



How to Teach Thanksgiving

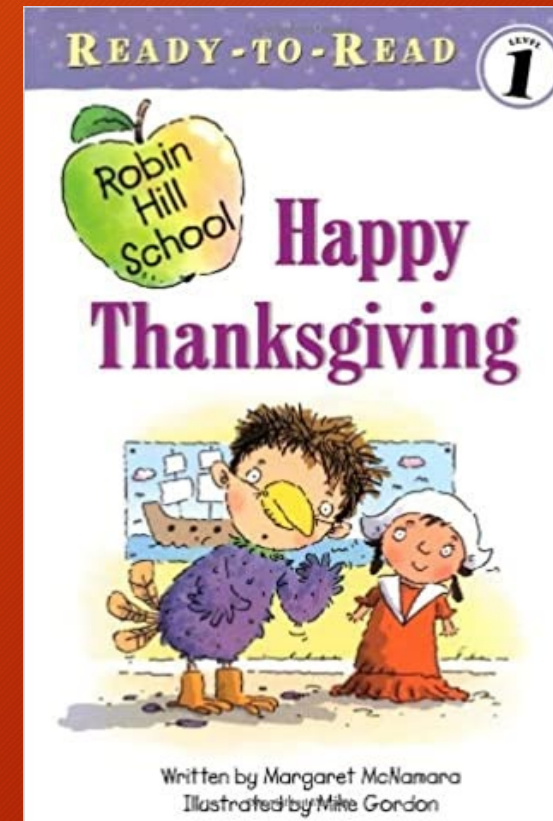
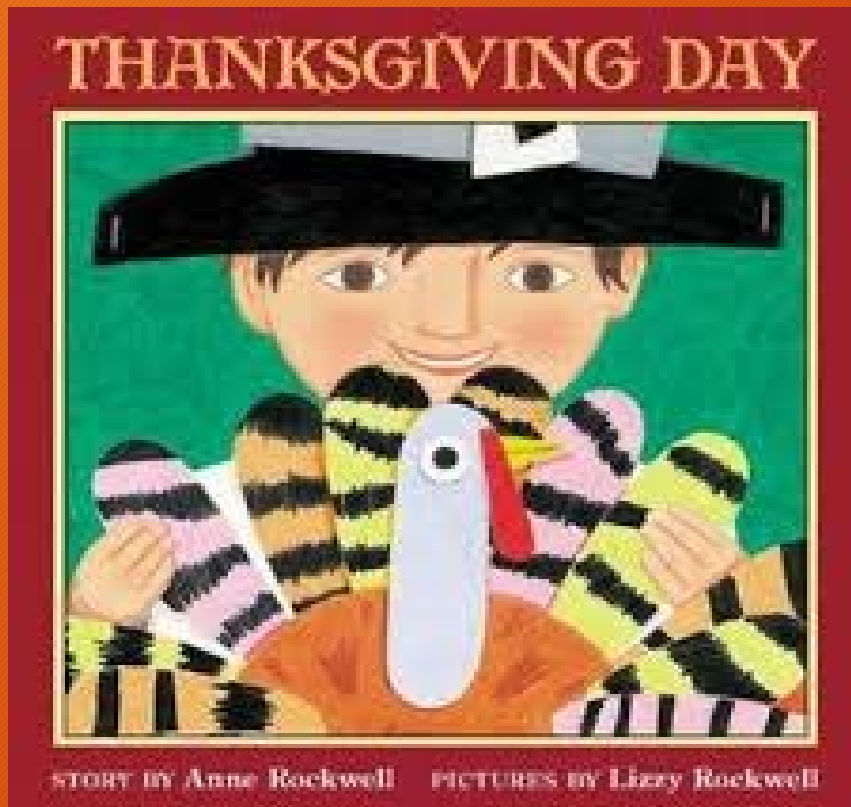
Today

- We will examine Thanksgiving-themed children's books.
- Talk about the difference between the history and myth of Thanksgiving.
- Discuss why many people see Thanksgiving as controversial.
- Discuss ways to teach about Thanksgiving and Native Americans that are less stereotypical.

