

**Q1) Who invented Thanksgiving?**

- A. The Wampanoag Indians
- B. It depends which Thanksgiving we're talking about
- C. The Pilgrims
- D. Abraham Lincoln
- E. Women's magazine editor Sarah Josepha Hale

**Answer B. *It depends which Thanksgiving we're talking about***

Though Indigenous people and English people observed Thanksgiving traditions for centuries, there was no 1621 holiday called Thanksgiving. For Indigenous people, days of thanks came every day as gratitude for life's many gifts. For the pilgrims, Thanksgiving days were spent in prayer to honor a bountiful harvest, the winning of a battle (including against Indigenous people), or other life sustaining events. The Thanksgiving that Americans know today was promoted by Sarah Josepha Hale starting in 1837. In 1863, President Lincoln (who may or may not have been familiar with Hale's campaign) declared the last Thursday in November to be "Thanksgiving" as a way to pull the country together on the heels of the Civil War.

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**Q2) Did Pilgrims and Indians like each other?**

- A. Whoops, this question has some misinformation in it
- B. Yes, that's why they celebrated Thanksgiving together in 1621
- C. No, they stayed away from each other as much as possible
- D. It's complicated
- E. A and D

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**Answer E. *Whoops, this question has some misinformation in it and It's complicated***

The Pilgrims didn't call themselves Pilgrims. That name was given to them 150 years later during the American Revolution. The term "Indians" obscures the rich history of the diverse range of Indigenous people who spanned the American continent and included hundreds of nations. A more accurate way to describe early encounters are *colonial settlers* and the [*Indigenous nation name*]. In the case of the Thanksgiving story, the "Indians" referenced were the Wampanoag people. *Colonial settlers* and *the Wampanoag* attempted an alliance early on. This wasn't a matter of liking or not liking one another as much as a political alliance for survival sake. Neither side much trusted each other. Colonial settlers considered the Wampanoag, and all "Indians," subhuman, savages, heathens. Meanwhile, the Wampanoag had witnessed colonial settlers robbing their graves.

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**Q3) Did the meal pictured in Thanksgiving paintings ever happen?**

- A. No. It's all fiction
- B. Yes, that's the first Thanksgiving
- C. Something sort of like it may have happened
- D. It's complicated
- E. C and D

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**Answer E. *Something sort of like it may have happened and It's complicated***

Oral history tells us that the Wampanoag made a three-day visit to the colonial settlers' village in November 1621. Wampanoag leader Massasoit led a group of 90 men there after learning that colonist gunfire had been heard. We know they left behind women and children which strongly suggests this visit was based in safety, not socializing, perhaps born of a fear that gunfire meant warfare on the horizon. When they arrived, they found colonists engaged in a big meal. The gunfire shots heard were likely colonists finding game to eat. That the Wampanoag men stayed is less likely that a great joint party unfolded and more likely a series of strategic negotiations regarding their mutual survival. Paintings of "Thanksgiving" are from the white imagination and reflect a concept conceived centuries later, not the reality of the moment. Errors in those paintings include the depiction of Wampanoag people in garb worn by Sioux people, who at the time were living hundreds of miles to the west.

**Q4) What did colonial settlers and Wampanoag people eat at that 1621 gathering?**

- A. Turkey, mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce, and pies
- B. Wild fowl, corn porridge, squash
- C. Venison
- D. Eel and lobster
- E. B and C

**Answer E. Wild fowl, corn porridge, squash and venison**

Because that 1621 meal was not considered a historic moment at the time, minimal records exist. Wampanoag oral history, a few written documents, and some basic understanding of food history do give us some insight though. We know potatoes didn't come to New England for another 100 years and sugar wouldn't have been available, so that rules out mashed potatoes, sweet pies, and cranberry sauce. Though we know eels and lobsters were part of the colonizers' diet, November would have been too cold to harvest them. Written diaries tell us that wildfowl, corn porridge, and mashed pumpkin were served, all of which makes sense given what was available in the season and the era. We also know venison was added by the Wampanoag men. When Massasoit understood he'd come upon a feast, not a war maneuver, he sent his men to get more food. They returned with five deer and more fowl.

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**Q5) How do Wampanoag people feel about Thanksgiving today?**

- A. Some may love and celebrate it
- B. Some don't celebrate it but are fine with the fact that lots of people do
- C. Some Indigenous people, beyond just the Wampanoag, resent the Thanksgiving myth and instead recognize the third Thursday of November as a Day of Mourning
- D. All of the above?

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**Answer D, though let's focus on C. Many Indigenous people, beyond just the Wampanoag, resent the Thanksgiving myth and instead recognize the third Thursday of November as a Day of Mourning**

No group is a monolith, so there may be a spectrum of opinion. However, the fact that many people in the US continue to celebrate Thanksgiving with no awareness of its harmful mythological underpinnings, saddens and angers many Indigenous people and non-Indigenous allies who care about justice and truth telling. Including me! (Debby Irving) Because Thanksgiving represents a much larger pattern of colonizer myth making, one request is that non-Indigenous people who continue to gather with food, friends, and family use the Fall Break to dispel myths, while also learning more about what Indigenous people today want and need.

