Abbe Museum
LESSON PLAN
Thanksgiving Alternatives
Grades 3-5

OBJECTIVE: To provide an alternative to the "typical" Thanksgiving Day lesson, free of stereotypes and anti-Indian Bias. To create an environment in which cross-cultural exchange happens in a respectful way. Students will learn about the various myths that surround "The First Thanksgiving," as well as learn some of the factual information surrounding the event. Students will have the opportunity to learn about specific tribes, as well as differences between tribes, and that Native cultures can not be lumped into one "Indian" category.

LEARNING RESULTS: This lesson can be used in the following Subject and Content areas:

Subject Area:	Content Standard:
Social Studies/History	C. Historical Inquiry, Analysis and Interpretation
Social Studies/Geography	A. Skills and Tools
Social Studies/Geography	B. Human Interaction with Environments

VOCABULARY: harvest, pilgrim, religion, feast, Indian, stereotype, culture

MATERIALS: Student hand out "Thanksgiving: True or False?"

PREPARATION: Teacher should read enclosed information before lesson takes place. Students take "Thanksgiving: True or False?" quiz. Objective: Deconstructing myths about "The First Thanksgiving." Objective is to shine light upon the commonly accepted myths surrounding Thanksgiving, NOT to point out that the children's answers are wrong. Could easily be done in a game format, depending on age of children (suggested for younger grades). If game format is desired, designate one side of the room as "False" and the other side of the room as "True." Children can choose appropriate side based on their answers, while the teacher reads the questions and answers aloud. Could also be done by show of hands. Great way to spark open discussion about Thanksgiving Myths.

ACTIVITY: This activity could be done in a single class period or in a research project format. Children will need access to a Library or other source of academic information. Have children research "Harvest Festivals" around the world! What is a harvest? Which countries or cultures celebrate the Harvest? In what ways do they celebrate? How are these customs similar to our own? How are they different? How does the environment

influence what foods are eaten at different Harvest festivals? Those students that do research on Native American Harvest festivals should focus on the differences between each individual tribe. Cite examples of Harvest Festivals in Maine!

Have the students Identify which tribes are closest to them using the Map of Indian Nations (attached). Which tribes are/were in the area? Where are they now? How are their customs different from those of the tribes in New England, and how are they the same? Answers will vary depending on location, so independent research is required to answer these questions.

Supplemental Activity: Harvest Feast! After the students have learned about various harvest festivals, work as a class to develop a menu. Ask each child to bring in a traditional dish from a culture that celebrates the harvest (a great opportunity for them to use the information learned in the previous activities!). Each child can prepare a short statement about the dish they prepared, as well as talk about the things they give thanks for.

QUESTIONS AND EVALUATION:

1. In what ways has Thanksgiving changed from the original harvest celebration in Plymouth in 1621?
2. Are all Indian tribes the same? What are some differences between the tribes that you found in your research?
3. What are some of the myths about Thanksgiving that you thought were historic fact?
4. How do the customs of tribes in your region differ from those near the Plymouth settlement in 1621?
5. When you see an "Indian" in a Thanksgiving scene, is that an accurate depiction of a Native American? Why or why not?

RESOURCES: To be read before lesson takes place. Very useful information.

Map. "Historic Tribal Locations." As Published in "Rethinking Columbus: The Next 500 Years." Bigelow and Peterson, Ed. Copyright 1998, Rethinking Schools, Ltd. Wisconsin.

Dorris, Michael. "Why I'm Not Thankful for Thanksgiving." As Published in "Rethinking Columbus: The Next 500 Years." Bigelow and Peterson, Ed. Copyright 1998, Rethinking Schools, Ltd. Wisconsin.

Dow, Judy and Slapin, Beverly. "Deconstructing the Myths of 'The First Thanksgiving'" As printed in "A Broken Flute: The Native Experience in Books for Children." 201-208. Copyright 2005 by Oyate. AltaMira Press, Maryland.

Heinrich, June Sark. "What Not To Teach About Native Americans." As Published in "Rethinking Columbus: The Next 500 Years." Bigelow and Peterson, Ed. Copyright 1998, Rethinking Schools, Ltd. Wisconsin.

Loewen, James W. "Plagues and Pilgrims: The Truth About the First Thanksgiving." As Published in "Rethinking Columbus: The Next 500 Years." Bigelow and Peterson, Ed. Copyright 1998, Rethinking Schools, Ltd. Wisconsin. Summarized from "Lies My Teacher Told Me"

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES: These books serve as great teaching resources for teachers that want to teach about Native Americans.

Loewen, James W. "Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong." Copyright 1995, James W. Loewen. Touchstone/ The New Press, New York.

"Teaching What Really Happened: How to Avoid the Tyranny of Textbooks and Get Students Excited About Doing History." Copyright 2010 Loewen, Teachers College Press, New York.

Seale, Doris and Slapin, Beverly, Eds. "A Broken Flute: The Native Experience in Books for Children." Copyright 2005 by Oyate. AltaMira Press, Maryland.

"Through Indian Eyes: The Native Experience in Books for Children." Copyright 1987, Seale and Slapin. New Society Publishers, Pennsylvania.

Bigelow, Bill and Peterson, Bob, Eds. "Rethinking Columbus: The Next 500 Years." Copyright 1998, Rethinking Schools, Ltd, Wisconsin.

OYATE'S MISSION:

Oyate means "The People." We are a Native American/American Indian advocacy and education organization that serves The People. We review children's literature and advocate for Native Americans/American Indians to be portrayed with historical accuracy, cultural appropriateness and without anti-Indian bias and stereotypes. We teach others to do the same.

http://www.oyate.org

Thanksgiving: True or False?
Or
What You Think You Know About the First Thanksgiving.

