

Rethinking Thanksgiving: The Reality of Indian-English

Summary

The student will be able to comprehend the differences between the story of Thanksgiving and the reality of the political tensions in early seventeenth-century New England and compare that situation to the settlement of Utah.

Time Frame

2 class periods of 30 minutes each

Materials

Teacher Materials

- [At a Glance: Indian Relations in Early New England](#) (pdf)
- Video: [We Shall Remain: The Paiute](#)
- Video: [We Shall Remain: The Ute](#)
- Video: [We Shall Remain: The Navajo](#)
- Video: [We Shall Remain: The Goshute](#)
- Video: [We Shall Remain: The Shoshone](#)

Student Materials

- [Edward Winslow Describes the First Thanksgiving](#) (pdf)
- [State of Affairs at the First Thanksgiving](#) (pdf)

Background for Teachers

One paragraph in a letter by Edward Winslow inspired the holiday of Thanksgiving. Winslow recounted the events immediately following the Plymouth colony's harvest in the fall of 1621. There is no reason to doubt the accuracy of his description of a harvest celebration, in which the Pilgrims were joined by Wampanoag Indians. However, the mythology that has grown around this event is inaccurate and confusing to students. Students learn about friendship and cooperation between Indians and Pilgrims, but in the next chapter of their textbook this relationship is one of violence and mistrust. A clearer understanding of the political situation before and after the harvest of 1621 can help them to understand the full narrative of events.

The full story of Thanksgiving can also give students in Utah perspective. How does Utah's story of settlers seeking religious freedom also turn to violence within one generation?

Instructional Procedures

Allow students to brainstorm on the question "What do Thanksgiving and Pioneer Day have in common?"

Make a classroom list of results. (These may be recorded individually on a KWL sheet.)

Provide each student with a copy of the Winslow letter. Explain that this is one of the only documents from that time to support our stories of the first Thanksgiving. Discuss as a class how much of the "mythology of Thanksgiving" was created long after that time.

Provide students with the State of Affairs page and a sheet of 11x17 copy paper.

Have students create a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting the myth of Thanksgiving with what we have come to understand about that time. This may be class work or homework.

Screen the *We Shall Remain* clips describing the American Indian perspective of Mormon settlement. Allow the students to take notes. On the other side of their Venn diagram, have students compare and contrast the story of Mormon settlement they are most familiar with to the story told in the films. They may want to use their Utah history textbooks as a resource. (This may be class work or

homework.)

Extensions

Instead of having the students read the "State of Affairs at Thanksgiving," show them clips from the American Experience films *We Shall Remain: After the Mayflower* (chapters 1, 2, and 3, available to Utah Educators in [eMedia](#)) and *We Shall Remain: Geronimo* (chapter 1, available to Utah Educators in [eMedia](#)).

Have students investigate and compare the long-term effects of contact on the Wampanoag and Utah's American Indian tribes.

Review the effects of the other European visitors to Utah using elements from the "Rethinking First Contact" lesson plan available at <http://www.UtahIndians.org>.

Assessment Plan

[End of Unit Assessment](#)

Bibliography

Diamond, Jared. *Guns, Germs, and Steele: The Fates of Human Societies*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1999.

Grace, Catherine O'Neill, and Margaret M. Bruchac, with Plimouth Plantation. *1621: A New Look at Thanksgiving*. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2004.

Mann, Charles C. *1491: New Revelations of the Americas before Columbus*. New York: Vintage Books. 2005.

Taylor, Alan. *American Colonies: The Settling of North America*. New York: Penguin Books.

The University of Utah's [American West Center](#) (AWC) produced the curriculum materials in consultation with the [Utah Division of Indian Affairs](#), [Utah State Office of Education](#), [KUED 7](#), and the Goshute, Northwestern Band of the Shoshone, Southern Paiute, and Ute nations.

Authors

[Utah LessonPlans](#)