



## TEACHER GUIDE

### THE REAL THANKSGIVING

#### DAY 1: LIFE IN THE FIRST PEOPLES' MOCASSINS

##### **5 minutes - Opening Exercise: Drawing and Symbolism Activity**

Introduce the topic and have students complete the "Drawing and Symbolism" worksheet. Have the students put these aside until after the videos.

##### **5 minutes - Introduce the History of the Wampanoag People**

**Explain the Wampanoag Tribe, their location and linguistic family.**

The Wampanoag are one of many hundreds of Nations of peoples who inhabited the continent that is now called North America. The Wampanoag Language is one of more than three dozen languages classified as belonging to the Algonquian language family. "Wampanoag" means, "people of the first light," and the Wampanoag People have inhabited the Northeast Coast for at least 12,000 years. Their traditional territory stretched from Wessagusset (today called Weymouth), all of what is now Cape Cod and the islands of Nantucket and Noepe (now called Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard), and southeast as far as Pokanocket (now Bristol and Warren, Rhode Island). We have been living on this part of Turtle Island for over fifteen thousand years. In the 1600's there were as many as 40,000 people living in 67 villages that made up the Wampanoag Nation.

Today, about 4,000-5,000 Wampanoag live in New England. There are three primary groups – Mashpee, Aquinnah, and Manomet – with several other groups forming again as well. Recently, Wampanoags living in New England have found relatives in the Caribbean Islands, who are the descendants of Wampanoag People who were sent into slavery after a war between the Wampanoag and English. The Wampanoag still continue their way of life through oral traditions (the telling of our family and Nation's history), ceremonies, the Wampanoag language, song and dance, social gatherings, hunting and fishing. [\[Source\]](#)

**Set the context by explaining what happened to the First Peoples in the previous few years due to the plague and prior visits from other traders.**

In 1616, a terrible plague swept the Massachusetts coast, wreaking the most devastation north of Boston. It's not clear what it was – perhaps smallpox, yellow fever, or bubonic plague. It decimated nearly all the Wampanoag people along the coast from Plymouth to Boston, but its impact was far less severe south of Plymouth.



## DAY 1: LIFE IN THE FIRST PEOPLES' MOCASSINS (CONT.)

### 30 minutes - Play Videos

Distribute the "Life in the Wampanoag Moccasins" worksheet. Ask students to fill in the worksheet while watching the videos. Have students submit worksheets, then review correct answers.

Play Videos:

- [We are Still Here: 400 Years of Wampanoag History](#)
- [The Real History of Thanksgiving | Uncivil History](#)
- [Thanksgiving Through Native Eyes | MashpeeTV](#)

### 10 minutes - Class Discussion

Ask students to tape their pictures to a wall. Encourage them to look at each others' images and share their drawings with the class, particularly any imagery of the Wampanoag people. Ask students: "What stood out to them about the Wampanoag Perspective?"

Point out imagery and symbolism in the students' collective psyche. Are there similarities between images? Do any of them seem to reflect stereotypes about Native Peoples?

Ask students to compare and contrast the drawing they made as a collective group to depictions of Native Peoples in the videos.



## DAY 2: LIFE IN THE SETTLERS' SHOES

### 30 minutes - Virtual Field Trip

Introduce the topic: Explain who the Pilgrims were, what they called themselves, where they came from, and why they chose to settle in Plymouth. Explain their previous pilgrimages and their religious background.

The Pilgrims were a group of English settlers who came to America seeking religious freedom during the reign of King James I. After two attempts to leave England, a separatist group relocated to Amsterdam around 1607-08 where they stayed for about one year. From there, the group moved to the town of Leiden, Holland, where they remained for about ten years, able to worship as they wished under lenient Dutch law.

Fearing their children were losing their English heritage and religious beliefs, the resumption of war and their inability as non-citizens to find decent jobs, a small group from the Leiden church made plans to settle in Northern Virginia - as New England was known at the time. In August 1620 the group sailed for Southampton, England, where other English colonists who hoped to make a new life in America met them.

They planned to make the crossing to America in two ships, the Speedwell and Mayflower. However, after many problems the Speedwell was forced to return to England where the group was reorganized. In their second attempt to cross the Atlantic, they boarded the Mayflower in September 1620 bound for the New World. They arrived as winter was settling in and endured significant hardships as they struggled to establish a successful colony at Plymouth. [\[Source\]](#)

Play video [Plimoth Plantation: Virtual Field Trip](#).