1. The First Thanksgiving occurred in 1621.
   T....F

2. The people who came across the ocean on the Mayflower called themselves Pilgrims.
   T....F

3. When the Pilgrims landed, they first stepped foot on "Plymouth Rock."
   T....F

4. The Pilgrims stole corn seeds from the Wampanoag Tribe to plant their first crops.
   T....F

5. The Pilgrims took objects from several Indian homes.
   T....F

6. The Pilgrims invited the Indians to celebrate the First Thanksgiving.
   T....F

7. The Pilgrims provided the food for their Indian Friends.
   T....F

8. The Pilgrims and Indians became great friends.
   T....F

9. Squanto was fluent in English.
   T....F

10. Thanksgiving has been celebrated every year since the First Thanksgiving in 1621.

    T....F

ANSWER KEY

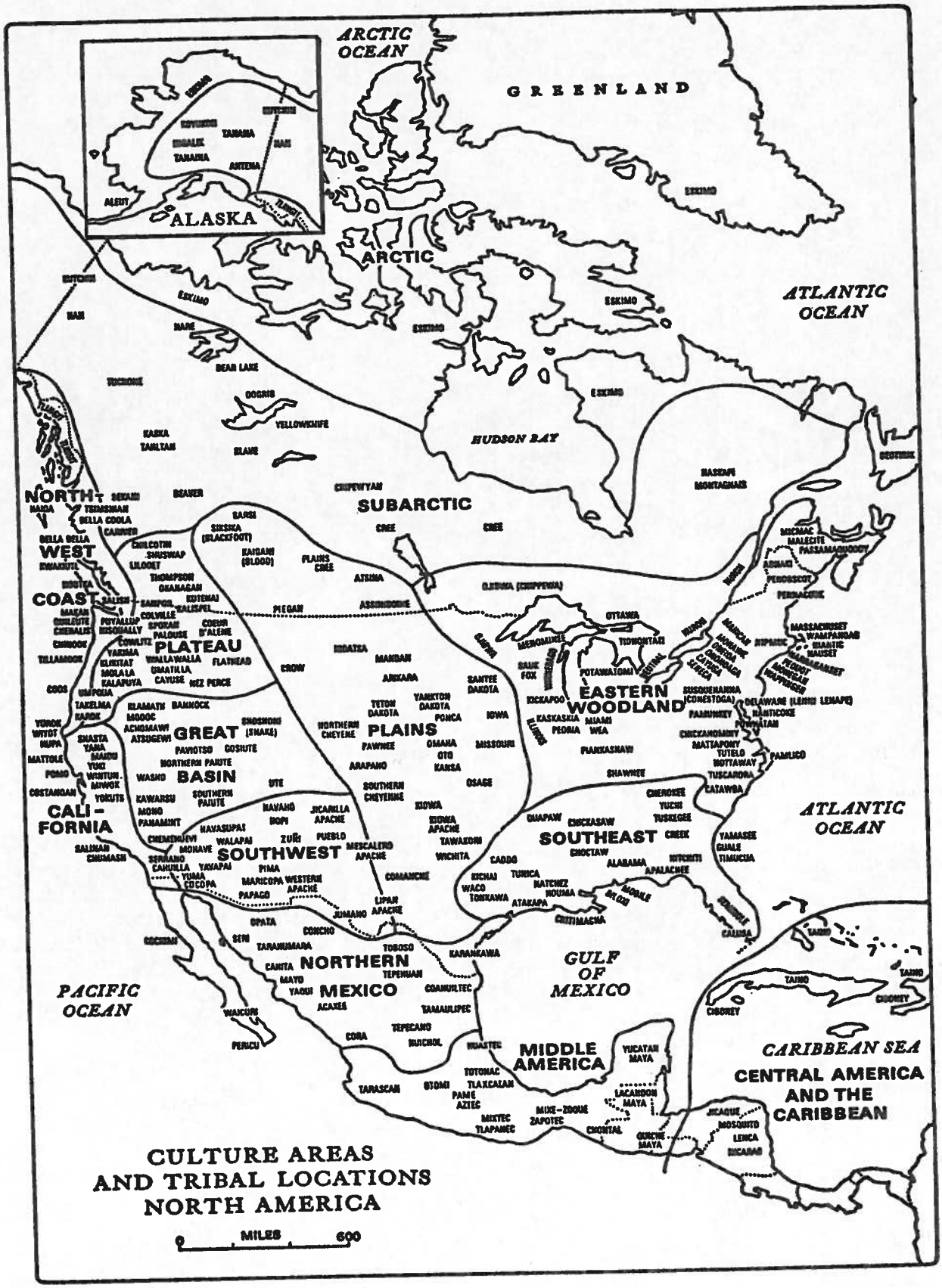
1. FALSE: No one knows when the "first" thanksgiving occurred. People give thanks all over the world, and harvest feasts are celebrated in many different cultures. Eastern Indians had been celebrating the harvest feast for centuries prior to the Plymouth settlers' arrival.
2. FALSE: A "pilgrimage" is a journey made for religious reasons, such as the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca. The Plymouth settlers did not refer to themselves as "Pilgrims." The term "Pilgrims" was not used until the 1870's. No one used the term "Pilgrims" until the 1870's.
3. FALSE: The small boat that carried the settlers from the Mayflower to the mainland would have been destroyed if they attempted to land on what is known as "Plymouth Rock." Plymouth rock was first referred to in a town surveying record in 1715. Since then, the rock has been moved, cracked in two, pasted together.
4. TRUE. "Pilgrims" reported "finding" caches of stored corn seed, stating that compensation for the corn will be given to the local tribes at a later date. No compensation was ever reported.
5. TRUE. They were reported taking objects from Indian homes.*
6. FALSE. The Wampanoag tribe, upon hearing gunshots from the Plymouth settlement, gathered approximately 90 men in fear that a battle was about to begin. Upon arriving at Plymouth and seeing the "festivities," they then went out and brought back 5 deer and several turkeys. Again, Native and Europeans alike were very familiar with harvest feasts long before 1621.
7. FALSE. All of the food present at "the First Thanksgiving" was indigenous to North America. This fact combined with the account of the Wampanoag tribe providing venison and turkeys makes it more likely that the Native peoples provided the food for the Pilgrims.
8. FALSE. About a century later, theft of Indian lands by European Settlers forced the Wampanoag to go to war to keep their homes.**
9. TRUE. Squanto learned English after being taken to England. He saw many parts of Europe, eventually escaped captivity and made his way back to North America. Squanto may have crossed the Atlantic as many as six times.
10. FALSE. Our modern celebrations of the Thanksgiving "holiday" date back only to 1863. President Lincoln named it a National Holiday during the Civil War in an attempt to promote solidarity and unity between the warring states.

*Note for Older Grades: In addition to theft, Pilgrims reported finding "grave-like" mounds and retrieved several objects from the graves before re-interring the bodies.
**Note for Older Grades: In 1637, English soldiers massacred some 700 Pequot men, women and children at Mystic Fort, burning many alive and shooting those that fled. The Colony of Connecticut and Massachusetts Bay Colony observed a day of thanksgiving commemorating the massacre. By the end of "King Phillip's War," most of the Indians in the Northeast had been wiped out, sold into slavery, or fled for safety into Canada.

Note: The information used to create this quiz comes from two different sources. Feel free to use these and other sources to add/change questions or create your own quiz.

Dow, Judy and Slapin, Beverly. "Deconstructing the Myths of 'The First Thanksgiving'" As printed in "A Broken Flute: The Native Experience in Books for Children." 201-208. Copyright 2005 by Oyate. AltaMira Press.
www.oyate.org

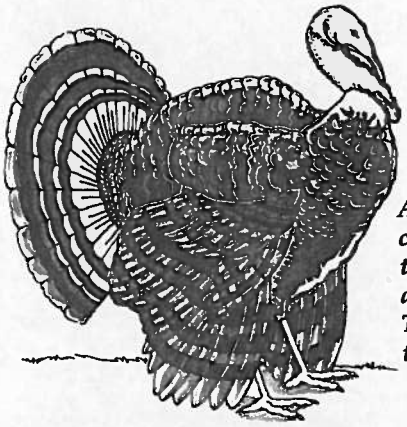
Loewen, James W. "Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong." Copyright 1995 by James W. Loewen. Touchstone, published by arrangement with The New Press. From Chapter 3, "The Truth about the First Thanksgiving," pp. 75-97



This map outlines thirteen culture areas — where distinct landforms, climate, and natural resources played a role in shaping the native cultures.

WHY I'M NOT THANKFUL FOR THANKSGIVING

BY MICHAEL DORRIS



According to this coloring book, the only one who doesn't like Thanksgiving is the turkey.

Native Americans have more than one thing not to be thankful about on Thanksgiving. Pilgrim Day, and its antecedent feast Halloween, represent the annual twin peaks of Indian stereotyping. From early October through the end of November, "cute little Indians" abound on greeting cards, advertising posters, in costumes and school projects. Like stock characters from a vaudeville repertoire, they dutifully march out of the folk-cultural attic (and right down Madison Avenue!) ughing and wah-wah-wahing, smeared with lipstick and rouged; decked out in an assortment of "Indian suits" composed of everything from old clothes to fringed paper bags, little trick-or-treaters and school pageant extras mindlessly sport and cavort.

Considering that virtually none of the standard fare surrounding either Halloween or Thanksgiving contains an ounce of authenticity, historical accuracy, or cross-cultural perception, why is it so apparently ingrained? Is it necessary to the American psyche to perpetually exploit and debase its victims in order to justify its history? And do Native Americans have to reconcile themselves to forever putting up with such exhibitions of puerile ethnocentrism?

