

Thanksgiving

Adapted from <<http://esl.about.com/library/weekly/aa110800a.htm>>.

The Pilgrims, who celebrated the first thanksgiving in America, were fleeing religious persecution in their native England. In 1609 a group of Pilgrims left England for the religious freedom in Holland where they lived and prospered. After a few years their children were speaking Dutch and had become attached to the Dutch way of life. This worried the Pilgrims. They considered the Dutch frivolous and their ideas a threat to their children's education and morality.

fleeing = running away from, escaping

prospered = do well, live well

frivolous = not serious

morality = belief system

So they decided to leave Holland and travel to the New World. Their trip was financed by a group of English investors, the Merchant Adventurers. It was agreed that the Pilgrims would be given passage and supplies in exchange for their working for their backers for 7 years.

backers = financial supporters

On Sept. 6, 1620 the Pilgrims set sail for the New World on a ship called the Mayflower. They sailed from Plymouth, England and aboard were 44 Pilgrims, who called themselves the "Saints", and 66 others, whom the Pilgrims called the "Strangers."

The long trip was cold and damp and took 65 days. Since there was the danger of fire on the wooden ship, the food had to be eaten cold. Many

passengers became sick and one person died by the time land was sighted on November 10th.

damp = wet

sighted = seen

The long trip led to many disagreements between the "Saints" and the "Strangers". After land was sighted a meeting was held and an agreement was worked out, called the Mayflower Compact, which guaranteed equality and unified the two groups. They joined together and named themselves the "Pilgrims."

Although they had first sighted land off Cape Cod they did not settle until they arrived at Plymouth, which had been named by Captain John Smith in 1614. It was there that the Pilgrims decide to settle. Plymouth offered an excellent harbor. A large brook offered a resource for fish. The Pilgrims biggest concern was attack by the local Native American Indians. But the Patuxets were a peaceful group and did not prove to be a threat.

harbor = protected area on the coast

threat = a danger

The first winter was devastating to the Pilgrims. The cold, snow and sleet was exceptionally heavy, interfering with the workers as they tried to construct their settlement. March brought warmer weather and the health of the Pilgrims improved, but many had died during the long winter. Of the 110 Pilgrims and crew who left England, less than 50 survived the first winter.

devastating = extremely difficult

interfering = preventing, making difficult

On March 16, 1621 , what was to become an important event took place, an Indian brave walked into the Plymouth settlement. The Pilgrims were frightened until the Indian called out "Welcome" (in English!).

settlement = place to live

His name was Samoset and he was an Abnaki Indian. He had learned English from the captains of fishing boats that had sailed off the coast. After staying the night Samoset left the next day. He soon returned with another Indian named Squanto who spoke better English than Samoset. Squanto told the Pilgrims of his voyages across the ocean and his visits to England and Spain. It was in England where he had learned English.

voyages = travels

Squanto's importance to the Pilgrims was enormous and it can be said that they would not have survived without his help. It was Squanto who taught the Pilgrims how to tap the maple trees for sap. He taught them which plants were poisonous and which had medicinal powers. He taught them how to plant the Indian corn by heaping the earth into low mounds with several seeds and fish in each mound. The decaying fish fertilized the corn. He also taught them to plant other crops with the corn.

sap = the juice of the maple tree

poisonous = food or liquid dangerous to the health

mounds = raising of the earth made of dirt by hand

decaying = rotting

The harvest in October was very successful and the Pilgrims found themselves with enough food to put away for the winter. There was corn, fruits and vegetables, fish to be packed in salt, and meat to be cured over smoky fires.

cured = cooked by smoke in order to keep meat a long time

The Pilgrims had much to celebrate, they had built homes in the wilderness, they had raised enough crops to keep them alive during the long coming winter, they were at peace with their Indian neighbors. They had beaten the odds and it was time to celebrate.

wilderness = uncivilized country

crops = cultivated vegetables such as corn, wheat, etc.

beaten the odds = won something that was very difficult or against somebody

The Pilgrim Governor William Bradford proclaimed a day of thanksgiving to be shared by all the colonists and the neighboring Native Americans. They invited Squanto and the other Indians to join them in their celebration. Their chief, Massasoit, and 90 braves came to the celebration which lasted for 3 days. They played games, ran races, marched and played drums. The Indians demonstrated their skills with the bow and arrow and the Pilgrims demonstrated their musket skills. Exactly when the festival took place is uncertain, but it is believed the celebration took place in mid-October.

proclaimed = declared, named

colonists = original settlers who came to the North America

braves = Indian warrior

musket = type of gun or rifle used during that period in history

The following year the Pilgrims harvest was not as bountiful, as they were still unused to growing the corn. During the year they had also shared their stored food with newcomers and the Pilgrims ran short of food.

bountiful = a lot of

newcomers = people who have recently arrived

The 3rd year brought a spring and summer that was hot and dry with the crops dying in the fields. Governor Bradford ordered a day of fasting and prayer, and it was soon thereafter that the rain came. To celebrate - November 29th of that year was proclaimed a day of thanksgiving. This date is believed to be the real true beginning of the present day Thanksgiving Day.

fasting = not eating

thereafter = after that

The custom of an annually celebrated thanksgiving, held after the harvest, continued through the years. During the American Revolution (late 1770's) a day of national thanksgiving was suggested by the Continental Congress.

harvest = collection of the crops

In 1817 New York State had adopted Thanksgiving Day as an annual custom. By the middle of the 19th century many other states also celebrated a Thanksgiving Day. In 1863 President Abraham Lincoln appointed a national day of thanksgiving. Since then each president has issued a Thanksgiving Day proclamation, usually designating the fourth Thursday of each November as the holiday.

designating = appointing, naming