

Every autumn, Canadian and American families gather for a day centred around community, food and giving thanks – the day of Thanksgiving. Where did this holiday come from and how is it celebrated today?

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary	Definition
1. a pilgrim	a. not connected to religion
2. a settler	b. a large meal
3. a harvest	c. a religious traveller
4. a feast	d. being thankful
5. secular	e. a decision that allows someone to go free
6. light-hearted	f. amusing and cheerful; not serious
7. a pardon	g. when food is collected from fields and gardens
8. gratitude	h. someone who moves to another region or country, starting a new home and life

Thanksgiving

The history of Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving combines the traditions of different groups of people. Travellers and migrants brought different religious traditions from Europe to the United States and Canada. Several celebrations are claimed as the first Thanksgiving. The best known is the celebration held by the pilgrims in what is now Plymouth, Massachusetts after their journey across the Atlantic Ocean on the famous Mayflower ship. Like the pilgrims, many groups held days of prayer, fasting or feasting to give thanks for successfully making the long boat journey. Later, settlers celebrated their successful harvest in a new land by holding feasts with their Native American neighbours. Over time, the Canadian and American traditions have become similar and developed into the modern holiday of Thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving today

In Canada, Thanksgiving is celebrated on the second Monday in October. In the United States, it is on the fourth Thursday in November. Although its origins are religious, today, Thanksgiving is a largely secular holiday. For most Americans and Canadians, it is a day for

coming together with family and friends to share a large meal. It is an occasion to spend time with loved ones and express gratitude for the year that has passed. In many households there is a tradition of everyone seated at the table sharing what they are most grateful for.

Thanksgiving food

Thanksgiving is also about food. Thanksgiving dinner traditionally includes roast turkey, mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce and, for dessert, apple, pumpkin or pecan pies. Every family has its own recipes, sometimes secret recipes handed down through generations. Turkey, a bird native to North America, is the unofficial mascot of Thanksgiving, with roast turkey on the menu and turkey decorations on the wall. In the United States, a tradition of gifting turkeys to the President has more recently evolved into a humorous turkey 'pardoning'. At this light-hearted ceremony, the President issues an official pardon for one or two turkeys, saving them from being cooked for supper.

More than food: football, parades and traffic jams!

Beyond food and gratitude, there are some unexpected sides to the American and Canadian holiday. One of these is football. This popular sport is an important part of the holiday, when families gather around to cheer on local or national teams. American football and Canadian football are both similar to rugby, played primarily not with the feet but with the hands.

Parades are another common part of the festivities. In the United States, the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade takes place in New York City on the morning of Thanksgiving. It's one of the world's largest parades and is broadcast nationwide. A similar Thanksgiving parade happens in Canada as part of the Kitchener – Waterloo Oktoberfest, a multi-day autumn festival.

Unfortunately, heavy traffic is also common at Thanksgiving. In both countries, the week of Thanksgiving is one of the most popular travel times of the year, as everyone heads home to visit their extended family. So try to avoid any road trips if you're visiting North America during this holiday!

Tasks

Task 1

Are the sentences true or false?

	Answer	
1. Thanksgiving was originally celebrated by European settlers in North America.	True	False
2. At many Thanksgiving celebrations, everyone tells the group what they are most thankful for.	True	False
3. Modern-day Thanksgiving celebrations are very religious.	True	False
4. The main part of Thanksgiving is the preparation and sharing of a big meal.	True	False
5. Only Americans play and watch football during Thanksgiving.	True	False
6. The American President kills two turkeys every year.	True	False

Task 2

Complete the sentences with words from the box.

feast	gratitude	light-hearted
pardon	secular	settlers

1. New from Europe brought religious traditions with them to North America.
2. Even though the first Thanksgiving celebrations were days of prayer, the modern holiday is largely
3. A roast turkey is the centrepiece of the big Thanksgiving
4. Modern Thanksgiving is a, fun holiday full of activities like football and parades.
5. The American President saves some turkeys from being feasted on by issuing a presidential
6. More than just food and fun, Thanksgiving is about and reflecting on a successful year.

Discussion

When do families gather to have a feast in your country?

Answers

Preparation task

1. c
2. h
3. g
4. b
5. a
6. f
7. e
8. d

Task 1

1. True
2. True
3. False
4. True
5. False
6. False

Task 2

1. settlers
2. secular
3. feast
4. light-hearted
5. pardon
6. gratitude