Thanksgiving Reader's Theater

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The First Thanksgiving:
A Story of Survival and Friendship

A Reader's Theater Script

Characters:

- **Narrator 1**
- **Narrator 2**
- **Governor William Bradford** – Pilgrim leader
- **Myles Standish** – Military leader
- **Priscilla Mullins** – Young Pilgrim woman
- **John Alden** – Pilgrim settler
- **Squanto (Tisquantum)** – Wampanoag interpreter and friend
- **Massasoit** – Wampanoag chief

Scene 1 – A Harsh Beginning

Narrator 1:
In the winter of 1620, after sixty-six stormy days at sea, the *Mayflower* finally reached the coast of the New World. The passengers — later called Pilgrims — hoped for freedom and a new beginning.

Narrator 2:
But instead of a warm welcome, they found snow, hunger, and sickness.

Priscilla Mullins:
When we stepped onto the frozen shore, the wind cut through our cloaks like knives. My mother, father, and brother all grew ill before spring. I buried them with my own hands.

Governor Bradford:
Half our company was lost. Still, we gave thanks for each sunrise and prayed that God would guide us.

Myles Standish:
We built homes and planted what seeds we had, but little would grow in this rocky soil. We knew how to farm in England — not here.

John Alden:
We didn't know which plants were safe to eat or which rivers held fish. We were strangers in a strange land.

Narrator 1:
By the time the snow melted, the Pilgrims were weak and weary — but spring brought hope.

Scene 2 – A Meeting of Worlds

Narrator 2:
One March morning, as the Pilgrims worked in their fields, a tall man walked into their settlement, greeting them in clear English.

Myles Standish:
We were startled! How could this man speak our language?

Narrator 1:
His name was Samoset, a member of the Wabanaki tribe. A few days later, he returned with another man who would change everything — Squanto.

Squanto:
I am Tisquantum — but you may call me Squanto. I once traveled to England and learned your words. My people once lived on this very land, but they died of sickness years ago. I will help you survive here.

Priscilla Mullins:
He showed us how to plant corn, using fish to make the soil rich, and how to find eels and clams in the mudflats.

John Alden:
He taught us where to gather berries and how to tell which herbs would heal.

Governor Bradford:
Without his wisdom, we might not have lived to see another winter.

Narrator 2:
Soon after, Squanto brought news that Massasoit, the great leader of the Wampanoag people, wished to meet.

Massasoit:
(entering calmly)
Your people are newcomers. We have watched you struggle through the cold months. If you come in peace, so do we.

Governor Bradford:
We wish for peace, good Massasoit. Let us trade and live as neighbors.

Massasoit:
Then it is agreed. Our people shall share food and help one another in times of need.

Narrator 1:
A treaty of friendship was made — and for many years, it was kept.

Scene 3 – The First Harvest Feast

Narrator 2:
By autumn of 1621, the Pilgrims' crops had grown tall and golden. The harvest was full, and Governor Bradford called for a celebration.

John Alden:
We gathered corn, beans, and squash — the Three Sisters of the field.

Priscilla Mullins:
I roasted fowl and baked cornbread. It wasn't much like the feasts we once knew, but it filled our hearts with gratitude.

Governor Bradford:
We invited our Wampanoag friends to join us in thanksgiving.

Narrator 1:
Massasoit arrived with ninety men — bringing venison, fish, and fruits from the forest.

Massasoit:
We bring what the land has given us. Let us eat and give thanks together.

Squanto:
For three days we feasted, played games, and shared stories around the fire. There was laughter, even after so much sorrow.

Priscilla Mullins:
As I looked across the tables, I saw faces that once seemed foreign — now friends. After loss and fear, we had found peace.

Governor Bradford:
Let this feast remind us: we survive best when we share, when we listen, and when we give thanks.

Narrator 2:
In time, the peace between settlers and the Wampanoag would fade — but this moment of gratitude remains a lesson for us all.

Priscilla Mullins:
Thankfulness is not just for easy days. It is for every day we find courage, kindness, and hope.

All Together: We give thanks for courage, friendship, and the harvest of peace.

The End

Teacher's Companion Guide

The First Thanksgiving: A Story of Survival and Friendship

Reader's Theater

Overview

This Reader's Theater brings to life the true story of the first Thanksgiving in 1621. It highlights the hardships the Pilgrims faced, the help they received from the Wampanoag people, and the spirit of cooperation and gratitude that defined their first harvest celebration.

Students learn about real historical figures — including William Bradford, Myles Standish, Priscilla Mullins, John Alden, Squanto, and Massasoit — and gain perspective on the complexity and humanity of early American history.

Discussion Questions

1. What were some of the hardest challenges the Pilgrims faced during their first year?
2. How did Squanto and the Wampanoag help the Pilgrims survive?
3. What foods were likely served at the first Thanksgiving?
4. Why do you think the Pilgrims invited the Wampanoag to celebrate with them?
5. What lessons can we learn today from the cooperation between the Pilgrims and the Wampanoag?
6. Why is it important to remember both the good and the difficult parts of this history?

Performance Notes

- **Length:** About 6–8 minutes (3–4 pages of reading).
- **Readers:** 6–7 students (Narrators can be doubled if needed).

- **Staging:** No props necessary, but simple items like a wooden bowl, fake corn, or paper hats/headbands can enhance it.
- **Tone:** Respectful, reflective, and balanced. Encourage students to think about the real people behind the story — not stereotypes.
- **Optional Music:** "Simple Gifts" or soft flute/drum background music for an immersive atmosphere.

Extension Ideas

- **Compare and Contrast:** Research how modern Thanksgiving traditions differ from the 1621 harvest feast.
- **Mapping Activity:** Locate Plymouth, Cape Cod, and the Wampanoag homelands on a map.
- **Primary Source Connection:** Read excerpts from *William Bradford's journal, Of Plymouth Plantation*.
- **Creative Writing:** Have students write a journal entry as if they were at the first Thanksgiving — from either a Pilgrim or Wampanoag perspective.
- **Art Extension:** Illustrate one scene from the Reader's Theater or design a historically accurate "Thanksgiving table."