It's Never Uncomplicated

Being a parent is never uncomplicated. One is compelled, through one's children, to re-experience vicariously the unfolding complexities of growing up, of coping with the uncomprehended expectations of an apparently intransigent and unaffectable world, of carving a niche of personality and point of view amidst the abundance of pressures and demands which seem to explode from all directions. Most people spend a good part of their lives in search of the ephemeral ideal often termed "identity," but never is the quest more arduous and more precarious — and more crucial — than in the so-called "formative years."

One would like, of course, to spare offspring some of the pains and frustrations necessarily involved in maturation and self-realization, without depriving them of the fulfillments, discoveries, and excitements which are also part of the process. In many arenas, little or no parental control is — or should be — possible. Learning, particularly about self, is a struggle, but with security, support and love it has extraordinary and marvelously unique possibilities. As parents, our lot is often to watch and worry and cheer and commiserate, curbing throughout our impulse to intervene. The world of children interacting with children is in large part off-limits.

Passivity ends, however, with relation to those adult-manufactured and therefore wholly gratuitous problems with which our children are often confronted. We naturally rise against the greed of panderers of debilitating junk foods; we reject dangerous toys, however cleverly advertised; and we make strict laws to protect against reckless motorists. We dutifully strap our children into seatbelts, keep toxic substances out of reach, and keep a wary eye for the molesting or abusive stranger.

With so many blatant dangers to counter, perhaps it is unavoidable that some of the more subtle and insidious perils to child welfare are often permitted to pass. The deficiencies of our own attitudes and training may be allowed to shower upon our children, thus insuring their continuation, unchallenged, into yet another generation. Much of what we impart is unconscious, and we can only strive to heighten our own awareness and thereby circumvent a repetition ad infinitum of the "sins of the fathers" (and mothers).

And of course, we all make the effort to do this, to one degree or another. It is therefore especially intolerable when we observe other adults witlessly, maliciously, and occasionally innocently, burdening our children with their own unexamined mental junk. Each of us has undoubtedly amassed a whole repertoire of examples of such negative influences, ranked in hierarchy of infamy according to our own values and perspectives. Even with the inauguration

of certain broad controls, Saturday morning cartoon audiences are still too often invited to witness and approve violence, cruelty, racism, sexism, ageism, and a plethora of other endemic social vices.

Attitudes pertinent to "racial" or "sex-role" identity are among the most potentially hazardous, for these can easily be internalized — particularly by the "minority" child. Such internalized attitudes profoundly affect self-concept, behavior, aspiration, and confidence. They can inhibit a child before he or she has learned to define personal talents, limits, or objectives, and tend to regularly become self-fulfilling prophesies. Young people who are informed that they are going to be under-achievers do underachieve with painful regularity.

Indian Fakelore

The progeny of each oppressed group are saddled with their own specialized set of debilitating — and to parents, infuriating — stereotypes. As the father of three Native American children, aged ten, six and three, I am particularly attuned (but not resigned) to that huge store of folk Americana presuming to have to do with "Indian lore." From the "One little, two little..." messages of nursery school, to the ersatz pageantry of boy scout/campfire girl mumbo jumbo, precious, ridiculous and irritating "Indians" are forever popping up.

Consider for a moment the underlying meanings of some of the supposedly innocuous linguistic stand-bys: "Indian givers" take back what they have sneakily bestowed in much the same way that "Indian summer" deceives the gullible flower bud. Unruly children are termed "wild Indians" and a local bank is named "Indian Head (would you open an account at a "Jew's hand," "Negro ear" or "Italian toe" branch?). Ordinary citizens rarely walk "Indian file" when about their business, yet countless athletic teams, when seeking emblems of savagery and bloodthirstiness, see fit to title themselves "warriors," "braves," "redskins," and the like.

On another level, children wearing "Indian suits," playing "cowboys and Indians" (or, in the case of organizations like the Y-Indian Guides, Y-Indian Maidens and Y-Indian Princesses, simply "Indians"), or scratching their fingers with pocket knives (the better to cement a friendship) are encouraged to shriek, ululate, speak in staccato and ungrammatical utterances (or, conversely, in sickeningly flowery metaphor) — thus presumably emulating "Indians." With depressing predictability, my children have been variously invited to "dress up and dance," portray Squanto (Pocahontas is waiting in the wings: my daughter is only three), and "tell a myth."

Not surprisingly, they have at times evidenced

Clifford dresses up like an Indian for Halloween.

Norman Bridwell/*Clifford's Halloween*/Scholastic

some unwillingness to identify, and thus cast their lot, with the "Indians" which bombard them on every front. My younger son has lately taken to commenting "Look at the Indians!" when he comes across Ricardo Montalban, Jeff Chandler or the improbable Joey Bishop in a vintage TV western. Society is teaching him that "Indians" exist only in an ethnographic frieze, decorative and slightly titillatingly menacing. They invariably wear feathers, never crack a smile (though an occasional leer is permissible under certain conditions), and think about little besides the good old days. Quite naturally, it does not occur to my son that he and these curious and exotic creatures are expected to present a common front — until one of his first grade classmates, garbed in the favorite costume of Halloween (ah, the permutations of burlap!) or smarting from an ecology commercial, asks him how to shoot a bow, skin a hamster, or endure a scrape without a tear. The society image is at the same time too demanding and too limiting a model.

What Does One Do?

As a parent, what does one do? All efficacy is lost if one is perceived and categorized by school officials as a hyper-sensitive crank, reacting with horror to every "I-is-for-Indian" picture book. To be effective, one must appear to be super-reasonable, drawing sympathetic teachers and vice-principals into an alliance of the enlightened to beat back the attacks of the flat-earthers. In such a pose, one may find oneself engaged in an apparently persuasive discussion with a school librarian regarding a book titled something like Vicious Red Men of the Plains (Why, it's set here for 20 years and nobody ever noticed that it portrayed all Indi...uh, Native Americans, as homicidal maniacs!"), while at the same time observing in silence a poster on the wall about "Contributions of the Indians" (heavy on corn and canoes, short on astronomy and medicine).

Priorities must be set. One might elect to let the

infrequent coloring book page pass uncontested in favor of mounting the battlements against the visitation of a traveling Indianophile group proposing a "playlet" on "Indians of New Hampshire." These possibly well-intentioned theatricals, routinely headed by someone called "Princess Snowflake" or "Chief Bob," are among the more objectionable "learning aids" and should be avoided at all costs. It must somehow be communicated to educators that no information about native peoples is truly preferable to a reiteration of the same old stereotypes, particularly in the early grades.

"The Indians Had Never Seen Such a Feast!"

A year ago my older son brought home a program printed by his school; on the second page was an illustration of the "First Thanksgiving," with a caption which read in part: "They served pumpkins and turkeys and corn and squash. The Indians had never seen such a feast!"

On the contrary! The Pilgrims had literally never seen "such a feast," since all foods mentioned are exclusively indigenous to the Americas and had been provided, or so legend has it, by the local tribe.

Thanksgiving could be a time for appreciating Native American peoples as they were and as they are, not as either the Pilgrims or their descendant bureaucrats might wish them to be.

If there was really a Plymouth Thanksgiving dinner, with Native Americans in attendance as either guests or hosts, then the event was rare indeed. Pilgrims generally considered Indians to be devils in disguise, and treated them as such.

And if those hypothetical Indians participating in that hypothetical feast thought that all was well and were thankful in the expectation of a peaceful future, they were sadly mistaken. In the ensuing months and years, they would die from European diseases, suffer the theft of their lands and property and the near-eradication of their religion and their language, and be driven to the brink of extinction.

