Native Americans in Maryland, 1634
Preview Lesson #2: The First Thanksgiving

Objective:
- Students will learn about the various Native American groups that lived in the United States prior to contact with Europeans. They will learn how the Native Americans’ environment impacted their way of life and how this differed between regions.
- Students will learn about the true story of Thanksgiving and the Native Americans who participated in the event.

Grade Level: K-5

Voluntary State Curriculum Correlation:
Grade 1:
1.B.1 Recognize that individuals and groups share and borrow from other cultures.
1.D.1 Explain how people modify, protect, and adapt to their environment.

Grade 2:
2.B.1 Explain that individuals and groups share and borrow from other cultures to form a community.
2.D.1 Explain how people modify, protect, and adapt to their environment.

Grade 3:
2.A.2 Explain the similarities and differences of communities using geographic characteristics.

Grade 4:
2.A.1.c Compare and describe elements of culture including shelter, recreation, education, oral traditions, art, music and language in Native American Societies.
3.B.1.c Explain how geographic characteristics affect how people live and work, and the population distribution of a place or region.

Grade 5:
2.A.1.c Describe the impact of location on the Native American way of life.
3.D.1.a Compare ways Native American societies used the natural environment for food, clothing and shelter.

**Estimated Time:** One 45 minute class period

**Advance Preparation:**
- Photocopy for each student

**Vocabulary:**

*Note to Teachers:* According to the National Museum of the American Indian, it is acceptable to use “Native Americans,” “American Indians,” or “Native peoples.” Although some tribes may prefer one term over the others, none of these terms is generally considered offensive. Whenever possible, it is always best to refer to a specific tribe.

**Procedure:**

1. Pull out a map of the United States. Explain that when colonists first arrived in Maryland in 1634, they encountered a group of Piscataway Indians called the Yaocomico Indians in present-day St. Mary’s City. Point out St. Mary’s City. Fourteen years earlier, in 1620, colonists aboard the *Mayflower* arrived in Plymouth, Massachusetts (today Provincetown), where they met the Wampanoag Indians. Point out Provincetown on the map. Both the Yaocomico and Wampanoag Indians were Eastern Woodland Indians. They were sedentary and lived in farming communities, growing plants such as corn, beans, and squash.

2. Explain to students that it was the Wampanoag Indians that participated in the first Thanksgiving. Ask students what they know about the first Thanksgiving. Accept all answers, and don’t correct students at this point.

3. Draw the following chart on the blackboard. Explain to students that we will compare how we celebrate Thanksgiving today with what really happened in 1621.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Today</th>
<th>1621</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is Thanksgiving?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How do we celebrate Thanksgiving?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In what month is Thanksgiving celebrated?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many days do we celebrate Thanksgiving?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do we eat at Thanksgiving dinner?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who comes to Thanksgiving dinner?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What games are played at Thanksgiving?

4. As a class, fill out the “Today” column.

5. Next turn to the 1621 column. Ask students how they think we know what happened at the first Thanksgiving. Explain that historians know what has happened in the past by looking at primary sources, or first-hand accounts of an event. Only one original primary source account of the first Thanksgiving still exists to tell us what that celebration was like, and unfortunately, it doesn’t give us very many details. It is a letter written by a Pilgrim named Edward Winslow in December, 1621.

6. Read aloud to the class the original text of the Winslow letter. The language is very difficult, and the students will probably not understand much of the content. You can help them understand it better by varying your inflection and inserting pauses where appropriate. It is important that the students hear (or read for themselves if they are able) the original to get a feeling for how differently people spoke over 300 years ago. After reading the original, ask students what, if anything, they learned from the letter. Comment on how different the language sounded from what we use today.

7. Read aloud (or have students read) the translated version of the letter.

8. Use the translated version to fill out the 1621 column of the chart as a class.

9. When the chart is complete, ask students to summarize how Thanksgiving today and Thanksgiving in 1621 are similar and different.

10. Explain that the first Thanksgiving was different in many ways from the one that we celebrate today. The first Thanksgiving was a harvest celebration, during which the Pilgrims thanked God for a bountiful harvest. Harvest feasts were a tradition that had existed in England for many, many years. The Wampanoag Indians also celebrated their harvests with a ceremony, during which they feasted, played games, and gave away some of their belongings to the poor among them. Also, for the Pilgrims, a day of thanksgiving was not something that happened on a certain day once a year. They were very religious, and would hold days of thanksgiving and prayer whenever they wanted to thank God for something good or to ask God to help them in some way. Similarly, the Wampanoag Indians were very spiritual and often thanked the earth and nature through ceremonies.

11. Thanksgiving was not celebrated from the time of that first Thanksgiving in 1621 straight through to the present. In fact, the next year, the Pilgrims did not have a good harvest and had no harvest celebration, although they continued to have intermittent days of thanksgiving and prayer to mark other occasions.

12. Have the students fill out the first column of the chart. Once they have finished, explain to them that how we celebrated the first Thanksgiving is very different from what actually happened in 1621. Discuss with the students the reality of what happened in 1621 and compare this with their answers.

