

# *The First Thanksgiving*

A Readers Theater Script

**Characters:** Narrator  
Grandma  
Mom  
Dad  
Sister  
Brother

**Narrator:** Nearly four hundred years ago, a ship full of English families landed at what is now Cape Cod, Massachusetts. After a rough crossing, the band of Protestants finally reached the land they called the New World.

They were eager to begin life in their new home, but the winter was harsher than it had ever been back in London, and supplies were low. Most of the settlers grew ill, and many died that winter. The next season, the native peoples of the land taught the settlers new and better ways to grow crops, so they'd never again run out of food.

Today, we commemorate these events with the holiday of Thanksgiving. Your family's celebration might even be a little bit like this one...

**Sister:** Come in, Grandma! Dinner's almost ready.

**Brother:** Welcome, Grandma!

**Grandma:** Hello, my darlings. It's wonderful to see you!

**Sister (calling out):** Mom, Dad, Grandma's here!

**Narrator:** The scents of pumpkin and spices fill the warm air. Mom and Dad emerge from the kitchen, wiping their hands on their aprons.



**Mom:** Hello, Mother! I'd hug you, but I'm afraid my apron is covered in cranberry sauce.

**Dad:** I'll give you a hug for all of us!

**Grandma:** Thank you, dear. It smells wonderful in here!

**Narrator:** The table is set with plates, napkins, and the special glasses Mom and Dad save for the holidays. There are two sets of forks, spoons for eating cranberry sauce, and steaming dishes of sweet potatoes, mashed potatoes, green beans, biscuits, and gravy.

**Mom:** The turkey will be ready in just a few minutes.

**Dad:** I don't know how the Pilgrims cooked their turkeys hundreds of years ago at Plymouth Rock. It takes hours and hours, even in a modern oven.

**Sister:** Oh, Dad, you've got it all wrong. The settlers had cranberries and vegetables and maybe potatoes, but they didn't eat turkey at their Thanksgiving feast!

**Dad:** Sure they did.

**Brother:** That's not what we learned in school!

**Mother:** What did you learn?

**Sister:** Most of the things we thought we knew about the first Thanksgiving aren't true.

**Mom:** Like what?

**Brother:** Well, first of all, the first Thanksgiving wasn't really the first!

**Dad:** What do you mean?

**Sister:** Thanksgiving was a harvest festival, and my teacher said harvest festivals began in pagan times. A harvest festival celebrates the bounty of food grown in farms and orchards, and they've traditionally taken place in Autumn, when crops are harvested.

**Brother:** Yeah, and my teacher told me the first Thanksgiving feast might even have taken place in Texas. Legend has it that a Spanish explorer, Juan de Oñate, threw a Thanksgiving feast all the way back in 1598.

**Dad:** So it wasn't a celebration of the Pilgrims' friendship with the Native Americans?

**Brother:** That part's true, but there's much more to the story!

**Sister:** First of all, the Pilgrims first landed at Cape Cod, not at Plymouth Rock. They celebrated their first Thanksgiving with the Native Americans in 1621, the year after they landed. The winter of 1620 was pretty hard on them. It was snowy and icy and they ran out of food.

**Mom:** They did come from London, after all. It doesn't snow as much in London.

**Brother:** That's right. So they weren't prepared for the cold in this new place. They couldn't grow crops in the snow, and they didn't know how to keep themselves warm enough. Many fathers, mothers, and even kids died in the winter of 1620.

**Dad:** Then a Native American named Squanto taught them better ways of farming.

**Sister:** You're mostly right.

**Brother:** Squanto's full name was actually Tisquantum, and he already spoke English. He was once kidnapped by Englishmen. They tried to sell him as a slave! He made his way back, but by the time he got home, his family had all died of a terrible illness that killed many of the tribes in the area.

**Mom:** That's so sad!

**Sister:** Tisquantum was taken in by another tribe. Their leader put him in charge of communication with the settlers. He's responsible for teaching the settlers about the natives' way of growing corn. The Thanksgiving feast of 1621 celebrated the settlers' first successful harvest.

**Grandma:** Some Native American peoples gather on Thanksgiving Day each year to remember the hardships of their ancestors during the Pilgrims' time, and to talk about the difficulties they still face today. They call it the National Day of Mourning.

**Brother and Sister:** How did you know that?

**Grandma** (*smiling*): You're not the only ones who read history books! Archaeologists and historians are always digging up new artifacts and documents. I'll bet we could learn something new about the first Thanksgiving every year.

**Mom:** Well, I've learned more than one thing today. The history of Thanksgiving isn't nearly as simple as I thought.

**Dad:** That gives me an idea. What do you say we make this a tradition? Each year, we can all read more about the first Thanksgiving, and each of us can share something we learned.

**Brother:** If we agree, can we eat now?

(*All laugh*)

**Dad:** Of course.

**Grandma:** Let's eat!

-- *The End* --

