

# Thanksgiving Lesson Plan *for* Museum Educators

*Theme: Gratitude*

Published by **Raising Citizens** – a  
partnership between  
Freedom's Feast and the  
Children's Museum of Manhattan.

# Program Overview

## Program Overview

- This program is designed to provide children with greater insight and appreciation into the historical and personal significance of Thanksgiving.
- Children will participate in discussion on how the history of Thanksgiving relates to personal family stories and traditions.
- Discussion will be followed by a hands-on activity. Children will design Gratitude plates with personal symbols and imagery to express their gratitude. The plates can be incorporated into their personal Thanksgiving celebrations.



Students at [KIPP Baltimore](#) show off their gratitude plates at a Freedom's Feast-sponsored event.

# Thanksgiving Background

- Thanksgiving, observed on the fourth Thursday in November, has been an American tradition since 1863.
- This holiday traces its roots back to a harvest celebration at the Plymouth Plantation in 1621.
- In 1621, the Wampanoags (*Wam\*pa\*no\*ag*), the native tribe of Plymouth, taught the newly arrived English pilgrims how to fish, hunt, and plant food for their new home. This knowledge was invaluable.
- The English were adjusting to a new climate and would have starved without the Wampanoags' help. These Native Americans and the Pilgrims celebrated their harvest with a special feast and brought different foods, including wild turkey, duck, rabbit, lobster, clams, mussels and many other foods.
- The natives also brought corn, beans and squash to the feast, and taught the Pilgrims how to cook the food.
- The Pilgrims were very appreciative of these gifts.
- This harvest celebration has come to be known as the "First Thanksgiving."
- During Thanksgiving, American families of all cultures like to gather together to celebrate family, their heritage, and express their gratitude.

# Thanksgiving Background



- In 1838, Sarah Josepha Hale, the editor of *Godey's Lady's Book*, the most widely circulated woman's magazine in America, launched a 38-year-long campaign to make Thanksgiving a federal holiday. She wrote 40 Thanksgiving theme-based editorials and sent hundreds of letters to governors, senators, and presidents. She even promoted the traditional menu we eat today.
- By 1848, Sarah reported that 24 of 29 state governors had proclaimed the last Thursday of November as a state Thanksgiving Day. And finally, in the midst of the Civil War, a key letter from Sarah helped to convince President Lincoln on October 3, 1863 to declare the last Thursday of November as national Thanksgiving Day "to heal the wounds of the nation." But Sarah wasn't satisfied. She saw Thanksgiving as an essential bonding holiday for families and for the nation.
- Her dream wasn't realized until 1941 when Congress responded to President Roosevelt's 1939 Thanksgiving proclamation. Under pressure from the National Retail Dry Goods Association, Roosevelt moved the holiday that year from the last Thursday to the fourth Thursday to extend the Christmas shopping season as the nation struggled to recover from the Great Depression. Many were upset by the change and Congress was forced to act. In the end, the economy trumped tradition. Our new tradition became the fourth Thursday in November but Thanksgiving finally became a legal, federal holiday.

# Questions for Discussion

- Does anyone know what national holiday we are celebrating this week?
- How does your family celebrate Thanksgiving?
- Do you go anywhere special on Thanksgiving day?
- What do you eat for Thanksgiving dinner?
- What do you know about the “first” Thanksgiving that took place long ago?

# Questions for Discussion (cont'd)

- Why were they having this special meal?
- Do you know what kinds of foods were eaten at this special harvest meal?
- What are you thankful for in your life?

# Thanksgiving Lesson Plan

## Image for Discussion (outside)



# Print on reverse of slide#7

- “The First Thanksgiving at Plymouth” by Brownscombe.
- In early autumn of 1621, the surviving Pilgrims of the original 102 voyagers celebrated their successful harvest, with over 100 members of the Wampanoag Indian tribe who taught them to plant crops.
- (PRIMARY TEXT) That 1621 celebration is remembered as the "First Thanksgiving in Plymouth."
- Edward Winslow, who was present at the First Thanksgiving, wrote this in *Mourt's Relation*: "our harvest being gotten in, our governor sent four men on fowling, that so we might after a special manner rejoice together, after we had gathered the fruits of our labors; many of the Indians coming amongst us, and amongst the rest their greatest king Massasoit, with some ninety men, whom for three days we entertained and feasted, and they went out and killed five Deer, which they brought to the Plantation... And although it be not always so plentiful, as it was at this time with us, yet by the goodness of God, we are so far from want, that we often wish you partakers of our plenty."
- <http://www.pilgrimhall.org/1stthnks.htm>

