

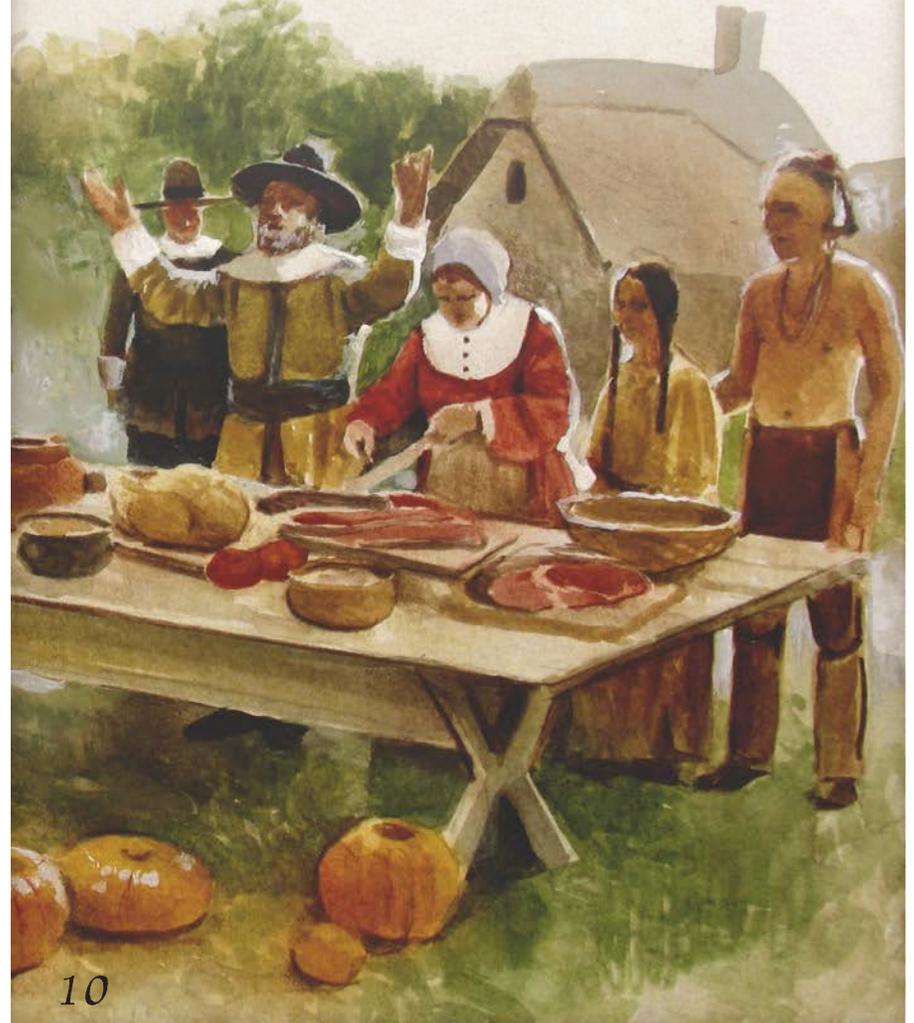
The Pilgrims were celebrating their first successful harvest, which would give them enough food to make it through their second winter. It was successful in large part because of the help they received from the Wampanoag.



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Massasoit sent some Wampanoag men to hunt deer. They brought five deer to the feast.

The harvest feast was not an organized meal like our Thanksgiving today. The Wampanoag came and went from the settlement throughout the feast. For three days, the Pilgrims and Wampanoag ate, played games, and celebrated.



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Thanksgiving Myths

The Thanksgiving story has been told countless times. Yet many things we believe about the first Thanksgiving are not true.



The English settlers did not meet any Native Americans until months after they arrived.

The Name "Pilgrims"

The Myth: The English settlers were called *Pilgrims*.

The Facts: In England, people were not allowed to belong to any church except the Church of England. The settlers left England so they could have their own church. They called themselves *Separatists* (not *Pilgrims*) because their church was separate from the Church of England.

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Today we celebrate Thanksgiving on one day. The first Thanksgiving took place over several days.

