

Lesson Plan: Thanksgiving Day



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Thanksgiving Day

[1] Cultures around the world celebrate good **harvests** and take time to **give thanks**. **Native** communities had thanksgiving celebrations before Europeans came to North America. When **colonists** arrived from Europe, they brought their own thanksgiving **traditions** with them. They also created traditions in their new communities.

[2] Some Native and **colonial** communities celebrated together. One famous example happened in 1621. People from the Wampanoag and Plymouth **Colony** communities had a three-day **feast** that included wild turkeys, duck, venison, lobsters, clams, bass, corn, green vegetables, and dried fruits. Americans have created paintings, performances, statues, and stories about this event. These works of art share some traditions that continue into modern Thanksgiving Day celebrations.

[3] After 1621, some **colonies** continued thanksgiving celebrations. George Washington, the first U.S. president, **proclaimed** an official day of thanks on November 26, 1789. Some other presidents also proclaimed national days of thanks. In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln gave a speech that said the U.S. would celebrate an official national day for thanksgiving every year on the last Thursday of November. Since then, every U.S. president has given a special Thanksgiving Day speech.

[4] Today, Thanksgiving Day is celebrated on the fourth Thursday in November. Schools, banks, and many businesses are closed for the holiday. Many people also choose the Friday after Thanksgiving Day as a holiday so they can enjoy a long weekend. The days near Thanksgiving Day are some of the busiest travel times of the year as many people travel to be near family.

[5] Thanksgiving Day celebrations include time together with family or close friends for a large meal. Traditional foods include turkey, corn, green vegetables, and fruit or nut pies. Meals in different parts of the country include local foods or ingredients. Older friends or family members often teach younger members how to make special foods for the holiday. In another typical tradition for Thanksgiving Day, each person shares what they are thankful for before the meal begins.

[6] Many Americans watch special parades or sports events on Thanksgiving Day. The day after Thanksgiving, some businesses have special sales. Some people shop during these sales to find presents for the Christmas holiday in December. Many people enjoy Thanksgiving because it is a day to share love and **gratitude** with family and friends.

[7] Expressing gratitude is an important part of many cultures. Taking time to remember the good things we have can help us feel happier and more content.

Overview

In this 90-minute lesson, students learn about the history and celebration of Thanksgiving Day in the United States. Students identify and practice language used to express gratitude and reflect on positive influences in their own lives.

Goals

Students will:

- Practice reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills.
- Learn how Thanksgiving Day started in the U.S. and how it is celebrated today.
- Make connections between their own lives and how Thanksgiving Day is celebrated in the United States.
- Strengthen collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking skills on the topic of gratitude.

Lesson Materials

1. Printed or projected copy of the photo at the beginning of this lesson.
2. Printed or projected copies of the Thanksgiving Day reading included with this lesson.
3. Paper, sticky notes, pens, or pencils.

For the optional Listening and Speaking Extension or Variation Activity:

1. Printed copy of Gratitude Role-Play Scenarios, cut into strips.
2. Printed copies of Gratitude Role-Play Scenarios (with phrases) for each pair of students.

Preparation

1. Read through this lesson in its entirety.
2. Review the Thanksgiving Day reading and the Vocabulary from the Reading list below.
3. Think about local traditions around gratitude or giving thanks. Decide if you would like to connect the U.S. holiday of Thanksgiving Day with these local traditions.
4. Determine whether you will need to activate students' prior knowledge, pre-teach, or otherwise provide scaffolding, or support, for your students beyond the suggestions in the Procedures section.
5. Consider if, or how, you will adapt or change this lesson to better meet your students' needs.



Vocabulary from the Reading

- colonial (adjective) – Of or relating to a colony.
- colonist (noun) – A person who lives in a colony.
- colony (noun) – An area that is controlled by a country that is usually far away from it.
- feast (noun) – A special meal with a lot of food.
- give thanks (phrasal verb) – To express gratitude for something good that has happened.
- gratitude (noun) – The good feeling you have when someone has done something for you.
- harvest (noun) – The crops, like fruits or vegetables, that are collected at the end of a growing season.
- Native (noun) – The first groups of people living in North America.
- proclaim (verb) – To publicly announce or tell people about something important.
- traditions (plural noun) – Beliefs, stories, and actions that have been part of the culture of a group for a long time.