Thanksgiving, like much of American history, is complex, multi-faceted, and will not bear too close a scrutiny without revealing a less than heroic aspect. Knowing the truth about Thanksgiving, both its proud and its shameful motivations and history, might well benefit contemporary children. But the glib retelling of an ethnocentric and self-serving falsehood does not do one any good.

Parents' major responsibility, of course, resides in the home. From the earliest possible age, children must be made aware that many people are wrong-headed about not only Native Americans, but about cultural pluralism in general.

Children must be encouraged to articulate any questions they might have about "other" people. And "minority" children must be given ways in which to insulate themselves from real or implied insults, epithets, slights, or stereotypes. "Survival humor" must be developed and positive models must, consciously and unconsciously, be available and obvious. Sadly, children must learn not to trust uncritically.

Protecting children from racism is every bit as important as insuring that they avoid playing with electrical sockets. Poison is poison, and ingrained oppressive cultural attitudes are at least as hard to antidote, once implanted, as are imbibed cleaning fluids.

No one gains by allowing an inequitable and discriminatory status quo to persist. It's worth being a pain in the neck about.

In preparing this essay on stereotyping and Native American children, I did not concern myself with overt or intentional racism. Native American young people, particularly in certain geographical areas, are often prey to racial epithets and slurs — and to physical abuse — just by being who they are. No amount of "consciousness-raising" will solve this problem; it must be put down with force and determination.

Anson Lowitz/Lerner

"And when it was all over, the Indians gave three cheers for the Pilgrims. Never before had they eaten such wonderful food," ***according to this popular children's book,*** **The Pilgrims' Party, A Really True Story,** ***by Sadyebeth and Anson Lowitz.***

Author of award-winning novels for adults and for children, the late Michael Dorris was of Modoc heritage. This essay originally appeared in the Bulletin of the Council on Interracial Books for Children, *Vol. 9, No. 7. Section headings have been added.*

DECONSTRUCTING THE MYTHS OF "THE FIRST THANKSGIVING"

What is it about the story of "The First Thanksgiving" that makes it essential to be taught in virtually every grade from preschool through high school? What is it about the story that is so seductive? Why has it become an annual elementary school tradition to hold Thanksgiving pageants, with young children dressing up in paper-bag costumes and feather-duster headdresses and marching around the schoolyard? Why is it seen as necessary for fake "pilgrims" and fake "Indians" (portrayed by real children, many of whom are Indian) to sit down every year to a fake feast, acting out fake scenarios and reciting fake dialogue about friendship? And why do teachers all over the country continue (for the most part, unknowingly) to perpetuate this myth year after year after year?

Is it because as Americans we have a deep need to believe that the soil we live on and the country on which it is based were founded on integrity and cooperation? This belief would help contradict any feelings of guilt that could haunt us when we look at our role in more recent history in dealing with other indigenous peoples in other countries. If we dare to give up the "myth" we may have to take responsibility for our actions both concerning indigenous peoples of this land as well as those brought to this land in violation of everything that makes us human. The realization of these truths untold might crumble the foundation of what many believe is a true democracy. As good people, can we be strong enough to learn the truths of our collective past? Can we learn from our mistakes? This would be our hope.

We offer these myths and facts to assist students, parents and teachers in thinking critically about this holiday, and deconstructing what we have been taught about the history of this continent and the world.—*Judy Dow and Beverly Slapin*

(Note: We thank Margaret M. Bruchac, Doris Seale, Lakota Harden, and the Wampanoag Indian Program at Plimoth Plantation.)

Myth #1: "The First Thanksgiving" occurred in 1621.

> The Pilgrims decided to have a three-day celebration feast to give thanks for a good harvest. Thus began the first Thanksgiving.[1]
>
> The first Thanksgiving was a celebration of the Pilgrims' very first harvest.[2]
>
> The feast at Plymouth in 1621 is often called The First Thanksgiving.[3]
>
> The pilgrims wanted to give thanks for all the good food. That was the first Thanksgiving.[4]

Fact: No one knows when the "first" thanksgiving occurred. People have been giving thanks for as long as people have existed. Indigenous Nations all over the world have celebrations of the harvest that come from very old traditions; for Native peoples, thanksgiving comes not once a year, but every day, for all the gifts of life. To refer to the harvest feast of 1621 as "The First Thanksgiving" disappears Indian peoples in the eyes of non-Native children.

Myth #2: The people who came across the ocean on the Mayflower were called Pilgrims.

> Once upon a time in the land of England, there lived a small group of people called Pilgrims. The Pilgrims were unhappy, because...[5]
>
> The people were called Pilgrims.[6]
>
> These are the Pilgrims, who farmed the new land,...[7]
>
> 1 little, 2 little, 3 little Pilgrims, 4 little, 5 little, 6 little Pilgrims,...[8]

Fact: The Plimoth settlers did not refer to themselves as "Pilgrims." Pilgrims are people who travel for religious reasons, such as Muslims who make a pilgrimage to Mecca. Most of those who arrived here from England were religious dissidents who had broken away from the Church of England. They called themselves "Saints"; others called them "Separatists." Some of the settlers were "Puritans," dissidents but not separatists who wanted to "purify" the Church.[9]

Myth #3: The colonists came seeking freedom of religion in a new land.

> The Pilgrims wanted their own religion....So the Pilgrims decided to leave England.[10]
>
> The Pilgrims had left England because King James did not want them to practice their own religion. They were in search of a new home.[11]
>
> They left their old country because they could not pray the way they wanted.[12]
>
> The Pilgrims wanted to worship God in their own way...[13]

Fact: The colonists were not just innocent refugees from religious persecution. By 1620, hundreds of Native people had already been to England and back, most as captives; so the Plimoth colonists knew full well that the land they were settling on was inhabited. Nevertheless, their belief system taught them that any land that was "unimproved" was "wild" and theirs for the taking; that the people who lived there were roving heathens with no right to the land. Both the Separatists and Puritans were rigid fundamentalists who came here fully intending to take the land away from its Native inhabitants and establish a new nation, their "Holy Kingdom." The Plimoth colonists were never concerned with "freedom of religion" for anyone but themselves. It wasn't until around the time of the American Revolution that the name "Pilgrims" came to be associated with the Plimoth settlers, and the "Pilgrims" became the symbol of American morality and Christian faith, fortitude, and family.[14]

Myth #4: When the "Pilgrims" landed, they first stepped foot on "Plymouth Rock."

> The Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock.[15]
>
> This is the harbor, marked by a huge stone where first steps were taken to chart the unknown,...[16]
>
> The Pilgrims came/To Plymouth Rock/One snowy, cold December...[17]
>
> On top of the gravel the glacier deposited huge boulders it had carried from distant places. One settled in Plymouth Harbor....A wandering pilgrim, it left its home in Africa two hundred million years ago....Eons later, battered by glaciers, all 200 tons of it came to rest in lonely splendor, on a sandy beach in a cove. This boulder is Plymouth Rock....Yet to Americans, Plymouth Rock is a symbol. It is larger than the mountains, wider than the prairies and stronger than all our rivers. It is the rock on which our nation began.[18]

Fact: When the colonists landed, they sought out a sandy inlet in which to beach the little shallop that carried them from the Mayflower to the mainland. This shallop would have been smashed to smithereens had they docked at a rock, especially a Rock. Although the Plimoth settlers built their homes just up the hill from the Rock, William Bradford in *Mourt's Relation: A Journal of the Pilgrims at Plymouth*, does not even mention the Rock; writing only that they "unshipped our shallop and drew her on land."[19] The actual "rock" is a slab of Dedham granodiorite placed there by a receding glacier some 20,000 years ago. It was first referred to in a town surveying record in 1715, almost one hundred years after the landing. Since then, the Rock has been moved, cracked in two, pasted together, carved up, chipped apart by tourists, cracked again, and now rests as a memorial to something that never happened.[20]

It's quite possible that the myth about the "Pilgrims" landing on a "Rock" originated as a reference to the New Testament of the Christian bible, in which Jesus says to Peter, "And I say also unto thee, Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church and the Gates of Hell shall not prevail against

it." (Matthew 16:18) The appeal to these scriptures gives credence to the sanctity of colonization and the divine destiny of the dominant culture. Although the colonists were not dominant then, they behaved as though they were.

