

## Lesson Plan – “Thanksgiving”

### LESSON PLAN

Origin Narrative - Thanksgiving

Social Studies, Grades 6-8

Duration: 1-2 hours

#### SUMMARY:

This lesson plan supports chapter 3, “Cult of the Covenant,” in *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States for Young People* by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, adapted by Jean Mendoza and Debbie Reese, as well as drawing upon key concepts from the introduction chapter. It deconstructs the philosophical foundation of the Thanksgiving narrative and interrogates the function of origin narratives.

#### LEARNING TARGETS:

- Students will examine the role of origin narratives in developing a (national) shared identity.
- Students will analyze the US Thanksgiving celebration from a nontraditional perspective.
- Students will write a short story.

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

How does the transmission of history become ingrained in collective memory?

#### STANDARDS:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2  
Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4  
Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6  
Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.2  
Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/ experiments, or technical processes.

#### Vocabulary:

- Terminal narrative
- Origin narrative
- Ingrained

#### Prior Knowledge:

- Students should be familiar with commonly retold variations of the “first Thanksgiving” story.
- Students will be asked to share knowledge of the origin of their own name.

#### Resources and Materials:

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- Sticky notes and/or butcher paper
- Poster paper
- Markers
- Projector
- OPTIONAL: Word cloud software, such as [Poll Everywhere](#) account; prepared to accept student submissions via computer and/or cell phone.

### Learning Plan:

#### Introduction – Origins (10 minutes)

1. Building background knowledge:
  - a. Ask students to indicate (stand/raise hand) if they know the meaning and story of their first and/or last name.
  - b. Invite volunteers to share their name origins. If no student is able to retell his/her story, be prepared with a name origin story to share with the class.
  - c. Ask the class: “How would someone come to know the origin story of a name?” Encourage students to talk about family histories, storytelling, conversation, books, etc.
  - d. Ask students to consider “Why would it be important to know the origin story of your first or last name?,” then share their answers with elbow partners. Encourage students to discuss issues such as knowing relations, belonging to a community, land/property ownership, family legacy, etc.
  - e. Invite students to create a wordsplash using sticky notes on butcher paper (or a word cloud using software such as [Poll Everywhere](#)) to complete this sentence: “It would be important to know the origination of a person/place/event because ...”
2. Invite students to share other items or events that might have an origin story attached. Encourage students to list documents, holidays, historical figures, etc.

#### Learning Activities – Why Origin Stories? (30 -45 minutes)

1. Project this paragraph for students to read:

“Origin narratives or “stories about how this all began” help a group of people feel that they belong to a community with a common past and have shared ideas about what is important to that community. Origin stories are central to a people’s sense of a unifying identity. However, origin stories may leave out key aspects of what actually happened and overemphasize others. That is the case with the most familiar origin story of the United States.” (Page 4)

  - a. Ask students to comment on what story they believe the paragraph might be describing. Encourage students to focus on early history of the continent. (See pages 4-5)
  - b. Ask students to theorize why a new nation might want to establish its origin stories. Encourage students to refer back to their elbow-partner discussion and the paragraph above.
  - c. Ask students to comment on how or why the holiday of Thanksgiving might be an example of an origin story for the United States.
2. Ask students to read the following excerpt from *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States for Young People*:

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“But the Doctrine of Discovery, which was ingrained in the mind-set of European colonizers, assured Christians that whatever land they saw was theirs to occupy and use. Their god, they believed, had given them dominion over the land and all its resources. In their eyes the land was an unoccupied, pristine wilderness. This idea is the basis of the origin story of the United States, a story that, like a myth, has been retold for hundreds of years.” (Page 49)

- a. Ask students to write on a sheet of paper why this origin story is unrealistic. Encourage students to think about who might have helped the colonizers settle the lands, locate resources, survive the climate, plant their foods, and hunt and fish unfamiliar species.
  - b. Invite students to create a Venn diagram that compares and contrasts the origin story of the European Pilgrims and Puritans. (Pages 50-52)
  - c. Guide students in a brief discussion to relate “a” and “b” above to demonstrate how origin stories can misrepresent reality.
3. Invite students to provide examples that they are familiar with about the first Thanksgiving.
  4. Read or view a more accurate perspective of Thanksgiving (see suggestions in ADDITIONAL RESOURCES: Student Resources, below)
    - a. As a whole class, use a similar protocol as in step 3 above to critique the commonly retold first Thanksgiving story. Explain why it is unrealistic and/or inaccurate.
    - b. Assist the students to create a class Venn diagram on the board that compares and contrasts the first Thanksgiving story with the updated, more accurate version of the story.
  5. Invite students to
    - a. Refer back to the wordsplash from the lesson introduction and to the paragraph from number 1 above to consider the following and then discuss with an elbow partner:
      - i. In what ways is the story of the first Thanksgiving an origin narrative for the United States?
      - ii. What was the purpose of the origin narrative of the first Thanksgiving for the United States when it was a newly formed nation? How has that purpose changed or remained the same?
      - iii. How does the idea of “terminal narrative” (chapter 2) help to support the US origin story of Thanksgiving?
    - b. Share a summary of their discussion with the class.

### Lesson Summary/Formative Assessment (10 minutes)

1. Invite students to comment on the following:
  - a. Why does it matter who tells the story about the origin of something?
  - b. Relate this quote to the commonly retold first Thanksgiving story: “Most people’s understanding of what it means to be an American is founded upon such tales, which together form a myth-like origin story.” (Pages 3-4)
  - c. Describe the purpose of an origin narrative and explain how Thanksgiving could be considered an origin narrative.

### ASSESSMENT (20 - 30 minutes)

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1. Organize students in groups of 3-4 and invite them to create an anchor chart poster for the key concept “ORIGIN NARRATIVE” that depicts in text and graphics the components of origin stories, including purpose, methods of transmission, and outcomes.
2. Individually, ask students to make a relational diagram or graphic organizer that explains how the commonly retold US Thanksgiving story fits the description of the origin narrative.
3. Ask students, in pairs or individually, to write and graphically illustrate a more accurate origin story of harvest and the relationships related to the settlement of the land along the Atlantic Ocean that includes both Indigenous and European settler roles.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

#### Student Resources

##### Thanksgiving History from Plimoth Plantation

- Interactive - <https://www.plimoth.org/sites/default/files/media/olc/intro.html>
- Background information - <https://www.plimoth.org/learn/just-kids/homework-help/Thanksgiving/Thanksgiving-history>

Bruchac, Margaret M. (Abenaki), and Catherine Grace O’Neill. *1621: A New Look at Thanksgiving*. Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 2001. Grades 4 and up.

#### Teacher Resources

From Bigelow, Bill, and Bob Peterson, editors. *Rethinking Columbus: The Next 500 Years*. (1998).

- Dorris, Michael. “Why I’m Not Thankful for Thanksgiving.”
- Loewen, James. “Plagues & Pilgrims: The Truth about the First Thanksgiving.”

PBS American Experience video series *We Shall Remain – Episode 1: After the Mayflower* (2009).