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**Q6) Why is myth making such a bad thing? I love the Thanksgiving story I learned.**

- What ideas do you have?
  - What could be dangerous about myths?
  - What could be hurtful about myths?
- Have you ever had someone spread a story about you (or people who share your ethnicity, sexual orientation, or class) that doesn't square with your perspective and life experience? How did that make you feel?
- Have you ever experienced a time when you or your wants and needs were being ignored or mocked? If you have an example to share, answering these 4 questions – in the present tense – might help others understand: 1) Where were you? 2) Who else was there? 3) What happened? 4) How did you feel?
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The myth that "Indians" were friends with the "Pilgrims" is an "origin story," a largely invented backstory about how America came to be. By presenting colonial settlers as brave adventurers and Indigenous people as friendly, dangerous, uncivilized, or simple mischaracterizes everyone and erases how Indigenous people experienced colonial settlers. The truth is tragic, which can make some people not want to talk about it, think about it, or believe it. Colonizer settlers were here to stay, not visit, and used trickery, theft, and murder to take land from Indigenous people in every part of what we now call the United States. Indigenous people have been on this land for thousands of years. Estimates range from 16,000 to much longer. What's important for non-Indigenous people to appreciate is that Indigenous people were *highly* civilized, their societies were just organized differently. The goal is to have the right returned to Indigenous communities to exist as sovereign nations. Another is to hand over land and water management, where Indigenous wisdom brings perspective and expertise US dominant culture lacks.

↑ use the above to have an authentic conversation ↑  
that builds empathy and compassion

**Q7) How many Indigenous people were here before European colonizers arrived?**

- A. 250,000
- B. 10,000
- C. 60,000,000
- D. 100,000
- E. 35,000

**Answer C. 60,000,000**

An extensive 2018 study by a consortium of UK universities reports that prior to European colonization, civilizations in the Americas sustained 60,000,000 people. Compare that to Europe's population at the time, 70 - 88 million, and the story of colonizers finding "untamed wilderness" and "savages" doesn't make much sense. Next time you notice a sign that says [town] or [state] founded in [year], think about the Indigenous people who'd been fishing, hunting, farming, sleeping, playing, worshiping, raising children, supporting their elders, and caring for that land for thousands of years. Can you start to notice Indigenous language that offers hints as to whose land you're on? (50% of US state names are in Indigenous languages.) \* *American* refers to the North American continent, not simply the US.. It bothers many Canadians and people from Central and South American countries that the US claims the name "America," as if it's the only place in America.

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**Q8) How many Native American nations are there in the US today?**

- A. 50, one in each state
- B. 574
- C. 4, basically one per NE, NW, SE, SW quadrants of the US

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**Answer B. 574**

*Taken directly from National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) website*

There are 574 federally recognized Indian Nations (variously called tribes, nations, bands, pueblos, communities and native villages) in the United States. Approximately 229 of these ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse nations are located in Alaska; the other federally recognized tribes are located in 35 other states. Additionally, there are state recognized tribes located throughout the United States recognized by their respective state governments.

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**Q 9) How can I learn more?**

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**Check out these two Thanksgiving-specific resources**

- A written version of the [Ohenten Kariwatekwen](#), also known as the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address. A wonderful piece to read aloud with family and friends.
- The why's and how's of the traditional Thanksgiving address explained by Haudenosaunee people in a [4-minute video](#)

**Check out <https://native-land.ca/>**

to learn more about whose land you're on. See how deep you can go ( how much you can learn) by following the linked nation websites on the left side of the map. This is an AWESOME and interactive website appropriate for all ages.

**Check out the 21-Day Indigenous Challenge at <https://www.mcnaa.org/21dc-indigenous-2024>**

## Special Thanks

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Special thanks to [Emily Jane Style](#) (the English teacher I never had) for help with final edits, a few additions, and affirmation that this is a resource worth sharing.

## Resources Used/For Deeper Learning

[Sioux Native Americans: Their History, Culture, and Traditions](#)  
(nativehope.org)

[Tribal Nations & the United States: An Introduction | NCAI](#)  
(National Congress of American Indians)

[Learning the Truth About Thanksgiving and America's Origin Story](#) (Beacon Broadside, a project of Beacon Press)

[History Smashers: Mayflower – Kate Messner](#)

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

[Native-Land.ca | Our home on native land](#)

[European colonization of the Americas killed 10 percent of world population and caused global cooling](#) (The World)

[Earth system impacts of the European arrival and Great Dying in the Americas after 1492](#) (Science Direct)

[A New History of the First Peoples in the Americas](#) (The Atlantic)

[Tracking a Mystery: When and How the First Americans Arrived](#) (National Geographic)