



# Intermediate Level Thanksgiving ESL Lesson Plan

## Thanksgiving

Harvest festivals and thanksgiving celebrations have been held throughout the world for thousands of years. The ancient Greeks held a three day festival every autumn to honor Demeter, their goddess of grain. The Romans also held a fall festival honoring their goddess of corn, Ceres. This celebration included music, games, parades and a thanksgiving feast. The ancient Egyptians honored their god of vegetation, Min, with a harvest festival as well. Like the Romans, the Egyptians partied with music, dancing and sports.

The ancient Chinese celebrated a harvest festival called Chung Ch'ui. This holiday fell on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 8<sup>th</sup> month in the lunar calendar. Still today, Chinese all over the world remember this special festival by baking round, yellow “moon” cakes to symbolize the beautiful, full moon. The autumn festival of Sukkoth, celebrated by the ancient Hebrew people, is still celebrated today by Jewish families around the world. Sukkoth is named for the huts or *succots* that people lived in as they wandered through the desert. These small huts were built of branches and could be easily put together and taken apart. Today many Jewish families build symbolic huts and decorate them with fruit and vegetables and eat their evening meal under the stars, remembering their ancestors' harvest celebrations of long ago.

Thanksgiving ceremonies were held in North America by the Native people long before the arrival of European settlers. Like other cultures around the world, the Natives showed thanks for their harvests by singing, dancing and praying. The American thanksgiving holiday that we know today began in the early days of the American colonies almost four hundred years ago. In 1620, a group of about 100 people left England looking for religious freedom and a better life in America. This group of people, called the Pilgrims, had wanted to separate from the Church of England and start their own church in the New World. When they arrived, their first winter was very difficult and many of them died from starvation and disease.

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The following year, a group of Native Americans began to teach the settlers many things about survival in their new land. They taught them how to grow corn and other crops in the unfamiliar soil, how to collect sap from the maple trees to make syrup, how to gather wild rice and collect berries. They also taught them how to fish and hunt. In 1621 the Pilgrims had a very successful harvest and they were able to put away food for the long winter ahead. That year the colonists had a lot to be thankful for, so they planned a large feast and celebrated for three days. They invited the Natives to their celebration because they had taught them so much about how to live in America. In the following years, the colonists continued to celebrate their harvest with a feast of thanks. In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln declared Thanksgiving to be a national holiday. Although the original thanksgiving feast occurred sometime in late October, now Americans celebrate the fourth Thursday in November as their official day of thanksgiving.

Canadians share many thanksgiving traditions with their neighbors to the south. In fact, the first known North American celebration of thanksgiving by Europeans took place in Newfoundland, Canada. The English settlers, led by the explorer Martin Frobisher, held a traditional British harvest feast in the year 1578. For many years after, Canadians continued to hold thanksgiving celebrations whenever they had a good reason to rejoice. Sometimes they celebrated because of a military victory; other times it was recovery from illness. In 1870, the Canadian government decided to officially mark a day of thanksgiving. Because the growing season is shorter in Canada and the harvest comes earlier, Canadians celebrate Thanksgiving earlier than Americans. Since 1957, Canadian Thanksgiving has been held on the second Monday in October.

In both Canada and the United States, Thanksgiving is a time to spend with family and friends. It is a day to stop working and to give thanks for one's life, health, family, food, and freedom. Some people spend time praying in their churches while others spend a day of relaxing at home. Most families share a festive meal together with traditional dishes such as turkey and stuffing, mashed potatoes, squash or turnips, cranberry sauce and of course, the traditional pumpkin pie for dessert.

## Comprehension

### A. Match the people on the left with the celebration, symbol, or date on the right.

- |                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| _____ 1. ancient Greeks    | A. 4 <sup>th</sup> Thursday in November |
| _____ 2. Canadians         | B. moon festival                        |
| _____ 3. ancient Egyptians | C. Ceres                                |
| _____ 4. ancient Hebrews   | D. Min                                  |
| _____ 5. Romans            | E. 2 <sup>nd</sup> Monday in October    |
| _____ 6. Chinese           | F. Sukkoth                              |
| _____ 7. Americans         | G. Demeter                              |

### B. Practice asking and answering the following questions with your partner. Then write the answers in your notebooks.