Myth #5: The Pilgrims found corn.

> During their first hard year in America, the Pilgrims found corn buried in the sand of Cape Cod. ....This important find gave the Pilgrims seeds to plant—and these became the seeds for survival.[21]
>
> On their way back they found Indian graves and some Indian corn.[22]
>
> The men dug down into [a hill of sand] and—there was a little old basket filled with corn! Now they had corn to plant. They found other baskets. These were big baskets, and it took two men to carry one. They filled their pockets with corn.[23]
>
> The men keep exploring. They find wonderful things—corn, baskets, a spring.[24]

Fact: Just a few days after landing, a party of about sixteen settlers led by Captain Myles Standish followed a Nauset trail and came upon an iron kettle and a cache of Indian corn buried in the sand. They made off with the corn and returned a few days later with reinforcements. This larger group "found" a larger store of corn, about ten bushels, and took it. They also "found" several graves, and, according to ***Mourt's Relation***, "brought sundry of the prettiest things away" from a child's grave and then covered up the corpse. They also "found" two Indian dwellings and "some of the best things we took away with us."[25] There is no record that restitution was ever made for the stolen corn, and the Wampanoag did not soon forget the colonists' ransacking of Indian graves.[26]

Myth #6: Samoset appeared out of nowhere, and along with Squanto became friends with the Pilgrims. Squanto helped the Pilgrims survive and joined them at "The First Thanksgiving."

> When Spring came, two men named Squanto and Samoset appeared and made friends with the surviving Pilgrims.[27]
>
> Squanto was the Pilgrims' teacher and friend. He helped save their lives and made sure their little settlement survived in the rocky New England soil. By saving the Pilgrims, Squanto became one of our first American heroes.[28]
>
> Squanto spoke really good English. He had even been to England. Squanto had no family, so he acted as though the Pilgrims were his family. He liked them so much he came to live at Plymouth.[29]
>
> One day, a kind Indian came to the Pilgrims' village. He like the Pilgrims and wanted to help them. Soon, more Indians came. They were nice and showed the Pilgrims how to....[30]

Fact: Samoset, an eastern Abenaki chief, was the first to contact the Plimoth colonists. He was investigating the settlement to gather information and report to Massasoit, the head sachem in the Wampanoag territory. In his hand, Samoset carried two arrows: one blunt and one pointed. The question to the settlers was: are you friend or foe? Samoset brought Tisquantum (Squanto), one of the few survivors of the original Wampanoag village of Pawtuxet, to meet the English and keep an eye on them. Tisquantum had been taken captive by English captains several years earlier, and both he and Samoset spoke English. Tisquantum agreed to live among the colonists and serve as a translator. Massasoit also sent Hobbamock and his family to live near the colony to keep an eye on the settlement and also to watch Tisquantum, whom Massasoit did not trust. The Wampanoag oral tradition says that Massasoit ordered Tisquantum killed after he tried to stir up the English against the Wampanoag. Massasoit himself lost face after his years of dealing with the English only led to warfare and land grabs. Tisquantum is viewed by Wampanoag people as a traitor, for his scheming against other Native people for his own gain. Massasoit is viewed as a wise and generous leader whose affection for the English may have led him to be too tolerant of their ways.[31]

Myth #7: The Pilgrims invited the Indians to celebrate the First Thanksgiving.

> The Pilgrims invited their Native American friends to a great feast.[32]
>
> "Join us," they said to the Indians. "Join us in a big feast of Thanksgiving. It will be a very special holiday."[33]
>
> The harvest was/So plentiful/The Pilgrims were delighted—/They prepared to have/A giant feast,/And the Indians were invited.[34]
>
> To celebrate, the Pilgrims decided to have a big party—a harvest festival. And they invited their new Indian friends to join them.[35]

Fact: According to oral accounts from the Wampanoag people, when the Native people nearby first heard the gunshots of the hunting colonists, they thought that the colonists were preparing for war and that Massasoit needed to be informed. When Massasoit showed up with ninety men and no women or children, it can be assumed that he was being cautious. When he saw there was a party going on, his men then went out and brought back five deer and lots of turkeys.[36]

In addition, both the Wampanoag and the English settlers were long familiar with harvest celebrations. Long before the Europeans set foot on these shores, Native peoples gave thanks every day for all the gifts of life, and held thanksgiving celebrations and giveaways at certain times of the year. The Europeans also had days of thanksgiving, marked by religious services. So the coming together of two peoples to share food and company was not entirely a foreign thing for either. But the visit that by all accounts lasted three days was most likely one of a series of political meetings to discuss and secure a military alliance. Neither side totally trusted the other: The Europeans considered the Wampanoag soulless heathens and instruments of the devil, and the Wampanoag had seen the Europeans steal their seed corn and rob their graves. In any event, neither the Wampanoag nor the Europeans referred to this feast/meeting as "Thanksgiving."[37]

Myth #8: The Pilgrims provided the food for their Indian friends.

> The Wampanoag smoked their pipes, tasted English cooking, and presented a dance to the Pilgrims.[38]
>
> The pilgrims hunted wild turkeys. They picked fruits and berries. When there was enough food, they all had a feast.[39]
>
> They knew they could never have survived without the Indians, so the Pilgrims invited the Indians to join them in a feast.[40]
>
> The twelve women of New Plymouth began great preparations. From the kitchens came the savory smell of roasting geese and turkey. An abundance of corn bread and hasty pudding was being prepared. Stewed eels, boiled lobsters, and juicy clam stews simmered over the fires. Before the feast, Squanto was sent with an invitation to Massasoit and his chiefs....The Indians were in no hurry to go home as long as the food held out, and the holiday-making carried on for three days.[41]

Fact: It is known that when Massasoit showed up with ninety men and saw there was a party going on, they then went out and brought back five deer and lots of turkeys. Though the details of this event have become clouded in secular mythology, judging by the inability of the settlers to provide for themselves at this time and Edward Winslow's letter of 1622,[42] it is most likely that Massasoit and his people provided most of the food for this "historic" meal.[43]

Myth #9: The Pilgrims and Indians feasted on turkey, potatoes, berries, cranberry sauce, pumpkin pie, and popcorn.

> There were meat pies, wheat breads, and corn puddings. There were berries, grapes, dried plums, and nuts.[44]

> Many tables are filled with the same foods the Pilgrims and Indians shared. There is cranberry sauce and a big turkey stuffed with breadcrumbs, herbs, and nuts. Also there are sweet potatoes, beans, squash, and cornbread. Sometimes there is a tasty pumpkin pie for dessert.[45]
>
> Corn was cooked in many ways. There was popcorn, too![46]
>
> There was eel and cod and lobster and quahogs and mussels and wild turkey and cranberries and succotash and berry pies.[47]

Fact: Both written and oral evidence show that what was actually consumed at the harvest festival in 1621 included venison (since Massasoit and his people brought five deer), wild fowl, and quite possibly nasaump—dried corn pounded and boiled into a thick porridge, and pompion—cooked, mashed pumpkin. Among the other food that would have been available, fresh fruits such as plums, grapes, berries and melons would have been out of season. It would have been too cold to dig for clams or fish for eels or small fish. There were no boats to fish for lobsters in rough water that was about sixty fathoms deep. There was not enough of the barley crop to make a batch of beer, nor was there a wheat crop. Potatoes and sweet potatoes didn't get from the south up to New England until the 18th Century, nor did sweet corn. Cranberries would have been too tart to eat without sugar to sweeten them, and that's probably why they wouldn't have had pumpkin pie, either. Since the corn of the time could not be successfully popped, there was no popcorn.[48]

Myth #10: The Pilgrims and Indians became great friends.

