

## **STUDY GUIDE: THE HISTORY OF THANKSGIVING**

### **1. Origins of Thanksgiving**

Thanksgiving today is known for family meals and gratitude, but its early roots come from the first interactions between the Pilgrims and the Wampanoag people in the early 1600s. Understanding the holiday requires looking at both groups and how the tradition developed over time.

### **2. The Pilgrims' Journey and First Winter (1620–1621)**

In 1620, English Separatists called Pilgrims sailed on the Mayflower to seek religious freedom. They landed at Plymouth and faced a harsh winter. Nearly half of the 102 passengers died from sickness, cold, and hunger.

### **3. Help from the Wampanoag**

The Wampanoag people had lived in the region for centuries but had recently suffered heavy population losses from European diseases. A Patuxet man named Squanto (Tisquantum) taught the Pilgrims how to plant corn, fish, and survive. A peace agreement formed between Governor William Bradford and Wampanoag leader Ousamequin (Massasoit), leading to years of relative peace.

### **4. The 1621 Harvest Feast**

After the first successful harvest, the Pilgrims held a three-day feast with the Wampanoag. Foods likely included venison, wild birds, corn, berries, boiled vegetables, and seafood. This event is often called the First Thanksgiving, though both Native Americans and Europeans had long held harvest festivals.

### **5. Growth of a National Tradition**

Colonists held occasional days of thanksgiving for harvests or victories. In 1789, George Washington declared a national day of thanksgiving, but it was not yearly. Writer Sarah Josepha Hale spent nearly 30 years urging that Thanksgiving become a national holiday to unite the country.

### **6. Lincoln Makes It Annual (1863)**

During the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln established Thanksgiving as an annual holiday on the last Thursday of November. He encouraged Americans to give thanks and support those suffering because of the war.

### **7. Setting the Modern Date**

In 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt tried moving Thanksgiving one week earlier to help businesses during the Great Depression. This caused confusion. In 1941, Congress made Thanksgiving officially the fourth Thursday of November.