New York State Objectives for Teaching Thanksgiving

- K.3 Symbols and traditions help develop a shared culture and identity within the United States
 - K.3b The study of American symbols, holidays, and celebrations help to develop a shared sense of history, community, and culture.
 - Students will explain when and why national holidays such as Labor Day, Constitution Day, Columbus Day, Thanksgiving, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Presidents Day, Law Day, and Independence Day are celebrated
- 1.2 There are significant individuals, historical events, and symbols that are important to American cultural identity.
 - Students will explain when and why national holidays such as Labor Day, Constitution Day, Columbus Day, Thanksgiving, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Presidents Day, Law Day, and Independence Day are celebrated
- 4.2 NATIVE AMERICAN GROUPS AND THE ENVIRONMENT: Native American groups, chiefly the Iroquois (Haudenosaunee) and Algonquian-speaking groups, inhabited the region that became New York State. Native American Indians interacted with the environment and developed unique cultures.
 - 4.2c Each Native American group developed a unique way of life with a shared set of customs, beliefs, and values.
 - 4.3c Students will examine the alliances between Native Americans and the English

How is Thanksgiving Usually Taught?



How is Thanksgiving Usually Taught?

- Coloring Cornucopias
- Creating Turkey hands & Pilgrim hats
- Thanksgiving feasts at school where students dress as “Indians and Pilgrims”
- Creating “I am Thankful lists”
- Thanksgiving pageants (even I was in a pageant, as an Indian).



Beyond Pilgrim Hats and Turkey Hands: Using Thanksgiving to Promote Citizenship and Activism

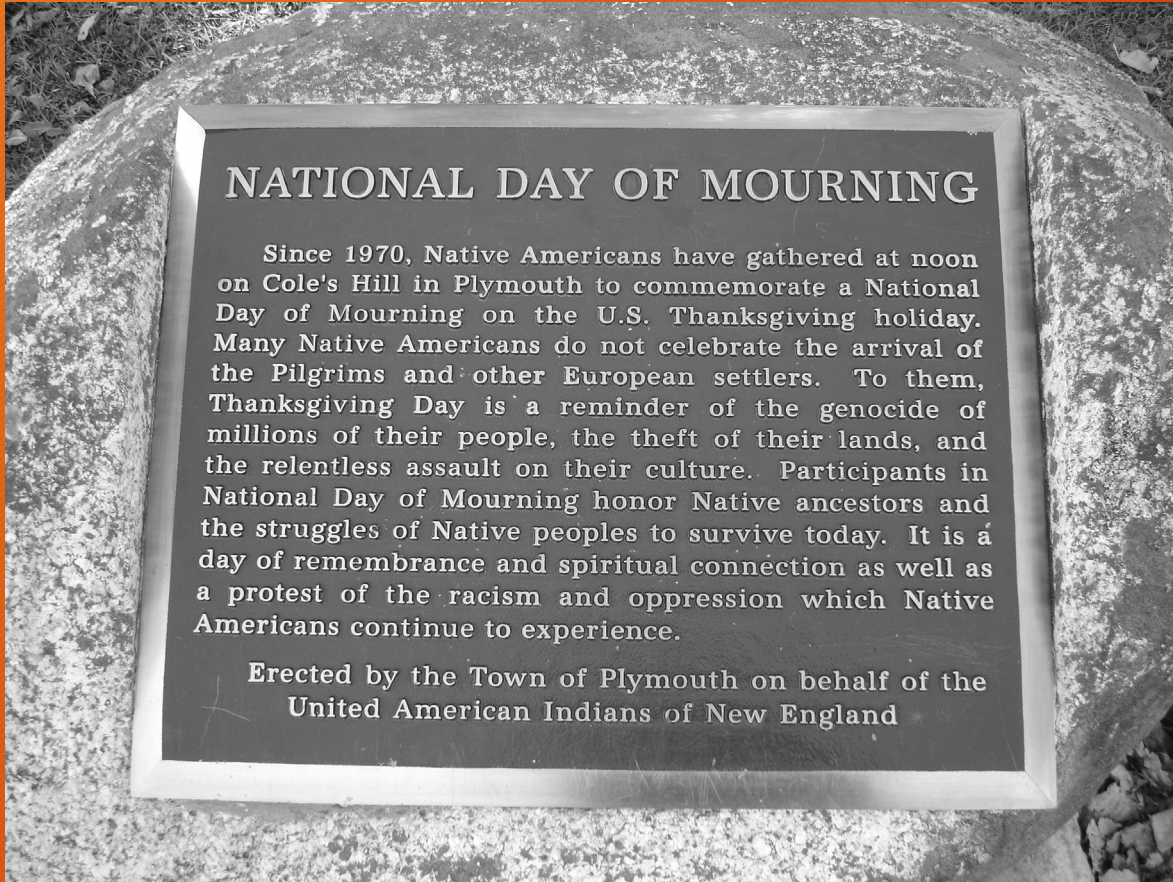
- As stated in *Beyond Pilgrim Hats and Turkey Hands: Using Thanksgiving to Promote Citizenship and Activism*,
 - “The holidays provide elementary teachers a rare and welcome opportunity to spotlight the social studies in their classrooms, replacing superficial craft activities with powerful and engaging social studies lessons”

