



# Native American Perspective

*By Ricky White, Fargo Public Schools Indian Education Cultural Specialist*

## Thanksgiving: A Native American Perspective

There is no question that the primary theme for Thanksgiving is a time to rejoice and express our thankfulness and gratitude to each other, and to be with our families and share a traditional turkey dinner. In my home, we enjoy getting all of the family together and we always say a few things that we are thankful for before the eating frenzy begins.

Often, coupled with those good family traditions are the lessons that are very similar to what I was taught in the 1980's, which is the old folktale of the starving pilgrims whose boat, The Mayflower, landed in the New England area, only to be saved by the "Indians" who taught them to plant and farm for food. Then, the following fall, the pilgrims invited the Indians to a feast, which henceforth became known as the "First Thanksgiving dinner." I remember coloring turkeys in grade school and bringing home painted war bonnets to commemorate the teachings I received at school.

Well folks, there is more to the story and it's important that we teach the facts from many perspectives. The Indians were actually the Wampanoag, who suffered a 75% loss of their people as a result of the contact with explorers and settlers on their homelands on the east coast. This was due to foreign illnesses and, more so, the aggressive actions done to them in the takeover of their precious lands.

The Wampanoag are near extinct and I promise you they do not celebrate the "First Thanksgiving." So, I wanted to remind folks:

- *Please consider avoiding* Native costumes or non-authentic Native arts or crafts in your classrooms. This means the war bonnet art.
- *Please incorporate* Native knowledge into your teachings that involve Native people.
- *Please celebrate* the beautiful Native cultures through authentic art, literature, and foods while you celebrate Thanksgiving.
- *Please do* contact your Indian Education Coordinator, Melody Staebner at 701-446-1054 or at [steabnm@fargo.k12.nd.us](mailto:steabnm@fargo.k12.nd.us) because she has resources and materials that can assist you when teaching about Native Americans. You can also contact me for guidance on factual Native History and perspectives when it comes to teaching about Thanksgiving and we can learn more together.

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# *Native American Perspective, continued*

Click below for a detailed lesson plan on Thanksgiving found in the North Dakota Native American Essential Understandings website. (Free authentic Native American curriculum warehouse!)

<https://teachingsofourelders.org/the-real-thanksgiving/>

Also, check out this short article by the National Museum of the American Indian (Smithsonian):  
[Harvest Ceremony: Beyond the Myth of Thanksgiving](#)

In an age of divisive politics and a world filled with so much indifference, we hear terms like “cancel culture” and “Critical Race Theory,” especially in discussions around a different perspective or when historical and generational topics are involved. My guidance here is **NOT** any of that; I am pointing to the fact that there is just a little more to the story and it's good to train ourselves and our students to receive teaching and learning from many perspectives. I wish you all the best and I am thankful for the work you do for our students, families and community.

Please contact me, Ricky White, your new FPS Indian Education Cultural Specialist at 701-446-1067 or email [whitef@fargo.k12.nd.us](mailto:whitef@fargo.k12.nd.us). I would be happy to answer any questions, share in your classroom or present at your next PLC. I am ready and here to support your good work!

Another national day of recognition in November is Veterans Day. Please join me in thanking all of our veterans, their families and those that are currently serving to protect and preserve our ways of life. According to [uso.org](http://uso.org), 19% of all Native Americans serve in the armed forces, in comparison to an average of 14% of all other ethnicities.