1. Who did the ancient Greeks honor in their three day autumn festival?
2. Why do the Chinese eat little, yellow, round cakes on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 8<sup>th</sup> month of the lunar calendar?
3. Who celebrates the holiday of Sukkoth?
4. Who was Min?
5. How did Native Americans celebrate their harvest festivals?
6. Why did the Pilgrims leave England?
7. How did the new American settlers learn to survive in their new land?
8. Why is Canadian Thanksgiving earlier than American Thanksgiving?
9. How do Canadians and Americans spend Thanksgiving Day?
10. Describe a traditional Thanksgiving meal in Canada or United States.
11. Do you have a day of thanksgiving in your country? If so, describe it.
12. What is your favorite holiday in your country? What are the customs and traditional foods associated with this holiday?

## Vocabulary

### A. Match the words on the left with the correct meaning on the right.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>_____ 1. honor</p> <p>_____ 2. harvest</p> <p>_____ 3. lunar</p> <p>_____ 4. autumn</p> <p>_____ 5. hut</p> <p>_____ 6. wander</p> <p>_____ 7. decorate</p> <p>_____ 8. ancestors</p> <p>_____ 9. settler</p> <p>_____ 10. colony</p> <p>_____ 11. starvation</p> <p>_____ 12. disease</p> | <p>A. hunger, not enough food</p> <p>B. fall</p> <p>C. small house or shelter</p> <p>D. make more beautiful</p> <p>E. sickness, illness</p> <p>F. show respect for</p> <p>G. family from long ago</p> <p>H. go from place to place</p> <p>I. person who starts to live in a new place</p> <p>J. taking grain and vegetables from the land</p> <p>K. a new country or place settled by people from another country</p> <p>L. of the moon</p> |
|---|---|

### B. Underline the word(s) with the closest meaning to the word in *italics*.

- |                     |               |           |            |                       |
|---------------------|---------------|-----------|------------|-----------------------|
| 1. <i>gather</i>    | a. understand | b. live   | c. collect | d. fight              |
| 2. <i>sap</i>       | a. bird       | b. hunt   | c. egg     | d. liquid from a tree |
| 3. <i>crop</i>      | a. plant      | b. fish   | c. find    | d. animal             |
| 4. <i>survive</i>   | a. travel     | b. live   | c. die     | d. study              |
| 5. <i>ancient</i>   | a. new        | b. usual  | c. old     | d. happy              |
| 6. <i>soil</i>      | a. lake       | b. river  | c. earth   | d. new                |
| 7. <i>tradition</i> | a. party      | b. custom | c. costume | d. unusual            |

### C. Odd One Out – Underline the word or expression that does not belong.

- |               |             |         |            |
|---------------|-------------|---------|------------|
| 1. feast      | celebration | study   | meal       |
| 2. turkey     | goose       | beef    | chicken    |
| 3. occur      | find        | happen  | take place |
| 4. victory    | failure     | success | winning    |
| 5. unfamiliar | strange     | same    | different  |

**Symbols of Thanksgiving**

**Directions: You and your partner each have two short readings about some of the symbols of Thanksgiving. Share your information with your partner.**

***Cranberry Sauce***

*Cranberry sauce is traditionally eaten with turkey at the Thanksgiving meal. Cranberry sauce or cranberry jelly was on the first thanksgiving table hundreds of years ago and is still served today. A cranberry is a small, red, sour berry that grows in soft, wet ground called bogs. The Native Americans used cranberries as medicine to treat infections. They also used the red juice of the cranberries to dye their rugs and blankets. When the early European settlers came to America, the Natives taught them how to cook the berries with water and sweet sap from the trees to make a sauce. The settlers thought that the flower of the cranberries looked like a long-necked bird called a crane and so they began to call the berry “crane-berry”. Cranberries are still grown in North America today and they remain a traditional part of our Thanksgiving dinners.*

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***The Cornucopia***

*One of the most common symbols of Thanksgiving is the cornucopia, which is also called the horn of plenty. The cornucopia is a symbol of the productivity of nature. This symbol originated in ancient Greek times.*

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**Practice asking and answering the following questions with your partner.**

1. Where do cranberries grow?
2. Describe a cranberry.
3. What did the Native Americans use cranberries for?
4. How did the early European settlers learn to make cranberry sauce?
5. Where did the name *cranberry* come from?
6. Why did the early settlers not know how to grow pumpkins when they first arrived?
7. What kind of plants did the early European settlers first try to grow?
8. How did the settlers learn to grow squash?
9. Why did the settlers invite the Natives to their first thanksgiving feast?
10. How is the turkey we eat today different from the turkey the early settlers ate.
11. What is another name for cornucopia?
12. Where did the symbol of the cornucopia originate?
13. What did the cornucopia symbolize?
14. What was the original cornucopia made from?
15. How do many people decorate their Thanksgiving tables nowadays?