Thanksgiving Controversy

- Thanksgiving is controversial because of its connections to the Pilgrims, European colonization, and the theft of Native lands.
- Over time the details of the Pilgrim story and the first Thanksgiving became blurry. Many people argue that the way Thanksgiving is taught in schools glosses over uncomfortable aspects of the relationship between the colonists and the Natives.



National Day of Mourning



Many Native Americans have a different view of Thanksgiving. They feel that the holiday is like a celebration of their ancestors being conquered.

Instead of Thanksgiving, some Natives celebrate a “Day of Mourning” on Thanksgiving. They gather at Plymouth Rock to remember the genocide of Indigenous people on the continent.

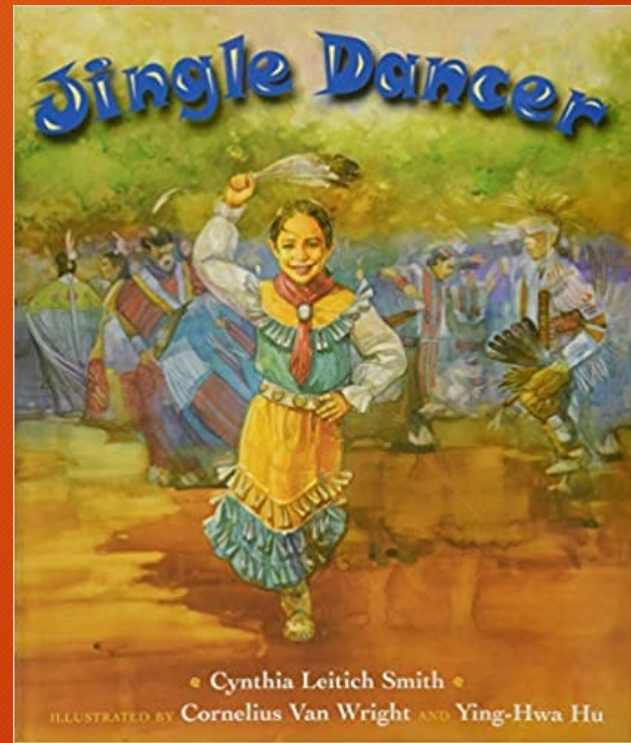
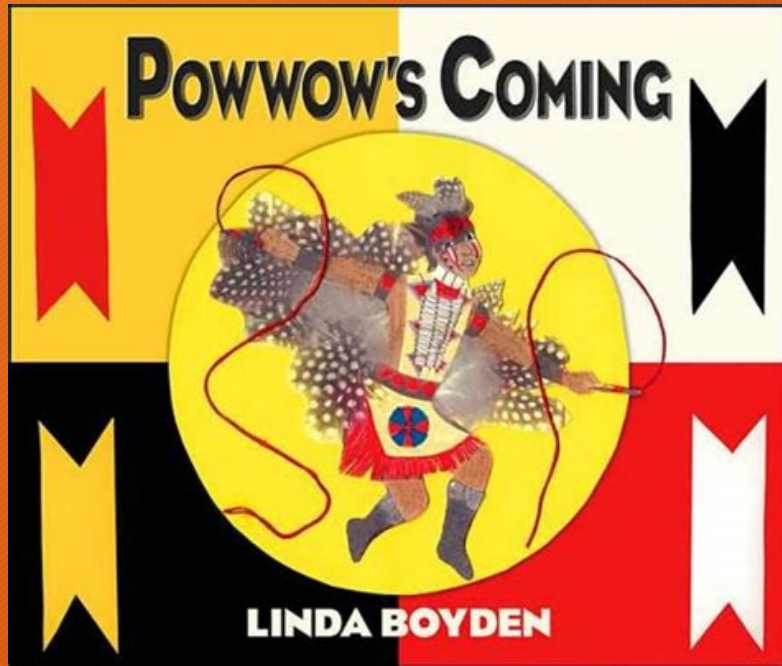
How to Teach Difficult History

