

## Analyzing Historical Artwork: *The First Thanksgiving, 1621*

Art is an important source for learning about history. But art has to be analyzed like any other source. For example, this painting is one of the most famous illustrations of the first Thanksgiving, when English colonists and Wampanoag people shared a meal in November 1621. But just because art is famous does not mean it is accurate! The bullets below the painting show some helpful questions to ask whenever you analyze artwork as a historical source. Read those, and then answer the questions on the following page.



*The First Thanksgiving, 1621*, painted by Jean Ferris in 1912

### Sourcing:

- Who created this artwork?
- When was this artwork made? When did the events in this painting take place?

### Analysis:

- How does the artist want you to feel about the people and events in the painting?
- Who is depicted in this artwork? What are they doing? What are they wearing?
- Does this painting have a mood? If there are people, what are their expressions?

### Corroboration:

- What other sources could you check to see if the artwork is inaccurate?

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Answer the questions below to analyze *The First Thanksgiving, 1621* as a historical source.

**Sourcing:** Identify how the source got its information.

1. How long after the first Thanksgiving was this painting created? Could Jean Ferris have witnessed the first Thanksgiving or interviewed someone who was there?

**Analysis:** Identify how the artist has chosen to depict people and events, and how the artist wants the audience to feel about those people and events.

2. How are the people in the painting feeling? What is the mood of this painting?

3. How does the painting portray the relationship between the English and the Wampanoag? What details show that?

**Corroboration:** Compare the source to other historical sources to see whether anything is inaccurate.

4. Look at the headdresses of eagle feathers the Wampanoag men are wearing in the painting. Do some research—did Wampanoag men usually wear this type of clothing?

5. Look at how some of the Wampanoag men are bare-chested. Do some research on November weather in Massachusetts. How would Wampanoag men have been dressed at this time of the year?

**Evaluation:** Use your sourcing, analysis, and corroboration to evaluate any piece of historical art.

6. What did you learn about using historical art by sourcing, analyzing, and corroborating this painting?