> The Pilgrims lived in peace with their Indian neighbors.[49]
>
> They had food and houses and warm fires. The Indians were their friends. They were free in this new land.[50]
>
> All of the Pilgrims took part. So did their Indian friends.[51]
>
> Together the Pilgrims and Indians lived in peace and grew in friendship.[52]

Fact: A mere generation later, the balance of power had shifted so enormously and the theft of land by the European settlers had become so egregious that the Wampanoag were forced into battle. In 1637, English soldiers massacred some 700 Pequot men, women and children at Mystic Fort, burning many of them alive in their homes and shooting those who fled. The colony of Connecticut and Massachusetts Bay Colony observed a day of thanksgiving commemorating the massacre. By 1675, there were some 50,000 colonists in the place they had named "New England." That year, Metacom, a son of Massasoit, one of the first whose generosity had saved the lives of the starving settlers, led a rebellion against them. By the end of the conflict known as "King Philip's War," most of the Indian peoples of the Northeast region had been either completely wiped out, sold into slavery, or had fled for safety into Canada. Shortly after Metacom's death, Plimoth Colony declared a day of thanksgiving for the English victory over the Indians.[53]

Myth #11: Thanksgiving is a happy time.

> Today, Thanksgiving is a happy time when families gather together.[54]
>
> It's a time to remember the Pilgrims and their first Thanksgiving.[55]
>
> Thanksgiving reminds us of the little band of people who founded the Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts. Each November it reopens a favorite chapter in our nation's history.[56]
>
> All over the country, people gather their families together and have a feast. They thank God for the good things of the past year. They eat turkey. They remember the brave Pilgrims and the first Thanksgiving Day.[57]
>
> That was the first Thanksgiving! It's a story we'll never forget. It's something we celebrate every year.[58]

Fact: For many Indian people, "Thanksgiving" is a time of mourning, of remembering how a gift of generosity was rewarded by theft of land and seed corn, extermination of many from disease and gun, and near total destruction of many more from forced assimilation. As currently celebrated in this country, "Thanksgiving" is a bitter reminder of 500 years of betrayal returned for friendship.

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WHAT NOT TO TEACH About Native Americans

BY JUNE SARK HEINRICH

Don't use alphabet cards that say A is for apple, B is for ball, and I is for Indian.

The matter may seem to be a trivial one, but if you want your students to develop respect for Native Americans, don't start them out in kindergarten equating Indians with things like apples and balls. Stay away from "I-is-for-Indian."

Don't talk about Indians as though they belong to the past.

Books often have titles like "How the Indians Lived," as though there aren't any living today. Today, about two million Native Americans live in what is now the United States, many on reservations and many in cities and towns. They are in all kinds of neighborhoods and schools and in all walks of life. Too many live today in conditions of poverty and powerlessness, but they are very much a part of the modern world. If the people who write books mean "How (particular groups of) Native Americans Lived Long Ago," then they should say so.

Don't lump all Native Americans together.

There were no "Indians" before the Europeans came to America — that is, no people called themselves "Indians." They are Navajo or Seminole or Menominee, etc. The hundreds of native groups scattered throughout the U.S. are separate peoples, separate nations. They have separate languages and cultures and names. Native Americans of one nation are as different from Native Americans of another nation as Italians are from Swedes, Hungarians from Irish, or English from Spanish. When teaching about Native Americans, use the word "Indians" — or even "Native American" — as little as possible. Don't "study the Indians." Study the Hopi, the Sioux, the Nisqually, the Apache.

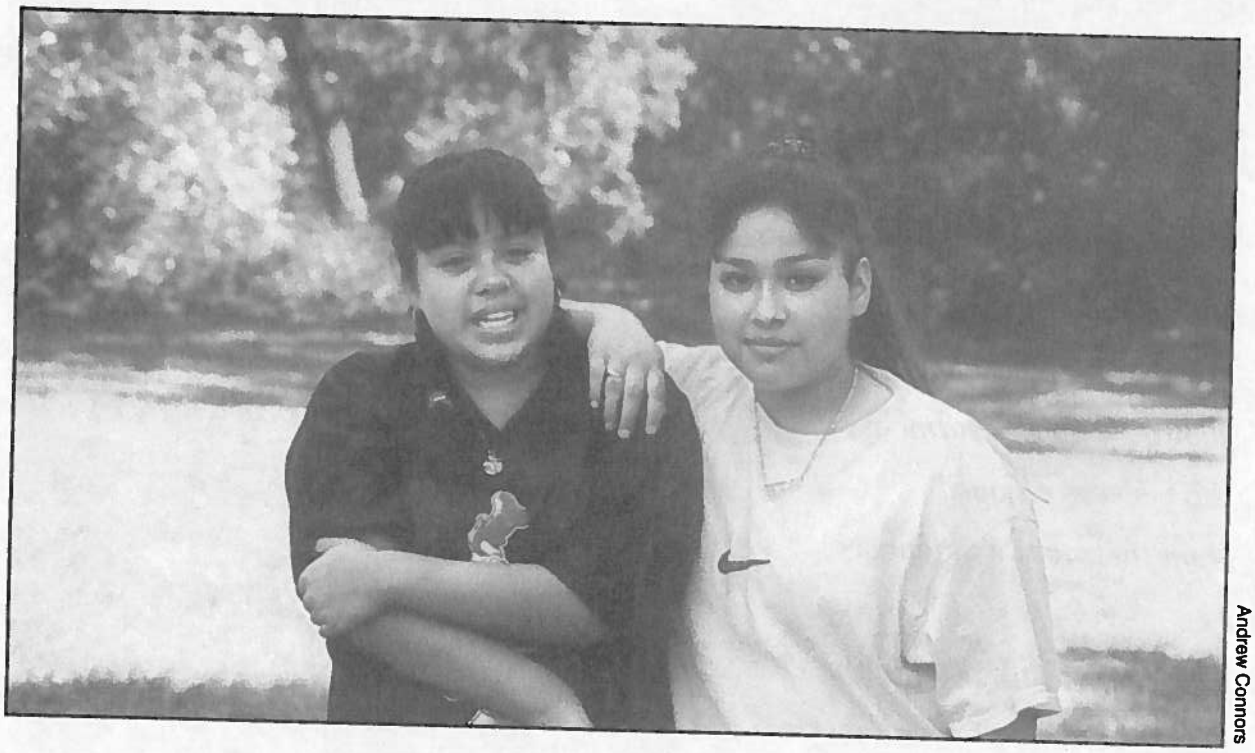
Don't expect Native Americans to look like Hollywood movie "Indians."

Some Native Americans tell a story about a white "American" woman who visited a reservation. She stopped and stared at a young man, then said to him, "Are you a real Indian? You don't look Indian."

Whatever it is that people expect Native Americans to look like, many do not fit those images. Since they come from different nations, their physical features, body structure, and skin colors vary a great deal — and none has red skin. Of course, Native and non-Native Americans have intermarried, so many Native Americans today have European, African, or other ancestry. Don't expect all Native Americans to look alike, any more than all Europeans look alike.

Don't let TV stereotypes go unchallenged.