- **Teach from the perspective of Native Americans.**
 - Read a narrative (either historically accurate fiction or nonfiction) to your class that describes the arrival of Europeans through the eyes of a Native American.
 - Follow up the story with discussion questions that encourage students to put themselves in the protagonist's shoes. Great examples include: How would you feel if strangers forced you and your family to leave your home? If you could go back in time, how would you respond to this situation?
 - Discuss acts of rebellion and resistance that real-life Native Americans carried out.
 - Display a poster of a traditional, stereotyped Thanksgiving (with pilgrims and Native Americans) and encourage your class to critique it.

Different Perspective

- Teach about European settlers and their “discovery” of the Americas in a truthful way.
- Powwow’s Coming by Linda Boyden
- Jingle Dancer by Cynthia Leitich Smith
- Pueblo Boy: Growing Up in Two Worlds by Marcia Keegan.
- Giving Thanks: A Native American Good Morning Message by Chief Jake Swamp

Resources



Fight Stereotypes

- Teach your students Native Americans are not a thing of the past.
- Every corner of this continent is Indian country. There are more than 565 federally-recognized tribes and hundreds of unrecognized tribes. Each tribe has their own culture, customs, traditional clothing, dwellings, and rituals. One of the most problematic issues with inaccurate, stereotypical Native American depictions is the absence of differentiation, and the appropriation of items from many different tribes.

Don't Limit

- Teach about Native American history throughout the school year, not just in November.
- Native American history is US history, which is all of our history. Don't feel the need to only teach it during the month of November.