The Name "Thanksgiving"

The Myth: The settlers called their feast *Thanksgiving*.

The Facts: The settlers did not call their feast *Thanksgiving*. For them, it was a harvest festival. For thousands of years, people all over the world, including Native Americans, have celebrated good harvests with feasts and ceremonies. The settlers' feast in 1621 was part of a long tradition.

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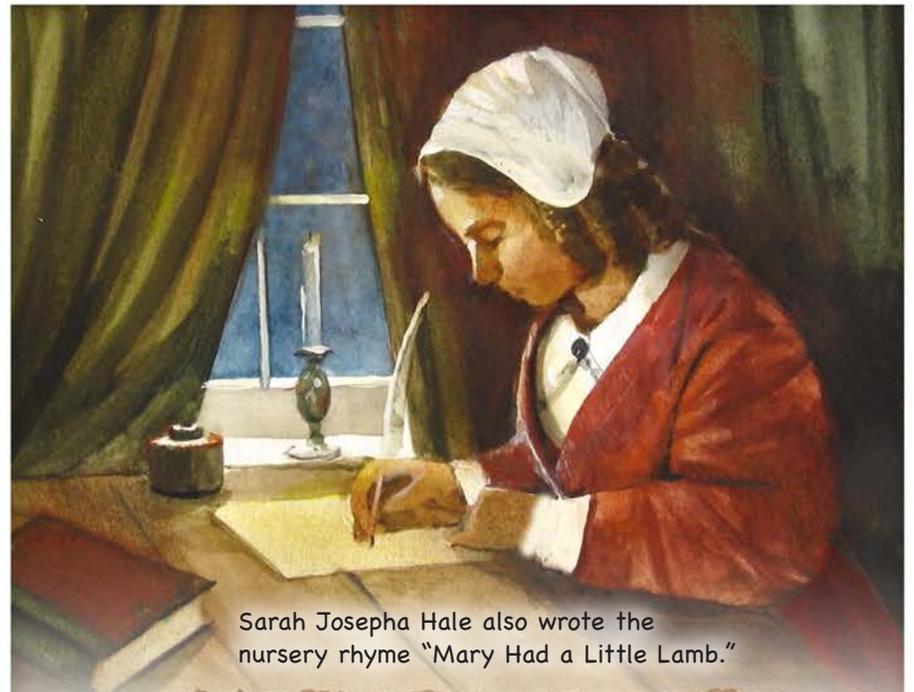


The Clothing

The Myth: Pilgrims dressed in grim black clothing. They wore silver buckles on their shoes and hats.

The Facts: The actual Pilgrims didn't wear silver buckles. Silver was expensive, and buckles weren't in style. They wore clothing dyed in colors such as red, green, blue, and violet.

The Wampanoag wore deerskin breechcloths, leggings, mantles, and moccasins. They often decorated their clothing with paint.



Sarah Josepha Hale also wrote the nursery rhyme "Mary Had a Little Lamb."

The Tradition

The Myth: People in the United States celebrated Thanksgiving each year after that first Thanksgiving.

The Facts: The United States didn't have a national Thanksgiving holiday until almost 250 years later.

Sarah Josepha Hale was a writer and magazine editor in the 1800s. She grew up in New Hampshire, a place where people celebrated a Thanksgiving holiday. Sarah believed that the whole country should celebrate Thanksgiving.

Sarah wrote editorials about Thanksgiving in her magazine. She wrote letters to five different presidents. Finally, in 1863, President Abraham Lincoln declared Thanksgiving a national holiday.