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- The Pilgrims came to America to escape religious persecution. Thanksgiving was a sacred tradition to them; an opportunity to give thanks for the blessings that sustained them through the struggles that they experienced. What keeps you healthy, safe, and well throughout the year that makes you grateful?



# Thanksgiving Lesson Plan

Image for Discussion (inside)



# Print on reverse of slide#9

- The High Table. The “high table” at one of the original Thanksgiving meals would have been impressive – Massasoit, Squanto (the Wampanoag who taught the Pilgrims to plant native crops), Governor William Bradford (left), and at least one of the Massasoit’s *pnieses*, or warrior-counselors. Photo courtesy of Scholastic.com

## DISCUSSION STARTERS

- For educators: Notice the difference in the setting and atmosphere between the two photos. One is held outside and seems to be more inclusive. The other is inside, and appears to be a more formal dinner between Native American and Pilgrim leaders.
- You’ve now seen two pictures of the first Thanksgiving. One depiction tells us that the Pilgrims and the Native Americans celebrated together outside, and the other shows a more intimate, indoor celebration. What are some of the differences do you notice between the two pictures? Why are these important in telling the tale of America’s first Thanksgiving? Which picture do you prefer?
- Does your family pray before your Thanksgiving dinner or perform a ritual that is unique to your heritage, religion, or family?

# Hands on Activity Info Page

- Children will design plates using symbols and imagery that express their personal experiences of gratitude.
- The plates can be used as part of their families' Thanksgiving celebrations.
- The Freedom's Feast Thanksgiving Gratitude Plate Collection is a collection of beautifully crafted plates by artists who were asked to paint what they were grateful for as Americans. Please visit the Freedom's Feast dinner plate collection at CMOM to see more: [bit.ly/QL5Yhl](http://bit.ly/QL5Yhl)

## *A few plates in the Freedom's Feast Thanksgiving Gratitude Plate Collection*



### **Sloane Tanen**

This image is a light-hearted celebration of my favorite holiday. Above all, it honors inclusion and the fact everyone has a seat at the Thanksgiving table... even the oddest of birds.



### **Nina Meledandri**

The diversity of colors and shapes beautifully represent the different cultures and races that make up our country.



### **Dr. Bob Hieronimus**

America's Founding Fathers believed that humans could govern themselves without a king, and should have the freedom to go to any church they wanted.

# Hands-on Activity

## *Materials for the Gratitude Plate Activity*

- Plastic plates to hold paper circles
  - Can be purchased at S&S Worldwide  
<http://www.ssw.com/item/color-me-plate-group-pack-SE575/> (“Color Me Plate Pack, Item # SE575”)
  - Alternative option is to utilize heavy duty paper plates
- Pre-cut circles made from colored construction paper circles
- Markers

# Hands-on Activity Steps

1. Distribute colored construction paper circles, markers, and colored pencils to the tables. Encourage children to choose colors they would like to use.
2. Prompt participants to think about the things they are thankful for and to draw them on the circle.
3. Demonstrate how to insert the paper circle into the plastic plates.
4. Distribute plates and markers.
5. Ask children to share their plate designs and talk about what they are thankful for.

# Resources

Freedom's Feast <http://www.freedomfeast.us/>

*Online resources to get the most out of your American holiday celebrations*

Native American Perspective

<http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=7587>

*Fast Turtle, Wampanoag Tribe Member*

The 1621 Thanksgiving

<http://www.mayflowerhistory.com/History/thanksgiving.php>

# Suggested Books

“Giving Thanks – The 1621 Harvest Feast” by Kate Waters, Scholastic, Inc., 2001.

“1621: A New Look At Thanksgiving” by Catherine O’Neill Grace, National Geographic Society, 2004.

“Giving Thanks: A Native American Good Morning” by Jake Swamp, Lee and Love Books, 2003.