Distribute "Life in the Settlers' Shoes" Worksheet.

### 5 minutes - Discussion

Turning the attention to the Picture Wall, re-examine the images from Day 1 and discuss imagery of the Pilgrims. Ask students how their understanding of the Thanksgiving holiday has changed. What would they change about their pictures?



## DAY 2: LIFE IN THE SETTLERS' SHOES (CONT.)

### 8 minutes - Teacher Presentation and Video

Introduce intersectionality and the lack of POC/Women voices, etc. Discuss what we are missing out when we only hear one perspective on an issue/event, etc.

**Explain Intersectionality:** Intersectionality is the concept that all oppression is linked. More explicitly, the Oxford Dictionary defines intersectionality as “the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.”

Intersectionality is the acknowledgement that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and oppression and we must consider everything and anything that can marginalise people – gender, race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability, etc. First coined by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw back in 1989, intersectionality was added to the Oxford Dictionary in 2015 with its importance increasingly being recognised in the world of women’s rights. For example, a black woman is going to have a different set of experiences when race and sex intersect, than a white woman in American society. [\[Source\]](#)

**Play video** [What is Intersectionality?](#)

### 2 minutes - Introduce the Group Email/Text Homework

Distribute the homework handout. Review it and answer any student questions



## DAY 3: THE REAL HARVEST FEAST

### 5 Minutes - Teacher Presentation

Review the timeline of the Pilgrims' journey until the Harvest meal.

#### The Pilgrim Timeline - from the World History Project

**Sep 16 1620:** The Mayflower Departs from Southampton, England

**Nov 9 1620:** Pilgrims Aboard the Mayflower Sight Land

**Nov 20 1620:** Birth of Peregrine White, First English Child Born to Pilgrims in New World (North America)

**Nov 21 1620:** The Mayflower Drops Anchor at the Tip of Cape Cod

**Nov 21 1620:** Signing of the Mayflower Compact

**Dec 6 1620:** Departure of Expedition Along Cape Cod Resulting in "First Encounter" Between English and Native Americans

**Dec 17 1620:** The Mayflower Drops Anchor in Plymouth Harbor, Location of Plymouth Rock, where Colonists are Said to Have First Set Foot on Land

**Dec 21 1620:** Landing Party Arrives at Site where Plymouth Settlement is Built, Beginning Difficult First Winter in New World

**Mar 16 1621:** First Formal Contact Between English Colonists and Native Americans

**Mar 22 1621:** Pilgrims Negotiate Peace Treaty with Nauset

**Jul 1621:** English Settlers Organize Rescue Party to Retrieve John Billington from Nauset, Improving Relations with Native Americans

**Jul 2 1621:** English Pilgrims Negotiate Exclusive Trading Pact with Massasoit

**Oct 1621:** The "First" Thanksgiving

### 15 Minutes - Play Video

Thanksgiving Through Native Eyes | MashpeeTV



## DAY 3: THE REAL HARVEST FEAST (CONT.)

### **25 Minutes - Group Activity**

Distribute the handout, "Massasoit's Relations" along with copies of "Mourt's Relations." Review Instructions.

In groups of 3, have students fill in the worksheet based on the primary source, Mourt's Relations.

Reserve the last 5 minutes for group discussion. Discussion prompt: "What is the societal impact when we only hear one perspective on a National issue/event?"

\*optional, teacher can choose to have students discuss the prompt in their small groups, or break out to the whole class.

Have students submit their worksheet at the end of class. If they run out of time, they may work on it overnight and submit the next day.

### **1 Minute - Introduce "The Actual Harvest Feast" Homework**

Distribute the homework handout. Review it and answer any student questions.



## DAY 4: THE NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING

### 5 Minutes - Explain the National Day of Mourning

Without the help of the Native American community they met upon settling in America, the Pilgrims would not have survived. Instead, the mutual understanding between the two groups led to one of the world's most well-known dates - Thanksgiving. Although these groups formed an alliance for a time, the events of the 17th century and the years following the arrival of the Mayflower led to the unprecedented mass killing of Native American peoples, the seizing of their lands, and enslavement of their peoples. For many of those descended from those Native populations who survived, it is not Thanksgiving - it is a National Day of Mourning. [\[Reference\]](#)

### 10 Minutes - Play Video

[The National Day of Mourning](#)

### 10 Minutes - Introduce Frank James and the birth of the National Day of Mourning. Then, choose students to read his speech out loud.