Procedures

Introduction and Communication Activity: Creating Photo Captions (10 Minutes)

1. Show students the photo at the beginning of this lesson.
2. Ask students to work with a partner to answer these questions:
 - What is in this photo?
 - Where was the photo taken?
 - Why do you think someone took this photo?
3. Explain that a *caption* is a phrase or sentence written near a picture to help viewers better understand what they see.
4. Ask students to work together and write a caption for the photo. For lower-level students, provide a bank of words for students to choose from and use to write their captions.
 - eat
 - food
 - fork
 - glass
 - knife
 - meal
 - napkin

- plate
 - table
 - tablecloth
 - spoon
5. Monitor students and offer help as needed.
 6. Ask students to keep their captions. They will look at them again in the final activity of this lesson.

Reading Activity: Sentence Scramble (20 minutes)

Pre-reading

1. Put students into small groups and share the scrambled sentences below.
 - celebrated / some / colonial / together / Native / and / communities
 - November / Day / in / celebrated / Thursday / the / Thanksgiving / is / today / on / celebrated / fourth
 - together / close / for / celebrations / Day / family / or / include / Thanksgiving / a / time / meal / with / friends / large /
 - us / taking / the / happier / time / help / more / to / we / content / feel / remember / and / can / things / good / have
2. Ask students to work together to unscramble 1 or more sentences.

While reading

3. As they read, ask students to look for their sentences from the pre-reading activity in the text and underline them.

After reading

4. Ask a few students to share the number of the paragraph where they found their unscrambled sentences. (For example, "I found sentence b in paragraph 4.")
5. Check for understanding of these key sentences from the Thanksgiving Day reading.

Collaboration Activity: Gratitude Word Wall (15 minutes)

1. Check in with students to make sure they understand the concept of gratitude: the good feeling you have when someone has done something for you.
2. Help students work together as a class to generate a list of 6 to 8 words related to gratitude. (Examples might include: thankful, kind, help, share, friend, etc.) Write the list on the board.
3. Tell each student to choose 1 or 2 words from the list on the board that they think are most connected to the idea of gratitude. Ask students to write each word they chose on a sticky note. Students who finish quickly can decorate their sticky notes or add a sentence using their word.



4. Ask students to place their sticky notes on a designated wall or poster board.
5. Group the sticky notes by word and count how many times each word appears. (If students do not have sticky notes, they can come to the board and place marks next to the words they chose.)
6. Use the wall as a reference during writing and speaking activities in the rest of the lesson.

Critical Thinking Activity: Visualizing and Personalizing Gratitude (15 minutes)

1. Ask students to close their eyes and think about someone who has positively influenced their life – someone who did something really amazing or important for them.
2. After 1 or 2 minutes, ask students to write down as much as they can about why this person is so important to them.

Creativity and Writing Activity: Expressing Gratitude (20 minutes)

1. Tell students they are going to use their notes from the previous activity to write a short paragraph or essay about the person they identified in the Visualizing and Personalizing Gratitude activity.
2. If necessary, share a framework and sentence frames to help students get started. (See examples below.)

Topic Sentence

- The person who has influenced me the most in my life is ... because ...
- The person who has had the biggest impact on my life is ... because ...

Example Sentences (to support topic)

- The reason I think this is ...
- I feel very strongly about this because ...
- For example ...
- In my experience ...

Closing/Summary Sentence

- This is why ... is so important to me.
- ... has been a positive influence in my life.

3. Ask students to include specific examples about why they chose this person.
4. When students are finished, remind them that taking time to express gratitude makes us feel happier.

Communication and Closing Activity: Revising Captions (10 Minutes)

1. Show students the photo at the beginning of this lesson.
2. Ask students to reread the photo captions they created in the opening activity.
3. Help students revise or rewrite their photo captions based on what they have learned in the lesson. Use these questions to guide them:
4. Would you change any part of your caption now that you know more about Thanksgiving Day in the U.S.?
5. What extra information would you need to add if you were writing a caption for someone who doesn't know anything about Thanksgiving Day?