Unfortunately, TV programs still show the "savage warrior" or occasionally, the "noble savage" stereotypes. Discuss with children the TV programs they watch. Help them understand the meaning of



Andrew Connors

the word "stereotype." Help them understand that, from the Native American point of view, Columbus and other Europeans who came to this land were invaders. Even so, Native Americans originally welcomed and helped the European settlers. When they fought, they were no more "savage" than the Europeans and were often less so.

Help children understand that atrocities are a part of any war, as war itself is atrocious. At least, the Native Americans were defending land they had lived on for thousands of years. Native Americans were not "savage warriors," nor were they "noble savages." They were no more nor less noble than the rest of humanity.

Another common stereotype is the portrayal of the "Indian" as a person of few words, mostly "ugh." On the contrary, early European settlers often commented on the brilliance of Native American oratory and the beauty of their languages.

Stereotypes are sneaky. They influence the way we talk and live and play, sometimes without our knowing it. Don't say to your students, "You act like a bunch of wild Indians." Don't encourage or even allow children to play "cowboys and Indians." Be sensitive to stereotypes in everything you say and do.

Don't assume that Native American children are well acquainted with their heritage.

If you have Native American children in your class, you may expect that they will be good resource persons for your "unit on Indians." It is likely that such children will be proud of being Native American. Some may participate in traditional activities of their cultures. In general, however, native children today have much in common with other children in the U.S. They know far more about TV programs than about their own national ways of life. They eat junk food and want all of the things most children in our society want. If lost in a forest, they would not necessarily be able to manage any better than other children would. Like other children in the U.S., native children need to be taught about the native heritage which, in a very real sense, is the heritage of everybody living in the U.S. today.

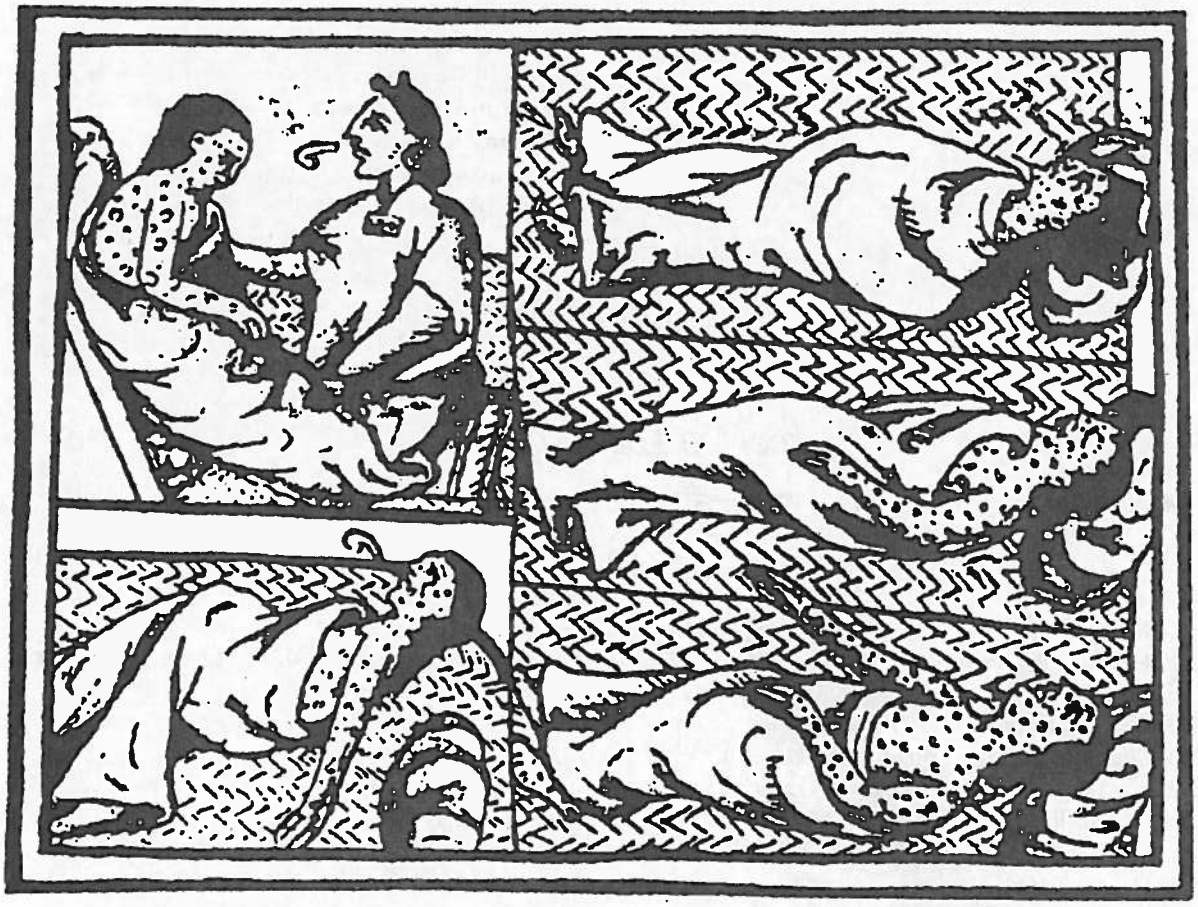
Don't let students think that native ways of life have no meaning today.

Native arts have long commanded worldwide interest and admiration. But far more important for human and ecological survival are Native American philosophies of life. Respect for the land; love of every form of life, human and non-human; harmony between humans and nature rather than conquest and destruction of nature — these are vital characteristics of native ways of life. All people in the U.S. can and must learn to live in harmony with the natural world and with one another. That is one lesson native peoples can teach your students about "the Indians."

June Sark Heinrich formerly directed the Native American Committee's Indian School in Chicago. This piece is adapted from an article in Unlearning "Indian" Stereotypes, *Council on Interracial Books for Children.*

PLAGUES & PILGRIMS
The Truth about the First Thanksgiving

BY JAMES W. LOEWEN



Fray Bernardinode Sahagun

Native peoples had no immunity to smallpox.

Textbooks spin happy yarns about the Pilgrims and the "First Thanksgiving." Here is the version in one high-school history, *The American Tradition*:

After some exploring, the Pilgrims chose the land around Plymouth Harbor for their settlement. Unfortunately, they had arrived in December and were not prepared for the New England winter. However, they were aided by some friendly Indians, who gave them food and showed them how to grow corn. When warm weather came, the colonists planted, fished, hunted, and prepared themselves for the next winter. After harvesting their first crop, they and their Indian friends celebrated the first Thanksgiving.

I teach first-year college students, the products of American high schools. And when I ask my students about the plague, they stare back at me. "What plague?"

For a variety of reasons, Native Americans were "a remarkably healthy race" before Columbus. Ironically, their very health now proved their undoing, for they had built up no resistance, genetically or through childhood diseases, to the microbes Europeans and Africans now brought with them. In 1617, just before the Pilgrims landed, the process started in southern New England. Today we think it was the bubonic plague, although pox and influenza are also candidates.

British fishermen had been fishing off Massachusetts for decades before the Pilgrims landed. After filling their hulls with cod, they would set forth on land to get firewood and fresh water and perhaps capture a few Indians to sell into slavery in Europe. On one of these expeditions they probably transmitted the illness to the people they met.

Whatever it was, within three years this plague wiped out between 90 percent and 96 percent of the inhabitants of southern New England. The Indian societies lay devastated. Only "the twentieth person is scarce left alive," wrote British eyewitness Robert Cushman, describing a death rate unknown in all previous human experience. Unable to cope with so many corpses, survivors fled to the next tribe, carrying the infestation with them, so that Indians died who had never seen a white person.

