The Pilgrims' Thanksgiving

We do not know the exact date of the celebration we now call the First Thanksgiving, but it was probably in late September or early October, soon after their crop of corn, squash, beans, barley, and peas had been harvested. It was also a time during which Plymouth Harbor played host to a tremendous number of migrating birds, particularly ducks and geese, and [William] Bradford ordered four men to go out "fowling." It took only a few hours for Plymouth's hunters to kill enough ducks and geese to feed the settlement for a week. Now that they had 'gathered the fruits of our labors," Bradford declared it time to 'rejoice together...after a special manner.'
...Countless Victorian-era engravings notwithstanding, the Pilgrims did not spend the day sitting around a long table draped with a white linen cloth, clasping each other's hands in prayer as a few curious Indians looked on. Instead of an English affair, the First Thanksgiving soon became an overwhelmingly Native celebration when Massasoit and a hundred Pokanokets (more than twice the entire English population of Plymouth) arrived at the settlement and soon provided five freshly killed deer...most of the celebrants stood, squatted, or sat on the ground as they clustered around outdoor fires, where the deer and birds turned on wooden spits and where pottages—stews into which varieties of meats and vegetables were thrown—simmered invitingly.

In addition to ducks and deer, there was, according to Bradford, a 'good store of wild turkeys' in the fall of 1621...The Pilgrims may have also added fish to their meal of birds and deer...Alas, the Pilgrims were without pumpkin pies or cranberry sauce. There were also no forks, which did not appear at Plymouth until the last decades of the seventeenth century. The Pilgrims ate with their fingers and their knives.


- What is the story the painting is trying to tell? What are some of its main themes?
- How is the scene pictured in the painting above different from the way Nathaniel Philbrick describes the Pilgrims' first Thanksgiving?
- Draw your own picture, based on the reading.

**P.A.S.S. for these activities**

- Grade 1: Reading - 6.1abc,2,3c / Visual Arts -2.1; 3.2
- Grade 2: Reading - 5.1abc,4b / Social Studies - 3.4 / Visual Arts -2.1; 3.2
- Grade 3: Reading - 3.2; 4.1abcd,2abc / Visual Arts - 2.1; 3.2
- Grade 4: Reading - 2.2; 3.1b,2abd,4b / Visual Arts - 2.2; 3.1
- Grade 5: Reading - 2.2; 3.1b,2abce,4d / Social Studies - 2.2; 3.1/ Visual Arts - 2.3; 3.1

Related lesson online: **Thanksgiving: Celebrating the Harvest.**

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