#### Frank James and the Birth of the National Day of Mourning

Fifty years ago, a Wampanoag leader named Frank James took a stand against centuries of history that told a story that was simply not true, and rendered his people voiceless. Some 350 years after the Pilgrims arrived in their lands, James refused to be silenced about the treatment of his people since the landing of the Mayflower.

He had been invited to a Thanksgiving state dinner to mark the anniversary of the Mayflower's sailing, as part of a celebration that embraced the misleading schoolbook narrative of the Pilgrims' relationship with the Wampanoag that culminated in a great feast. He was asked to give a speech to mark the occasion, one the organisers requested to read beforehand to check its content. James wrote a scathing indictment of the Pilgrims. He described how they desecrated Native American graves, stealing food and land and decimating the population with disease. The speech was deemed inappropriate and inflammatory and James was given a revised speech. He refused to read it.

He vowed that the Wampanoag and other Native peoples would regain their rightful place and was 'uninvited' from the program. Instead, supporters followed James to hear him give his original speech on Cole's Hill, next to the statue of former Wampanoag leader Ousamequin. This became the first official National Day of Mourning.

The same year, James founded the United American Indians of New England, a progressive Native American activist group. Frank James passed away on 20 February, 2001, at the age of 77 and was buried at the Seaside Cemetery in Chatham, MA.

[\[Resource\]](#)



## DAY 4: THE NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING (CONT.)

### Frank James Full Speech

*I speak to you as a man -- a Wampanoag Man. I am a proud man, proud of my ancestry, my accomplishments won by a strict parental direction ("You must succeed - your face is a different color in this small Cape Cod community!"). I am a product of poverty and discrimination from these two social and economic diseases.*

*I, and my brothers and sisters, have painfully overcome, and to some extent we have earned the respect of our community. We are Indians first - but we are termed "good citizens." Sometimes we are arrogant but only because society has pressured us to be so.*

*It is with mixed emotion that I stand here to share my thoughts. This is a time of celebration for you - celebrating an anniversary of a beginning for the white man in America. A time of looking back, of reflection.*

*It is with a heavy heart that I look back upon what happened to my People. Even before the Pilgrims landed it was common practice for explorers to capture Indians, take them to Europe and sell them as slaves for 220 shillings apiece. The Pilgrims had hardly explored the shores of Cape Cod for four days before they had robbed the graves of my ancestors and stolen their corn and beans.*

*Mourt's Relation describes a searching party of sixteen men. Mourt goes on to say that this party took as much of the Indians' winter provisions as they were able to carry. Massasoit, the great Sachem of the Wampanoag, knew these facts, yet he and his People welcomed and befriended the settlers of the Plymouth Plantation. Perhaps he did this because his Tribe had been depleted by an epidemic. Or his knowledge of the harsh oncoming winter was the reason for his peaceful acceptance of these acts. This action by Massasoit was perhaps our biggest mistake. We, the Wampanoag, welcomed you, the white man, with open arms, little knowing that it was the beginning of the end; that before 50 years were to pass, the Wampanoag would no longer be a free people.*

*What happened in those short 50 years? What has happened in the last 300 years?*



## DAY 4: THE NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING (CONT.)

### 10-15 Minutes - Lead a Class Discussion

Discussion Prompts:

- What are your reactions to learning about the national day of mourning?
- Do you think that Americans should keep celebrating Thanksgiving? Why? Why not?
- How can Americans integrate the knowledge of the real history of Thanksgiving into their Thanksgiving practices and traditions? Should they? Why? Why not?

Use the responses to the last prompt to set up the homework.

### 2 Minutes - Introduce “Thanksgiving Perspectives” Homework

Distribute the homework handout. Review it and answer any student questions.

