

Giving thanks on Thanksgiving



Do you know what is happening in America on Thursday 26 November? It's *Thanksgiving*, when families come together to share a meal, traditionally turkey and pumpkin pie. And it's followed by Black Friday, a day when Americans go shopping and spend, spend, spend!

It's thought that the first *Thanksgiving* festival was held in 1621, when the Plymouth Brethren celebrated their first year's harvest with the Wampanoag, a local Indian tribe. The three-day festival probably consisted of goose, corn, codfish and lobster – turkey and pumpkins were introduced much later.

In subsequent years, each colony would celebrate its own *Thanksgiving* in thanks for the bountiful harvest, victorious battles and plentiful rain. In 1789, after the War of Independence, George Washington introduced a *Thanksgiving* proclamation to give thanks for the successful conclusion to the war. Each of the thirteen states celebrated *Thanksgiving* on different days in the autumn: there was not one designated day for the whole country.

It was thanks to writer Sarah Josepha Hale, who campaigned tirelessly for over 36 years, that a national *Thanksgiving* holiday was introduced. Abraham Lincoln agreed to her request in 1863 and the last Thursday of November was established as *Thanksgiving* in the USA. That was until 1939, when Franklin Roosevelt moved the holiday one week earlier in attempt to boost Christmas retail sales. This was met with great opposition, and two years later, he signed a bill making *Thanksgiving* the fourth Thursday in November.

This gives Barack Obama enough time to carry out the traditional pardoning of the turkeys. Each year the president selects two turkeys who are saved from slaughter and are then able to live their lives out to their natural end. It's unclear which President actually started this tradition (some say Abraham Lincoln, other sources say Harry S. Truman), but in 1989, George H. W. Bush was quoted as saying: *Reprieve, keep him going, or pardon: it's all the same for the turkey, as long as he doesn't end up on the president's holiday table.*

And let's not forget the other *Thanksgiving* celebrations which have already taken place on 12 October this year in Canada. The menu is

similar, the sentiments the same – it just takes place about 6 weeks earlier, on the second Monday in October.

This year, *Thanksgiving* in the USA will fall on Thursday 26 November and that's when Americans will sit around their dining tables tucking into traditional *Thanksgiving* fare: roast turkey, cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes, chestnut stuffing, sweet potatoes, all followed by a sweet slice of pumpkin pie.

And what do many Americans do on the Friday after *Thanksgiving*? They start their Christmas shopping on the day that is now known as Black Friday. It seems that this name originated in Philadelphia when the police referred to the traffic and extra mayhem caused by floods of shoppers.

So, when you're at work on Thursday 26 November, spare a thought for all those Americans enjoying a hearty *Thanksgiving* roast turkey dinner with friends and family.

If you would like to read more about the history of *Thanksgiving*, then click [here](#).

And if you would like to use *Thanksgiving* as a topic in your lesson, then we have provided you with two activities at A2 level. You'll find them in the following **Teacher's notes** and on the **Worksheet**.

Teacher's notes**Activity 1: Thanksgiving** (Level A2 upwards, 10+ minutes)

- Copy Activity 1, **Thanksgiving** (see Worksheet) - one for each student.
- On the board write: *Thanksgiving*. Ask students what they know about it. Allow a few minutes for discussion.
- Give each student a copy of **Thanksgiving** and ask them to complete the exercise. Help with any unknown vocabulary.
- Check answers together in class.

Key: (1) Americans, (2) Thursday, (3) November, (4) Family, (5) meal, (6) turkey, (7) cranberry, (8) pumpkin, (9) Black Friday, (10) shopping

Activity 2: Your Thanksgiving party (Level A2 upwards, 15+ minutes)

- Tell students to look at Activity 2, **Your Thanksgiving party** (see Worksheet) and to complete the questions.
- Help with vocabulary and encourage students to use dictionaries.
- Students work in pairs and tell each other about the food and guests.

Activity 3: Giving thanks (Level A2 upwards, 10+ minutes)

- On the board write: *Thanksgiving, 1621*. Explain that the first *Thanksgiving* took place in 1621 and that the Pilgrims wanted to give thanks to God.
- Ask students what the Pilgrims gave thanks for. (A good harvest of corn; being alive and safe one year after arriving in Plymouth, America.)
- Ask students to write a list of five things they themselves give thanks for. Ideas might include: Family, health, safe housing, friends, jobs, holidays.
- Ask each student to read out their list of things they give thanks for, add reasons why these things are important for them and allow time for other students to comment.

Worksheet

Activity 1: Thanksgiving

Read the following text about *Thanksgiving* and circle the correct words for (1) - (10).

(1) **Americans** | **The British** celebrate *Thanksgiving* on the fourth
(2) **Thursday** | **Wednesday** in (3) **July** | **November**.
(4) **Work colleagues** | **Family** come together and share a (5) **meal** |
drink. They usually eat roast (6) **turkey** | **sausages**, potatoes, chestnut
stuffing*, vegetables and (7) **raspberry** | **cranberry** sauce, followed by
(8) **potato** | **pumpkin** pie for dessert. On the day after *Thanksgiving*,
called (9) **Black Friday** | **Sunday**, many people go (10) **swimming** |
shopping as they have a free day.

* *Kastanienfüllung*

Activity 2: Your Thanksgiving party

- What would you like to eat for *Thanksgiving*?
Write the food you would like to eat. Include a starter, a main course and a dessert.
- And now write the names of eight people you would like to invite to your meal.
You can invite your family, friends and *at least* two famous Americans (alive or dead).
- Tell your partner about your meal and guest list.