Variations and Extensions

Listening and Speaking Extension or Variation Activity: Gratitude Role-Play

Students may complete this activity in addition to, or instead of, the Gratitude Word Wall activity.

1. Check in with students to make sure they understand the concept of gratitude: the good feeling you have when someone has done something for you.
2. Use the list of gratitude-related words students generated in the Gratitude Word Wall activity or help students work as a class to create a list of 6 to 8 words related to gratitude. (Examples might include: thankful, kind, help, share, friend, etc.) Guide students through practicing simple gratitude phrases related to their list of words.
3. Give students one of the short scenarios from the [Gratitude Role-Play Scenarios](#) handout. Put students into pairs and ask them to act out short scenarios using gratitude-related words and phrases.
4. If your students need more support, they can use the [Gratitude Role-Play Scenarios \(with phrases\)](#).

Critical Thinking and Writing Extension: Gratitude Journals

Students may complete this activity as an extension to the Visualizing and Personalizing Gratitude activity.

1. Remind students that taking time to identify and express gratitude can make us happier.
2. Explain that students will keep a gratitude journal for an extended period of time. (You can choose to do this for 1 week, 1 month, or more.)
3. Give students a simple journal prompt to help them get started. (See example prompts below.)

Daily Reflection Prompts

- What made you happy today?
- Who helped you this week?
- What is your favorite place? Why do you like it?

Deeper Thinking Prompts (for more advanced learners)

- Describe a challenge you faced that helped you grow. What are you grateful for in that experience?
- What is a mistake you made that taught you something valuable?
- What is something you usually take for granted but appreciate today?

Creative Prompts

- Draw something that makes you feel good.
- Imagine gratitude is a color, a sound, or a shape. What would it be and why?
- Create a gratitude alphabet. Write one thing you are grateful for starting with each letter, A to Z.

Social & Community Prompts

- What is something kind someone did for you recently?
 - How can you show appreciation to someone today?
 - What is a tradition or celebration that fills you with gratitude?
4. At the end of the journal project, ask students to reread their journal entries.
 5. Put students in pairs and ask them to share highlights from their journals.

Listening and Speaking Creativity Extension

Students may complete this activity as an extension to the Expressing Gratitude activity.

1. Ask students to call (a voicemail is okay), email, or meet with the person they wrote about in the Expressing Gratitude activity and read what they wrote. (If it is not possible to contact the person, students may share with their teacher.)
2. In the next class, put students in pairs and ask them to discuss these questions:
 - How did it feel to share what you wrote? Were you nervous or excited? Or something else?
 - Did anything surprise you about their response?
 - What did you learn from this experience?

If students need additional support, write these sentence frames on the board:

- The person I wrote about said ...



- This made me feel ... because ...
- I was surprised that ...
- I learned that ...

Gratitude Role-Play Scenarios

To the teacher: Cut these apart and distribute them to students.

Someone gives you a pencil when you need it.

Someone helps you with your homework.

A classmate helps you find your lost item.

A sibling helps you clean your room or do chores.

A classmate invites you to join their group for a project.

Someone cheers you up when you're feeling sad.

A friend defends you when someone is being unfair.

Someone gives you a small gift.

A family member makes your favorite meal.

Someone gives you a compliment on your outfit or style.

Gratitude Role-Play Scenarios (with phrases)

Use these phrases to complete one of the conversations below. Then practice the conversation with a partner.

Basic Thank You

- Thank you!
- Thanks a lot!
- Thank you very much!

Appreciation

- I really appreciate it.
- That was very kind of you.
- You're so helpful!

More Personal

- You made my day better.
- I feel lucky to have you.

Responding to Thanks

- You're welcome!
- No problem!
- Any time!
- I'm happy to help.

Helping at School

Student A: I don't understand what to do for this assignment.

Student B: I think I understand it. Let me help you.

Student A:

Student B:

Student: I'm sorry but I didn't finish my homework for today.

Teacher: I'll give you an extra day to finish.

Student:

Teacher:

Kindness at Home

A: I made your favorite meal today.

B:

A:

A: My room is a mess. It will take me hours to clean.

B: I can help you. That way we can finish sooner.

A:

B:

Surprise Act of Kindness

A: I have something for you.

B: Oh! What is it?

A: It's a small gift. Surprise!

B:

A: