

PRESIDENTIAL THANKSGIVING PROCLAMATIONS

A Historical Perspective

Learning Objectives: Students will:

1. Compare and contrast several original documents proclaiming a day of Thanksgiving for our nation.
2. Learn about what was happening in history at the time of the proclamations of Thanksgiving as a national holiday.
3. Create a list of words associated with their own celebration of Thanksgiving.
4. Create a word search or crossword puzzle using Thanksgiving words in order to compare how different families celebrate.

TEKS: SS 3.12 (A), 3.16 (C), 3.17 (A), (B), 4.22 (B), (C), 5.23 (B), 5.25 (A-D), 5.26 (D), LA 3.7 (B), 3.9 (F-I), 4.10 (G), (H), (L), 5.10, 5.11 (D), 5.12 (J)

Materials: <http://www.pilgrimhall.org/ThanxProc.htm>, <http://www.puzzle-maker.com/>, <http://www.toolsforeducators.com/wordsearch/> , graphic organizer (attached), copies of Thanksgiving Proclamations (attached)

Vocabulary: celebration, proclamation, traditions

Teaching Strategies:

1. Introduce the lesson by asking students to tell about traditional Thanksgiving practices in their families. With whom do they celebrate, what foods are served, what other traditions are observed?
2. Tell students that even though it was Abraham Lincoln in 1863 who proclaimed that Thanksgiving be observed every year on the fourth Thursday in November, it was recognized many times before that as a national day of giving thanks.
3. Display and/or distribute copies of the Continental Congress Thanksgiving Proclamation, the George Washington Thanksgiving Proclamation, and the Abraham Lincoln Thanksgiving Proclamation. These documents are attached, with edits (in blue) to increase student understanding. Original documents without simplification may be found online at <http://www.thanksgivingnovember.com/thanksgiving-proclamations.html>
4. Divide the class into three groups, one for each proclamation. As a group, the students will read, discuss, and analyze the proclamation assigned to them. Students should use internet or print resources to discover what was happening in the nation at the time of the proclamation.
 - a. 1782 – end of the Revolutionary War with Great Britain for our independence;
 - b. 1789 – Washington elected President, new constitution
 - c. 1863 – Civil War

5. Each group will select 3 people in their group to tell about what they've learned. Pertinent historical facts include:
 - a. When Thanksgiving was to be observed
 - b. What was happening in our country at the time
 - c. What the proclamation mentioned that we should be thankful for.
6. (Optional) In addition, each group will discover facts about one other Thanksgiving topic of interest to share with the class. Topics to be explored include:
 - a. Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade
 - b. Presidential Pardon of a turkey
 - c. Chung Ch'ui – the 3 day Chinese harvest festival
 - d. Thanksgiving Day in Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Korea, or Japan
 - e. First Thanksgiving with the Wampanoag Indians
7. Allow time for each group to report. As they do, students will record historical facts on a graphic organizer (attached).
8. Each student will compile a list of words they associate with Thanksgiving traditions in their families. Students will use these words to create a word search or crossword puzzle to exchange with other students.
(<http://www.puzzle-maker.com/> or <http://www.toolsforeducators.com/wordsearch/>) In this way, students will discover likenesses and differences in the ways that different families celebrate the holiday.

Extension for G/T

Students will search <http://www.pilgrimhall.org/ThanxProc.htm> for other Presidential Thanksgiving Proclamations, to determine what was happening in our country at the time for which the President was thankful.

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LRE Consultant

Continental Congress Thanksgiving Proclamation (1782)

IT being the indispensable (very important) duty of all Nations, not only to offer up their supplications (requests) to **ALMIGHTY GOD**, the giver of all good, for his gracious assistance (help) in a time of distress, (hard times) but also in a solemn and public manner to give him praise for his goodness in general, and especially for great and signal interpositions of his providence (luck, destiny) in their behalf (for them):

Therefore the United States in Congress assembled, taking into their consideration (because) (reasons to be thankful)

1. the many instances of divine goodness to these States (the 13 Colonies), in the course of the important conflict in which they have been so long engaged (Revolutionary War);
2. the present happy and promising state of public affairs (return to peace); and the events of the war, in the course of the year now drawing to a close (we won the war);
3. particularly the harmony of the public Councils (cities and states getting along), which is so necessary to the success of the public cause;
4. the perfect union and good understanding which has hitherto (before) subsisted (existed) between them and their Allies, notwithstanding the artful and unwearied attempts of the common enemy (Great Britain) to divide them;
5. the success of the arms (military) of the United States, and those of their Allies, and the acknowledgment of their independence by another European power (France), whose friendship and commerce (trading) must be of great and lasting advantage to these States:

----- Do hereby recommend to the inhabitants (citizens) of these States in general, to observe, and request the several States to interpose their authority (each state was asked to repeat this request in their states) in appointing and commanding the observation of THURSDAY the twenty-eight day of NOVEMBER next, as a day of solemn **THANKSGIVING to GOD** for all his mercies: and they do further recommend to all ranks (people), to testify (how we can show our thanks) to their gratitude to GOD for his goodness, (1. by a cheerful obedience of his laws, and by (2. promoting, each in his station (wherever they are), and by his influence, the practice of true and undefiled religion (honorable), which is the great foundation (base) of public prosperity (well-being) and national happiness.

Done in Congress, at Philadelphia, the eleventh day of October, AD 1782.

George Washington's Thanksgiving Proclamation (1789)

Whereas it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge ([recognize](#)) the providence ([influence](#)) of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly ([respectfully](#)) to implore ([ask](#)) His protection and favor; and Whereas both Houses of Congress have, by their joint committee, requested me "to recommend to the people of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity ([chance](#)) peaceably to establish ([make](#)) a form of government for their safety and happiness:"

Now, therefore, I do recommend and assign Thursday, the 26th day of November next, to be devoted by the people of these States ([the United States](#)) to the service of that great and glorious Being ([God](#)) who is the beneficent ([helpful](#)) author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be; that we may then all unite in rendering unto ([giving](#)) Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country previous to ([before](#)) their becoming a nation; for the signal and manifold ([many](#)) mercies and the favorable interpositions of His providence ([care](#)) in the course and conclusion ([all the way through](#)) of the late war ([American Revolution](#)); for the great degree of tranquility ([peace](#)), union, and plenty which we have since enjoyed; for the peaceable and rational ([sensible](#)) manner in which we have been enable to establish constitutions ([rules](#)) of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national one now lately instituted' ([the constitution](#)) for the civil and religious liberty ([freedom](#)) with which we are blessed, and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge ([schools and colleges](#)); and, in general, for all the great and various favors which He has been pleased to confer upon ([give](#)) us.

And also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications ([requests](#)) to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations ([God](#)) and beseech ([ask](#)) Him to pardon our national and other transgressions ([sins](#)); to enable ([allow](#)) us all, whether in public or private stations ([at home or out in public](#)), to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually ([on time](#)); to render ([give](#)) our National Government a blessing to all the people by constantly being a Government of wise, just ([fair](#)), and constitutional laws, discreetly ([carefully](#)) and faithfully executed ([done](#)) and obeyed; to protect and guide all sovereigns ([rulers](#)) and nations (especially such as have show kindness to us), and to bless them with good governments, peace, and concord ([harmony](#)); to promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue ([good qualities](#)), and the increase of science ([understanding, knowledge](#)) among them and us; and, generally to grant unto all mankind such a degree of temporal ([earthly](#)) prosperity ([success](#)) as He alone knows to be best.

Given under my hand, at the city of New York, the 3rd day of October, A.D. 1789.

G. Washington

Abraham Lincoln's Thanksgiving Proclamation

(1863)

The year that is drawing towards its close (ending), has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies (good crops and rain). To these bounties (blessings), which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature, that they cannot fail to penetrate (break through) and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible (unfeeling) to the ever watchful providence (destiny) of Almighty God. (Sometimes we forget all the good things in our lives)

In the midst of a civil war of unequalled magnitude and severity (huge and hard), which has sometimes seemed to foreign States (other countries) to invite and to provoke their aggression (invasion or attack), 1. peace has been preserved (kept) with all nations, 2. order has been maintained, 3. the laws have been respected and obeyed, and 4. harmony has prevailed everywhere except in the theatre of military conflict (on the battlefield); while that theatre (battlefields) has been greatly contracted by the advancing armies and navies of the Union. Needful diversions of wealth and of strength from the fields of peaceful industry (factories) to the national defense, 5. have not arrested (stopped) the plough (farming), the shuttle (transportation), or the ship; the axe had enlarged the borders of our settlements 6.(new lands are being settled), and 7. the mines, as well of iron and coal as of the precious metals, have yielded even more abundantly than heretofore (before). 8. Population has steadily increased, notwithstanding the waste that has been made in the camp (except people killed in the war), the siege and the battle-field; and 9. the country, rejoicing in the consciousness of augmented strength and vigor (getting stronger), is permitted to expect continuance of years, with large increase of freedom.

No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. (People could not have made these good things happen.) They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy.

It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and voice by the whole American people. I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning (traveling or working) in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens (God). And I recommend to them that while offering up the ascriptions (acknowledgment or credit) justly due to Him for such singular deliverances (rescue or relief) and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence (regret or sorrow) for our national perverseness (unreasonableness) and disobedience, commend to his tender care all those who have

become widows, orphans, mourners or sufferers in the lamentable (terrible) civil strife (war) in which we are unavoidably (can't keep from it) engaged, and fervently (eagerly) implore (ask) the interposition (action) of the Almighty Hand (God) to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility and Union.

In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my hand, and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the city of Washington, this third day of October, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and of the independence of the United States the eighty-eighth.

By The President: Abraham Lincoln

William H. Seward, Secretary of State

Three Thanksgiving Proclamations

For each Thanksgiving Proclamation, record the date for Thanksgiving, what major event was happening in the US at the time, and what specific things the Proclamation stated that the citizens should be thankful for.