Read:

- [The True Indigenous History of Thanksgiving](#)
- [3 Ways to Decolonize Thanksgiving](#)
- Keepunumuk: Weeâchumun’s Thanksgiving Story



## DAY 5: HOW TO DECOLONIZE THANKSGIVING TODAY

### 10 Minutes - Introduce the Concepts of *Erasure*, *Decentering*, and *Oppression* and Ways to Decolonize Thanksgiving

The most powerful way to begin to decolonize a place or event is to acknowledge the living descendants of the first peoples that used to live there or were involved in the story. Here is an overview of how Thanksgiving continues to perpetuate colonization and a few ways we can decolonize the holiday.

#### ERASURE

Erasure is a social process by which one group, typically a group in power, eliminates the identity of another group. An examples of erasure is eliminating women from the history of science. Cultural erasure takes place when a group pressures or forces another group to stop speaking their language, wearing their clothes, eating their foods, etc. An example of this is when the US forced American Indian and Alaska Native children to attend compulsory boarding schools that forced them to assimilate to “American” ways of life.

The Thanksgiving holiday has traditionally been one of the only times America’s First Peoples are mentioned in school, but they were portrayed as sidekicks, to the real heroes, the Pilgrims. We did not learn about how the Wampanoag peoples had already been decimated by disease introduced by European traders by the time of the “first Thanksgiving,” or how they had been stolen and sold as slaves to Europe, or how their graves were robbed. Mainstream culture left out all of the precious details about who the Wampanoags were and portrayed their society, culture, language and very existence as unimportant.

#### DECENTERING

Decentering is the social process of shifting from a particular society’s interpretation of the world and events. In the US, for example, the dominant culture is described as the norm in schools, throughout media and popular culture. Decentering emphasizes that there is no one “right” way to interpret an event, institution, or way that things are. In this way, decentering helps to uncover previously hidden power dynamics.

Understanding Thanksgiving from a Wampanoag perspective decenters the dominant society’s narrative, and offers a different way to think about the events that led up to Thanksgiving as well as its aftermath. For example, knowing that Thanksgiving was “invented” decades after the original event took place and made a holiday to unify white Americans after the Civil War, sheds light on the way that the US government attempts to create a particular type of national culture that prioritizes European settlers over Native Americans.

#### OPPRESSION

Oppression is the cruel, unjust, and/or excessive exercise of power by one group of people over another, often under governmental authority. It can be overt (direct) or covert (indirect). Oppression can take several forms. First, at its core, any oppressive system has the idea that one group is better than the other(s) which is upheld through the invention and spread of harmful stereotypes.



## DAY 5: HOW TO DECOLONIZE THANKSGIVING TODAY (CONT.)

This idea that one group is superior then becomes embedded in institutions in society, including schools, the legal system, police practice, housing development, hiring practices, etc. When a woman doing the same job as a man makes half the money the man makes, this is an example of institutionalized oppression. Individuals within the society can oppress each other on a personal level, for example when a white person makes a racist joke to a black person. This reinforces the overall system of oppression. Oftentimes, the individual oppressor is not consciously aware that they are being oppressive. For example, if a white woman sees a young man of color driving a very expensive sports car and says aloud, "I bet he stole that car." Finally, the people being oppressed can internalize the oppression. In other words, they start to believe that they are inferior. This keeps the system of oppression in place, and results in self harm as well as interpersonal harm between oppressed peoples.

[\[Resource\]](#)

What we learn in school about Thanksgiving internalizes oppression and privilege. By reaching children at an age when their brains and ideas are still forming, we normalize the idea that America is a European-descendant, Christian country above all, and that white people deserve land and resources. Children of different ethnic and religious backgrounds implicitly learn that their roots are not a part of the American story, and that they are inherently inferior.

**Present three new traditions that you can adopt to begin to decolonize Thanksgiving.**

1. Combat erasure by telling the real story of Thanksgiving around the table.
2. Re-center Thanksgiving by serving locally sourced food.
3. Address oppression by widening your circle.

[\[Resource\]](#)

### 5 Minutes - Reflection

Write a reflective response in your class journal: "Now that you know about how Thanksgiving upholds oppression, what is one new tradition you might introduce to your family to transform the holiday?"

If your family does not celebrate Thanksgiving, or instead recognizes a Day of Mourning, reflect upon how you think society would change if most Americans took these steps to decolonize Thanksgiving.

### 20 Minutes - Play Video

[Thanksgiving from Wampanoag Youth](#)

### 5 Minutes - Discussion

Ask students to share their responses to the video.