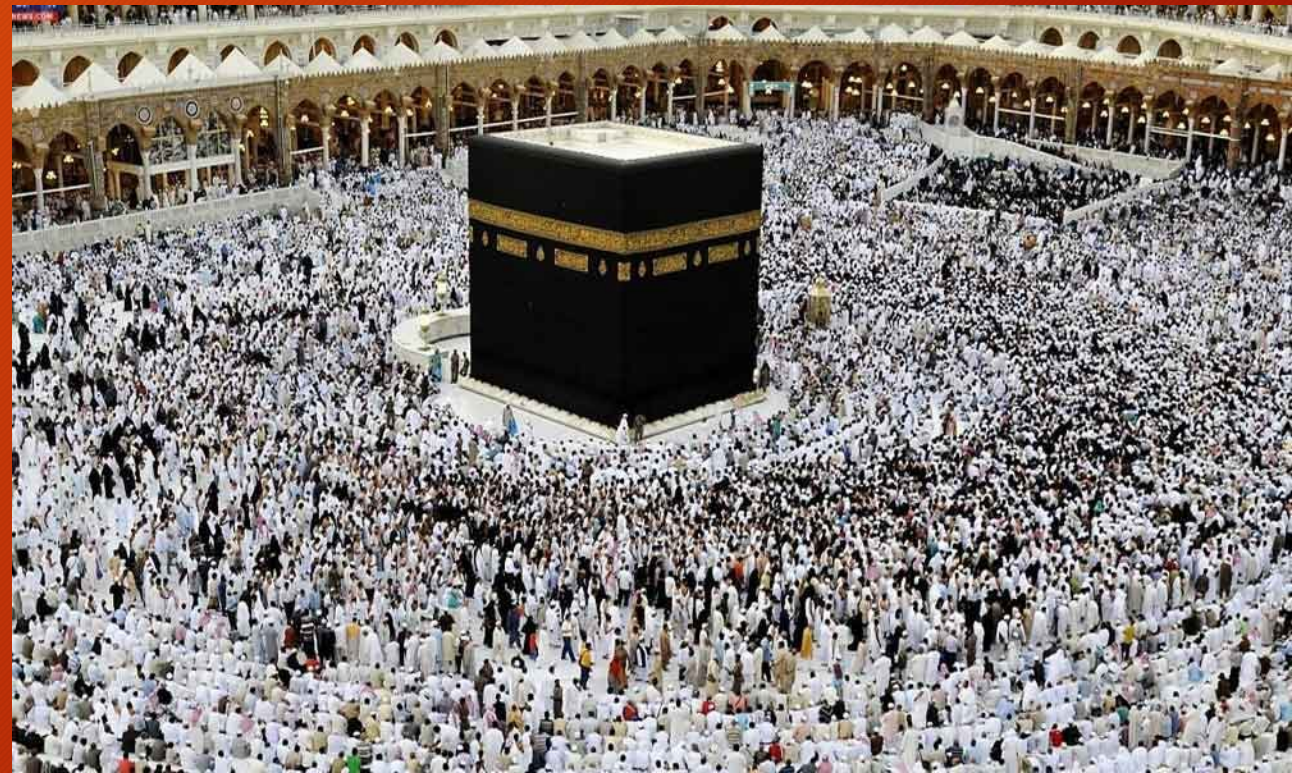


Who Were the Pilgrims?

- What does the word “Pilgrim” mean?

Definition

- pilgrim (n.):
 - "a person traveling to a holy place", also "a traveler" generally, "a wayfarer" ...from Late Latin *pelegrinus*, "foreigner, stranger, foreign resident".



Who Were the Pilgrims from the Thanksgiving Story?



Pilgrims

- The pilgrims were a group of Puritan separatists from England.
- The Puritans wanted to reform the Anglican Church, one group of Puritans, the separatists, wanted to leave the church altogether.
- Being a separatist was illegal in England (it was actually illegal to not attend church on Sunday). After some of their leaders were arrested and executed, the separatist Puritans decided that it was better to leave the country.
- The separatists first left England and moved to Leiden in the Netherlands.

In the Netherlands

- Holland was more religiously tolerant than England and the separatists were able to live there for several years.
- But the group was concerned that their children were losing their English culture and an alliance between the Dutch king and England made life harder for the group.
- They decided to start a colony in America.
- They got funding from investors in England who also leased a boat, the *Mayflower*.
- The pilgrims set out from Plymouth in England.

In America

- The first winter was really difficult for the Pilgrims.
- During that first winter, half of the passengers from the *Mayflower* died.
- The Pilgrims had landed in territory that was formerly occupied by the Patuxet Indians. All but one Patuxet had died due to diseases brought by previous English explorers.
- The Pilgrims were able to survive the first Winter due to help provided by *Massassoit*, the chief of the *Wampanoag*.



Squanto

- Squanto was an Indian who could speak English.
- He had been kidnapped by English explorers and sold as a slave in Europe, and there, he learned to speak English.
- He eventually returned to his homeland but he found that all of his people had died from disease.
- He is a controversial figure because he helped the colonists but he also helped them to fight other tribes.

Unfortunate Relationship With the Wampanoags



King Philip's War is considered the bloodiest war per capita in U.S. history. It left several hundred colonists dead and dozens of English settlements destroyed or heavily damaged.

Thousands of Indians were killed, wounded or captured and sold into slavery or indentured servitude. The war decimated the Narragansett, Wampanoag and many smaller tribes and mostly ended Indian resistance in southern New England, paving the way for additional English settlements.