

MAYFLOWER MYTHS

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The Mayflower brought the group of English settlers now known as the Pilgrims to North America. Leaving England in the fall of 1620, the Pilgrims were attempting to land near the mouth of the Hudson River, but instead ended up in Cape Cod Harbor. Plymouth, the colony established there by the Pilgrims in 1621, became the first permanent European settlement in New England. The story of the Pilgrims and their harvest feast has since become one of best-known in American history, but you may not know it as well as you think. Discover the facts behind these well-known Thanksgiving myths!

MYTH: THE FIRST THANKSGIVING WAS IN 1621 AND THE PILGRIMS CELEBRATED IT EVERY YEAR THEREAFTER.

Fact: The first feast wasn't repeated, so it wasn't the beginning of a tradition. In fact, the colonists didn't even call the day Thanksgiving. To them, a thanksgiving was a religious holiday for which they would go to church and thank God for a specific event, such as the winning of a battle. On such a religious day, the types of recreational activities that the Pilgrims and Wampanoag Indians participated in during the 1621 harvest feast—dancing, singing secular songs, playing games—wouldn't have been allowed. The feast was a secular celebration, so it never would have been considered a thanksgiving in the pilgrims' minds.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Mayflower was originally supposed to sail with a sister ship, the Speedwell, but it proved unseaworthy, and the Mayflower made the journey alone.

MYTH: THE ORIGINAL THANKSGIVING FEAST TOOK PLACE ON THE FOURTH THURSDAY OF NOVEMBER.

Fact: The original feast in 1621 occurred sometime between September 21 and November 11. Unlike our modern holiday, it was three days long. The event was based on English harvest festivals, which traditionally occurred around the 29th of September. After that first harvest was completed by the Plymouth colonists, Gov. William Bradford proclaimed a day of thanksgiving and prayer, shared by all the colonists and neighboring Indians. In 1623 a day of fasting and prayer during a period of drought was changed to one of thanksgiving because the rain came during the prayers. Gradually the custom prevailed in New England of annually celebrating thanksgiving after the harvest.

During the American Revolution, a yearly day of national thanksgiving was suggested by the Continental Congress. In 1817 New York State adopted Thanksgiving Day as an annual custom, and by the middle of the 19th century many other states had done the same. In 1863 President Abraham Lincoln appointed a day of thanksgiving as the last Thursday in November, which he may have correlated with the November 21, 1621, anchoring of the *Mayflower* at Cape Cod. Since then, each president has issued a Thanksgiving Day proclamation. President Franklin D. Roosevelt set the date for Thanksgiving to the fourth Thursday of November in 1939 (approved by Congress in 1941.)

MYTH: THE PILGRIMS WORE ONLY BLACK AND WHITE CLOTHING. THEY HAD BUCKLES ON THEIR HATS, GARMENTS, AND SHOES.

Fact: Buckles did not come into fashion until later in the seventeenth century and black and white were commonly worn only on Sunday and formal occasions. Women typically dressed in red, earthy green, brown, blue, violet, and gray, while men wore clothing in white, beige, black, earthy green, and brown.

MYTH: THE PILGRIMS BROUGHT FURNITURE WITH THEM ON THE MAYFLOWER.

Fact: The only furniture that the Pilgrims brought on the Mayflower was chests and boxes. They constructed wooden furniture once they settled in Plymouth.

MYTH: THE MAYFLOWER WAS HEADED FOR VIRGINIA, BUT DUE TO A NAVIGATIONAL MISTAKE IT ENDED UP IN CAPE COD MASSACHUSETTS.

Fact: The Pilgrims were in fact planning to settle in Virginia, but not the modern-day state of Virginia. They were part of the Virginia Company, which had the rights to most of the eastern seaboard of the U.S. The Pilgrims had intended to go to the Hudson River region in New York State, which would have been considered "Northern Virginia," but they landed in Cape Cod instead. Treacherous seas prevented them from venturing further south.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Where did the Pilgrims land when they came to North America?

