



Native American Perspective

By Ricky White, Fargo Public Schools Indian Education Cultural Specialist

Thanksgiving: A Native American Perspective

A primary theme of Thanksgiving is time to rejoice and express our thankfulness and gratitude to each other, and to be with our families and share a traditional turkey dinner. In my home, we enjoy getting all of the family together and we always say a few things that we are thankful for before the eating frenzy begins.

Often, coupled with those good family traditions are memories of what I was taught in the 1980's, which is the old folktale of the starving pilgrims whose boat, "The Mayflower," landed in the New England area, only to be saved by the "Indians" who taught them to plant and farm for food. Then, the following fall, the pilgrims invited the Indians to a feast, which henceforth became known as the "First Thanksgiving." I remember coloring turkeys in grade school and bringing home painted war bonnets to commemorate the teachings about Thanksgiving when I was in grade school.

Well folks, there is more to the story and it's important that we teach the facts from many perspectives. The Indians were actually the Wampanoag, who suffered a 75% loss of their people. This was due to foreign illnesses and, more so, the aggressive actions done to them in the takeover of their precious lands.

The Wampanoag are near extinct and not celebrate the "First Thanksgiving." So, when we celebrate, the following are good guidelines:

- *Please consider avoiding* Native costumes or non-authentic Native arts or crafts , such as the war bonnet art.
- *Please incorporate* Native knowledge into your teachings that involve Native people.
- *Please celebrate* the beautiful Native cultures through authentic art, literature, and foods while you celebrate Thanksgiving.
- *Please do* read this short article by the National Museum of the American Indian (Smithsonian): [Harvest Ceremony: Beyond the Myth of Thanksgiving](#)

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In an age of divisive politics and a world filled with so much indifference, we hear terms like “cancel culture” and “Critical Race Theory,” especially in discussions around a different perspective or when historical and generational topics are involved. My guidance here is **NOT** any of that; I am pointing to the fact that there is just a little more to the story and it's good to train ourselves and our students to receive teaching and learning from many perspectives. I wish you all the best and I am thankful for the work you do for our students, families and community.

P.S. Another national day of recognition in November is Veterans Day. Please join me in thanking all of our veterans, their families and those that are currently serving to protect and preserve our ways of life. According to [uso.org](https://www.uso.org), 19% of all Native Americans serve in the armed forces, in comparison to an average of 14% of all other ethnicities.

