**History of Thanksgiving**

Modern Thanksgiving has its direct origins in American history. In 1609, a group of [Puritans](http://history.howstuffworks.com/american-history/american-colonial-life.htm) fleeing religious persecution in England moved to [Holland](http://maps.howstuffworks.com/netherlands-topographic-map.htm). They ­lived in Holland for a number of years until a group of English investors -- the Merchant Adventurers -- financed a trip for more than 100 passengers to the New World.

On Sept. 6, 1620, they set sail on a ship called the **Mayflower**, leaving from [England](http://maps.howstuffworks.com/maps-of-england.htm) and arriving in the New World after 65 days. They settled in a town called Plymouth in what is now [Massachusetts](http://maps.howstuffworks.com/maps-of-massachusetts.htm). The Pilgrims' first winter was so harsh that fewer than 50 of the group survived the season.

On March 16, 1621, an Abnaki Indian named Samoset entered the Plymouth settlement. He welcomed the Pilgrims in English, and the next day returned with another American Indian named Squanto, who spoke English well. With Squanto's help, the Pilgrims were able to survive in the New World. He taught them how to get sap out of the maple trees, how to avoid plants that were poisonous and how to plant corn and other crops.

The harvest was very successful, due in large part to help from the American Indians. The Pilgrims had enough food for the winter and had learned how to survive in the New World. Plymouth Colony's Governor, William Bradford, decided to throw a celebratory feast and invited the colony's American Indian neighbors to take part. The American Indians brought food as well, and the celebration lasted for three days.

Historians believe that this celebration took place sometime in the fall. And although there are very few clues to reconstruct the feast, some scholars believe that food items, like venison and fish, were the main sources of protein, rather than [turkey](http://recipes.howstuffworks.com/menus/how-to-cook-the-perfect-turkey.htm). It's also thought that the food preparation would have been greatly influenced by American Indian traditions since the Puritans had been instructed by American Indians on how to cultivate and cook items.

Many view the [first Thanksgiving](http://tlc.howstuffworks.com/family/first-thanksgiving.htm) as an example of the possibility of great respect and cooperation between two different cultures. But others see it as a symbol of the [colonists](http://history.howstuffworks.com/american-history/american-colonial-life.htm)' eventual persecution of the American Indians. Sadly, the friendly spirit of the first Thanksgiving and the 50-year period of peace that followed is one exception in a long history of bloodshed between Native American tribes and European settlers.

In 1970, some [American Indians](http://history.howstuffworks.com/native-american-history/history-of-native-americans.htm) began observing a Day of Mourning on Thanksgiving Day to remember the violence and discrimination suffered by their ancestors. The Day of Mourning is observed by gathering at the top of "Coles Hill," which overlooks [Plymouth Rock](http://tlc.howstuffworks.com/family/family-vacations-plymouth-rock.htm).

**TRUE OR FALSE?**

1. Pilgrims arrived in the New World on the Mayflower after sailing from Europe for 65 days
2. The first Native American Indian that the pilgrims met did not speak English.
3. Puritans fleeing religious persecution moved to France before 100 of them moved to the New World.
4. The Native American Indian Squanto helped the pilgrims survive in the New World by teaching them about poisonous plants and how to plant corn and other crops.
5. The first harvest of the pilgrims was very successful and they had enough food for the winter.
6. The pilgrims had a feast to celebrate their good harvest, but they did not invite the Native American Indians who helped them with their crops.
7. The first celebratory feast of the pilgrims probably took place in the fall.
8. Many people view the first Thanksgiving as a symbol of the pilgrims’ eventual persecution of the Native American Indians.
9. In 1970, some [American Indians](http://history.howstuffworks.com/native-american-history/history-of-native-americans.htm) began observing a Day of Mourning on Thanksgiving Day