- A Canada
- B Virginia
- C The Hudson River
- D Cape Cod Harbor

2. What does the author list in this article?

- A the types of food at the first harvest feast
- B the colors of clothing that Pilgrims wore
- C the different cities where colonists settled
- D the ways in which the Indians helped the Pilgrims

3. The Plymouth colonists had strong religious beliefs.

What evidence in the text supports this conclusion?

- A "To them, a thanksgiving was a religious holiday in which they would go to church and thank God for a specific event, such as the winning of a battle."
- B "Gradually the custom prevailed in New England of annually celebrating thanksgiving after the harvest."
- C "The pilgrims had intended to go to the Hudson River region in New York State, which would have been considered "Northern Virginia," but they landed in Cape Cod instead."
- D "The original feast in 1621 occurred sometime between September 21 and November 11. Unlike our modern holiday, it was three days long."

4. Based on the article as a whole, what is a myth?

- A something that people think is a lie, and that is a lie
- B something that people believe to be true, and that is true
- C something that people believe to be true, but that may not be true
- D something that people think is a lie, but that is actually true

5. Which sentence from the text best states the article's main idea?

- A "The feast was a secular celebration, so it never would have been considered a thanksgiving in the pilgrims' minds."
- B "The story of the Pilgrims and their harvest feast has since become one of best-known in American history, but you may not know it as well as you think."
- C "Gradually the custom prevailed in New England of annually celebrating thanksgiving after the harvest."
- D "Plymouth, the colony established there by the Pilgrims in 1621, became the first permanent European settlement in New England."

6. Why might the author have chosen to use headings that start with “Myth:” throughout the entire article?

- A to hint that people today do not believe that Thanksgiving is important
- B to show that people today think of the Pilgrims as imaginary heroes
- C to help put the content of the article into groups based on the myth they address
- D to prove that the statements in the headings are all completely true

7. Choose the answer that best completes this sentence.

The pilgrims landed in Cape Cod instead of the Hudson River region _____ treacherous seas prevented them from venturing further south.

- A because
- B although
- C however
- D for example

8. What did the pilgrims think of as a “thanksgiving?”

9. Why would the Pilgrims never have thought of their own harvest feast as a thanksgiving?

10. Would Pilgrims have considered today’s Thanksgiving to be a true “thanksgiving” in their eyes? Why or why not? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

Question related to the text and the video, “Bet You Didn’t Know: Thanksgiving”:

11. How has Thanksgiving changed from the time of the Pilgrims to the present day? Use evidence from the video and text to support your answer.

Teacher Guide & Answers**Passage Reading Level:** Lexile 1130

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8. What did the pilgrims think of as a “thanksgiving?”

Suggested answer: To pilgrims, a thanksgiving was a religious holiday for which they would go to church and thank God for a specific event.

9. Why would the Pilgrims never have thought of their own harvest feast as a thanksgiving?

Suggested answer: The Pilgrims wouldn’t have thought of their own harvest feast as a thanksgiving because it was a non-religious celebration. They danced, sang secular songs, and played games at their feast, which wouldn’t have been allowed on an actual thanksgiving day.

10. Would Pilgrims have considered today’s Thanksgiving to be a true “thanksgiving” in their eyes? Why or why not? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

Suggested answer: Answers may vary, as long as they are supported by the text. For example, students may argue that Pilgrims would not have considered today’s Thanksgiving to be a true “thanksgiving” because, much like the original harvest feast, it does not focus on prayer and religion.

Question related to the text and the video, “Bet You Didn’t Know: Thanksgiving”:

The following question can be used to support an analysis of the video and text in conjunction:

11. How has Thanksgiving changed from the time of the Pilgrims to the present day? Use evidence from the video and text to support your answer.

Suggested answer: Answers may vary, as long as they are based in the text and video. Students may note that the Pilgrim’s harvest feast was three days long, and wasn’t on the fourth day of November, unlike today’s Thanksgiving. They may mention that certain foods that have become part of present day Thanksgiving, like pumpkin pie and turkey, were not part of the Pilgrim’s harvest feast. Answers may also mention that what people today consider to be Thanksgiving, with a focus on the feast, is not what Pilgrims considered to be a thanksgiving, with a focus on religion and prayer.