- **What is Thanksgiving?:** The first Thanksgiving was actually a harvest celebration. In England, after a harvest, people would celebrate with a large feast, so when the colonists harvested their crops in Plymouth, they kept the same traditions they had in England. In the Fall 1621, after the crops had
been harvested and stored for the winter, the English colonists held a large meal to celebrate the harvest. In preparation for this meal, the colonists went out hunting for deer to add to the feast. The firing of the guns alerted local Indians. Fearing that the colonists were going to attack them, the Indians sent for Massasoit, the leader of the Wampanoag village, Pokanoket, to investigate what was happening. Massasoit arrived in Plymouth with 90 men, prepared to possibly fight. When he realized that the colonists were only celebrating, Massasoit sent his men out to hunt deer to offer as a present to the colonists. Realizing that it was safe, more Wampanoag Indians from the area joined the celebration.

- **Why do we celebrate Thanksgiving?:** The colonists were celebrating the harvest, as well as an entire year of hard work in the fields. The Wampanoag were joining the celebration to make friends with the colonists.
- **In what month is Thanksgiving celebrated?:** Historians are unsure of when the actual Thanksgiving celebration occurred, but they think that it happened sometime between mid-September and early November.
- **How many days do we celebrate Thanksgiving?:** The colonists and Indians celebrated for three days. Because the event lasted so long, the Wampanoag men built temporary shelters in which to stay while they were visiting.
- **What do we eat at Thanksgiving dinner?:** The colonists ate several different foods, including duck, deer, goose, samp (thick porridge made from Indian corn), stewed pompion (stewed pumpkin), shellfish, corn, nasaump (a type of porridge), fruits, and other vegetables. Tables full of food were set up indoors and outdoors. Massasoit and the leaders of the colony sat at a separate table and ate the best foods. For three days, everyone worked to prepare the meals, grinding corn, hunting, and cooking.
- **Who comes to Thanksgiving dinner?:** The colonists from Plymouth and over 90 Wampanoag people attended the feast.
- **What games are played at Thanksgiving?:** The following games were thought to be played during the three days of the feast: ball, blind man’s bluff, ring toss, and a log-throwing contest. The Wampanoag and the colonists also sang, danced, played music, shot muskets, and held military drills.

13. Explain to students that the Thanksgiving that we celebrate today is very different from the Thanksgiving that was celebrated in 1621. The Thanksgiving of 1621 was not a special holiday. In both English and Wampanoag tradition, people celebrated harvests with large feasts. This was a common celebration, and several similar celebrations would have also happened throughout the year. We only started to recognize Thanksgiving as a national holiday about 150 years ago. Ask the students if what really happened in 1621 is different or similar from the stories that they have learned in the past.
*Suggested Activity:* Hold an accurate Thanksgiving celebration in your classroom. Teach the students how to play the following games: blind man’s bluff and the ring toss game. Also, provide the students with historically-accurate Thanksgiving dishes. To find recipes, visit Plimouth Plantation’s website at: http://www.plimoth.org/learn/history/recipes/recipeList.asp.

**Closure/Assessments:**
1. Explain to students that there were several different Native Americans living in North America when the colonists began arriving in the New World. These different groups spoke different languages, lived in different types of houses, and tried to survive and use the natural resources which their environment provided.
2. Rather than separate these different groups of people, we tend to see them as all the same people or develop incorrect ideas about the ways in which they lived, the animals they hunted, the clothing they wore, etc. (ie: teepees and buffalo).
3. Ask the students if they can tell you what things they have learned and how their ideas about the Native Americans may have changed.

**Reading Suggestions:**

**Post-Visit Suggestions:**
After participating in the *Native Americans in Maryland, 1634* Classroom Presentation, have the students complete one of the following activities:
- Have each student plant a Native American garden with the three sisters, corn, beans, and squash in a small pot.
- Teach the students how to make a Native American pinch pot.
- Have students make a diorama of an Indian village, using John White’s watercolors. You can find these watercolors at: http://www.virtualjamestown.org/images/white_debry_html/jamestown.html.
LETTER FROM EDWARD WINSLOW, DECEMBER 11, 1621

Original Text

. . . We set last spring some twenty acres of Indian corn, and sowed some six acres of barley and peas; and according to the manner of the Indians, we manured our ground with herrings, or rather shads, which we have in great abundance, and take with great ease at our doors. Our corn did prove well; and, God be praised, we had a good increase of Indian corn, and our barley indifferent good, but our peas not worth the gathering, for we feared they were too late sown. They came up very well, and blossomed; but the sun parched them in the blossom.

Our harvest being gotten in, our governor sent four men on fowling, that so we might, after a special manner, rejoice together after we had gathered the fruit of our labors. They four in one day killed as much fowl as, with a little help beside, served the company almost a week. At which time, among other recreations, we exercised our arms, many of the Indians coming among us, and among the rest their greatest king, Massasoit, with some ninety men, whom for three days we entertained and feasted; and they went out and killed five deer, which they brought to the plantation, and bestowed on our governor, and upon the captain and others. And although it be not always so plentiful as it was at this time with us, yet by the goodness of God we are so far from want, that we often wish you partakers of our plenty.


Translation

. . . Our grain grew well; and thanks to God, we had a good growth of Indian corn, and our barley did okay, but our peas did not do well enough for us to harvest, because we planted them too late. They sprouted well and blossomed, but the sun burned them.

After completing the harvest, our governor sent four men hunting for wild fowl so that we might have a special celebration. The four men killed enough fowl to feed the whole colony for almost a week. During the celebration, we fired our guns into the air and many of the Indians came to the party, including their greatest king, Massasoit, with about ninety men, whom we entertained and feasted with for three days; and the Indians went out and killed five deer, which they brought to the plantation and gave to our governor and the captain and others. And although we do not always have so much food, right now, thanks to God, we have so much that we often wish you could be here to share it.