



MEMORANDUM

To: All Employees
From: The Educational Equity Department
Reg: Thanksgiving and American Indian Sensitivity

As the Educational Equity Department of the district, we ask you to be sensitive of your discussions, activities and teachings during the month of November regarding Thanksgiving and American Indians. Please read the following perspective on this holiday as well as the suggested activities that follow.

Long before Europeans arrived on the North American continent, people have been giving thanks for the gifts of the land and the harvests that have sustained humanity over time. American Indians, throughout history, have expressed gratitude for the earth and the gifts of life, not just around the time of the harvest, but each and every day. American Indian ceremonies and festivities of thanks existed long before European settlers arrived on their shores. On the same token, both European and American Indian cultures have had long histories of honoring the harvest such as the European Harvest Home festival and the Green Corn Dance of the Cherokees.

In 1620 when the Mayflower arrived on the shores of North America, European immigrants took up residence on the lands and home of the Wampanoag people. At the time of European arrival, the Wampanoag nation, a complex society, contained 69 villages and encompassed territory from present day Massachusetts to eastern Rhode Island. The Wampanoag people had and continue to have profound spiritual and agricultural ties to the land.

European people had been migrating to the Americas, long before the arrival of the Mayflower, looking for land and resources, and bringing with them many diseases that the American Indians had never been exposed to. This influx of European people, taking claim on the homeland of many different American Indian nations, marked the beginning of a long and continuing history of embitterment, mistrust, sadness, and loss. Our national holiday that we call "Thanksgiving" is often celebrated with little thought given to the American Indian perspective and often overlooks the rich and diverse traditions and practices that are embedded in the historical and contemporary culture of American Indians.

Please refer to the following page for instructional strategies.

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Positive Strategies for Instruction at the time of Thanksgiving
Shortened from [Teaching Young Children about Native Americans](#) by Debbie Reese

A number of positive strategies can be used in classrooms, regardless of whether American Indian children are members of the class.

1. AT THANKSGIVING, SHIFT THE FOCUS AWAY FROM REENACTING THE "FIRST THANKSGIVING." Instead, focus on items children can be thankful for in their own lives, and on their families' celebrations of Thanksgiving at home.
2. PROVIDE KNOWLEDGE ABOUT CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN INDIANS to balance historical information. Teaching about American Indians exclusively from a historical perspective may perpetuate the idea that they exist only in the past.
3. PREPARE UNITS ABOUT SPECIFIC TRIBES, rather than units about "American Indians." For example, develop a unit about the people of Nambe Pueblo, the Turtle Mountain Chippewa, the Potawatami. Ideally, choose a tribe with a historical or contemporary role in the local community. Such a unit will provide children with culturally specific knowledge (pertaining to a single group) rather than over-generalized stereotypes.
4. LOCATE AND USE BOOKS THAT SHOW CONTEMPORARY CHILDREN OF ALL COLORS ENGAGED IN THEIR USUAL, DAILY ACTIVITIES playing basketball, riding bicycles as well as traditional activities. Make the books easily accessible to children throughout the school year. Three excellent titles on the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico are: PUEBLO STORYTELLER, by Diane Hoyt-Goldsmith; PUEBLO BOY: GROWING UP IN TWO WORLDS, by Marcia Keegan; and CHILDREN OF CLAY, by Rina Swentzell.
5. BE SPECIFIC ABOUT WHICH TRIBES USE PARTICULAR ITEMS, when discussing cultural artifacts (such as clothing or housing) and traditional foods. The Plains tribes use feathered headdresses, for example, but not all other tribes use them.

More Resources

American Indian Education: Salt Lake City School District
<http://www.slc.k12.ut.us/depts/equity/advocacy/aied/>

We Shall Remain: A Native History of American and Utah
<http://www.kued.org/productions/weshallremain/>

"American Indian Perspectives on Thanksgiving"
Published by The National Museum of the American Indian
http://americanindian.si.edu/education/files/thanksgiving_poster.pdf

"Harvest Ceremony: Beyond the Thanksgiving Myth"
Published by The National Museum of the American Indian
http://americanindian.si.edu/education/files/NMAI_Harvest_Study_Guide.pdf

"Thanksgiving Address: Greetings to the Natural World",
Published by The National Museum of the American Indian
http://americanindian.si.edu/education/files/thanksgiving_address.pdf