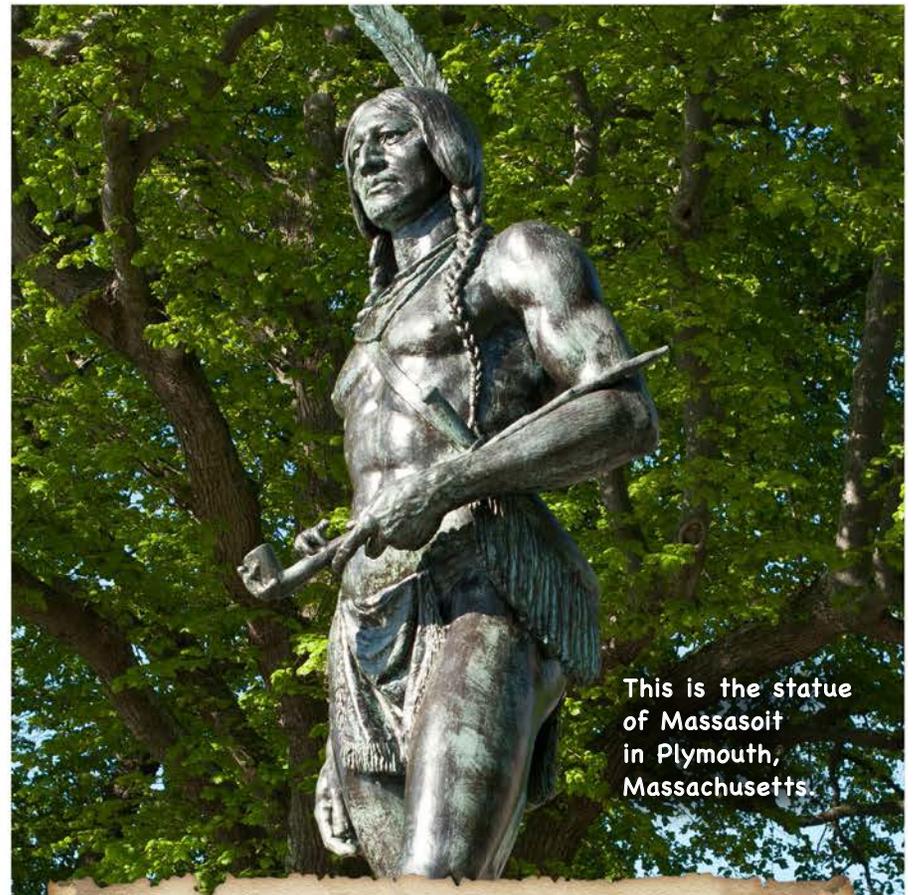


The Food

The Myth: On Thanksgiving, most people eat turkey, sweet potatoes, cranberry sauce, and pumpkin pie. We often think this is the meal the Pilgrims and Wampanoag ate.

The Facts: Their real feast was much different. They ate venison, or deer meat, from the deer the Wampanoag people brought. They did eat wild fowl, but it could have been turkey, duck, or goose. They could have eaten roasted pumpkin, but they didn't have butter, flour, and sugar to make a pie. They wouldn't have served cranberry sauce. Without sugar, cranberries are very sour. Finally, sweet potatoes come from South America. At the time of the feast, sweet potatoes hadn't yet been brought to North America.

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This is the statue of Massasoit in Plymouth, Massachusetts.

The Holiday

The Myth: We may think that today, all people in the United States observe Thanksgiving in the same way.

The Facts: Many Wampanoag mark the holiday in a much different way. They gather on Thanksgiving Day at the statue of Massasoit in Plymouth, Massachusetts. They remember the strength of their Wampanoag ancestors.

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The Thanksgiving holiday people celebrate today is different from the first Thanksgiving in many ways. Even so, the holiday continues a long tradition of getting together with friends and family to celebrate and be thankful.



Glossary

- celebrate** (v.) to do something special to honor an event (p. 4)
- colony** (n.) an area or a country that is ruled by or belongs to another country (p. 9)
- feast** (n.) a large meal in celebration of a special event (p. 9)
- gathers** (v.) brings or comes together (p. 4)
- harvest** (n.) the time when crops are picked and gathered (p. 9)
- survive** (v.) to stay alive; to continue to exist (p. 8)
- Pilgrims** (n.) a group of settlers who founded Plymouth Colony in New England in 1620 in order to freely practice their religion (p. 7)
- traditions** (n.) beliefs or customs that are passed down from year to year and generation to generation (p. 4)
- treaty** (n.) a formal agreement of peace or friendship between two nations or groups (p. 8)