During the next fifteen years, additional epidemics, most of which we know to have been smallpox, struck repeatedly.

The English Separatists, already seeing their lives as part of a divinely inspired morality play, inferred that they had God on their side. John Winthrop, Governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony, called the plague "miraculous." To a friend in England in 1634, he wrote:

But for the natives in these parts, God hath so pursued them, as for 300 miles space the greatest part of them are swept away by the smallpox which still continues among them. So as God hath thereby cleared our title to this place, those who remain in these parts, being in all not fifty, have put themselves under our protection....

God, the original real estate agent!

Many Indians likewise inferred that their God had abandoned them. Cushman reported that "those that are left, have their courage much abated, and their countenance is dejected, and they seem as a people affrighted." After all, neither they nor the Pilgrims had access to the germ theory of disease. Indian healers offered no cure, their religion no explanation. That of the whites did. Many Indians surrendered to alcohol or began to listen to Christianity.

These epidemics constituted perhaps the most important single geopolitical event of the first third of the 1600s, anywhere on the planet. They meant that the British would face no real Indian challenge for their first fifty years in America. Indeed, the plague helped cause the legendary warm reception Plymouth [the Pilgrims] enjoyed in its first formative years from the Wampanoags. Massasoit, the Wampanoag leader, needed to ally with the Pilgrims because the plague had so weakened his villages that he feared the Narragansetts to the west.

Moreover, the New England plagues exemplify a process which antedated the Pilgrims and endures to this day. The pestilence continues, now killing Indians in the interior of the Amazon Basin in northern Brazil and southern Venezuela.

Europeans were never able to "settle" China, India, Indonesia, Japan, or most of Africa because too many people already lived there. Advantages in military and social technology would have enabled Europeans to dominate the Americas — as they eventually dominated China and Africa — but not to "settle" the New World. For that, the plague was required.

Thus, except for the European invasion itself, the pestilence was surely the most important event in the history of America. Nonetheless, most high-school textbooks leave it out.

> *The antidote to feel-good history is not feel-bad history, but honest and inclusive history.*

It was a Lovely Site

The Pilgrims chose Plymouth because of its cleared fields, recently planted in corn, "and a brook of fresh water [that] flowed into the harbor." It was a lovely site for a town. Indeed, until the plague, it had been a town. Everywhere in the hemisphere, Europeans pitched camp right in the middle of native populations — Cuzco, Mexico City, Natchez, Chicago. Throughout New England, colonists appropriated Indian cornfields, which explains why so many town names — Marshfield, Springfield, Deerfield — end in "field."

Inadvertent Indian assistance started on the Pilgrims' second full day in Massachusetts. A colonist's journal tells us:

We marched to the place we called Cornhill, where we had found the corn before. At another place we had seen before, we dug and found some more corn, two or three baskets full, and a bag of beans .... In all we had about ten bushels, which will be enough for seed. It was with God's help that we found this corn, for how else could we have done it, without meeting some Indians who might trouble us.... The next morning, we found a place like a grave. We decided to dig it up. We found first a mat, and under that a fine bow.... We also found bowls, trays, dishes, and things like that. We took several of the prettiest things to

carry away with us, and covered the body up again.

A place "like a grave"!

Squanto

More help came from a live Indian, Squanto. What do the textbooks leave out about Squanto? First, how he learned English. As a boy, along with four Penobscots, he was probably stolen by a British captain in about 1605 and taken to England. There he probably spent nine years, two in the employ of a Plymouth merchant who later helped finance the Mayflower. At length, the merchant helped him arrange a passage back to Massachusetts.

He was to enjoy home life for less than a year, however. In 1614, a British slave raider seized him and two dozen fellow Indians and sold them into slavery in Malaga, Spain. Squanto escaped from slavery, made his way back to England, and in 1619 talked a ship captain into taking him along on his next trip to Cape Cod.

It happens that Squanto's fabulous odyssey provides a "hook" into the plague story. For now Squanto walked to his home village, only to make the horrifying discovery that "he was the sole member of his village still alive. All the others had perished in the epidemic two years before." No wonder he throws his lot in with the Pilgrims, who rename the site of his original village, "Plymouth." Now that is a story worth telling!

Compare the pallid account in a high-school textbook, *Land of Promise*. "He had learned their language from English fishermen." What do we make of books that give us the unimportant details — Squanto's name, the occupation of his enslavers — while omitting not only his enslavement, but also the crucial fact of the plague? This is distortion on a grand scale.

Embarrassing Facts

Should we teach the truths about Thanksgiving? Or, like our textbooks, should we look the other way? Thanksgiving is full of embarrassing facts. The Pilgrims did not introduce the Native Americans to the tradition; Eastern Indians had observed autumnal harvest celebrations for centuries. Our modern

Anson Lowitz/Lerner

"The Pilgrim army drilled," a curious thing to do for Native guests at the 1621 Thanksgiving feast — unless the goal was to impress the visiting Wampanoag leader, Massasoit, with the Pilgrims' military power. Illustration from the book,* The Pilgrims' Party, A Really True Story, *by Sadyebeth and Anson Lowitz.

celebrations date back only to Abraham Lincoln in 1863; not until the 1890s did the Pilgrims get included in the tradition.

Plymouth Rock itself achieved legendary status only in the 19th century, when some enterprising residents of the town moved it down to the water so its significance as the "holy soil" the Pilgrims first touched might seem more plausible.

Indians are marginalized in this civic ritual. Our archetypal image of the first Thanksgiving portrays the groaning boards in the woods, with the Pilgrims in their starched Sunday best and the almost naked Indian guests. This exemplifies what art historians call "hieratic scale," as in "hierarchy." It is silly once thought about, for depending on the weather, either the Indians were very cold or the Pilgrims were very hot. But we aren't supposed to think about it.

Thanksgiving silliness reaches some sort of zenith in the handouts that school children have carried home for decades, with captions like, "They served pumpkin and turkeys and corn and squash. The Indians had never seen such a feast!"

When his son brought home this "information" from his New Hampshire elementary school, Native American novelist Michael Dorris pointed out "the *Pilgrims* had literally never seen 'such a feast' since all foods mentioned are exclusively indigenous to the Americas and had been provided by [or with the aid of] the local tribe."

I do not suggest a "bash the Pilgrims" interpretation, emphasizing only the bad parts. I have emphasized untoward details only because our histories have suppressed everything awkward for so long. The Pilgrims' courage in setting forth in the late fall to make their way on a continent new to them remains unsurpassed. In their first year, like the Indians, they suffered from diseases. Half of them died. The Pilgrims did not cause the plague and were as baffled as to its true origin as the stricken Indian villagers.

The antidote to feel-good history is not feel-bad history, but honest and inclusive history.

Because our Thanksgiving holiday has roots in both Anglo and Native cultures, and because of the interracial cooperation the first celebration enshrines, it might yet develop into a holiday that promotes tolerance and understanding.

But to glorify the Pilgrims is dangerous. The genial omissions and false details our texts use to retail the Pilgrim legend promote Anglocentrism, which only handicaps us when dealing with all those whose culture is not Anglo.

The Wampanoag leader, Massasoit, had a son known as King Philip, who became the leader of an alliance of several tribes worried about the spread of European settlements deeper into their lands. In 1675, war broke out between the Native peoples and the Pilgrim colonists. Within a year, the European immigrants crushed the resistance; Massasoit's heir, Philip, was killed in battle and his wife and child captured and sold into slavery. Philip's head was cut off and displayed on a pole in the town of Plymouth for the next 25 years.

James Loewen is the author of Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong *(New Press, 1995), from which this excerpt is modified. He is now writing* Lies Across America: What Our Historic Markers and Monuments Get Wrong.