**Symbols of Thanksgiving**

**Directions:** You and your partner each have a short reading about one of the symbols of Thanksgiving. Share your information with your partner.

***Pumpkins and Turkey***

*Pumpkins and other kinds of squash did not grow in the Old World, so the early European settlers had never seen them before they came to America. When the settlers first arrived, they tried to grow the plants they were familiar with, but they did not succeed. The Native Americans introduced the new settlers to the big, new vegetables and showed them how to grow them. The Europeans were very grateful when they had their first successful harvest of pumpkins and squash and held a big feast to celebrate. These vegetables have been a Thanksgiving tradition ever since. Squash is usually served with the main course and pumpkin pie remains a favorite for dessert.*

*A turkey is a large North American bird. When the settlers held their first Thanksgiving dinner, they invited the Natives who had taught them how to survive in the long, cold winter. The Natives brought deer meat to roast for the meal, as well as fresh wild turkeys. Turkey has been the main course at Thanksgiving dinners since that first celebration. However, the turkeys we eat today are usually farm-raised and are no longer wild.*

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***The Cornucopia***

*The original cornucopia was a curved goat's horn filled with fruit and grain. Nowadays people often decorate their Thanksgiving tables with horn shaped baskets filled with fruit and vegetables.*

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## Vocabulary, Idioms And Expressions

1. **to be grateful** – to be thankful
2. **to appreciate** – to be thankful, to be grateful
3. **to be appreciative** – to be thankful
4. **to show your gratitude** – to show someone that you are grateful
5. **thank goodness** – an expression used to express relief
6. **thank heavens** – same as **thank goodness**
7. **thanks a million** - thank you very much, thanks a lot
8. **you can thank your lucky stars** – you were very lucky
9. **to count your blessings** – to be very thankful for what you have
10. **to feel or be stuffed** – to feel very full from eating a lot
11. **to go or quit something cold turkey** – to quit a habit all at once, not gradually
12. **to talk turkey** – to discuss a deal very seriously

**Choose one of the above words or expressions to complete the following sentences.**

1. If the owner of the business really wants to sell, he will \_\_\_\_\_.
2. I am very \_\_\_\_\_ to you for all your help.
3. Last night he threw a full package of cigarettes in the garbage. He decided to \_\_\_\_\_.
4. You can \_\_\_\_\_ that a doctor was close by when you had your heart attack. You almost died.
5. Thanksgiving is a day for all of us to \_\_\_\_\_.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ for everything you have done for me!
7. \_\_\_\_\_ you arrived safely! We were very worried about you.
8. I can't eat another thing! I feel \_\_\_\_\_.

### Find Someone Who.....

**Directions: Circulate around the classroom asking your classmates questions. Try to find someone.....**

1. who is planning to have a turkey dinner this Thanksgiving. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. who likes pumpkin pie. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. who has tried cranberry sauce before. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. who has quit something cold turkey. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. who can thank his/her lucky stars for something. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. who celebrated a harvest or thanksgiving festival in his/her country. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. who would rather eat turkey than beef. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. who felt very stuffed recently. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. who counts his/her blessings. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. who is planning to go away this Thanksgiving holiday. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**TEACHER'S NOTES / ANSWER KEY**

These activities are designed for intermediate level adult ESL learners, but they may also be suitable for junior and senior high school ESL students.

**Warm Up – Introduction to Thanksgiving**

You can begin by showing pictures of pumpkins, turkeys, cranberries, Pilgrims, cornucopias, etc. Ask the students to share any information they may already have about Thanksgiving or any similar celebrations they have in their own countries. Talk about harvest times in their countries and typical fall vegetables.

**Activity One – Reading on Thanksgiving and Comprehension Questions**

Begin by introducing any vocabulary you feel the students may have difficulty with. You may choose to have the students read the passage silently, or have the students take turns reading aloud in order to monitor pronunciation. After reading the passage, break the students into pairs and have them practice asking and answering the comprehension questions. At the end of the oral practice, have the students write the answers. Review again orally with the whole class.

**A. Match the people**

1. G            2. E            3. D            4.F            5. C            6. B            7. A

**B. Comprehension questions**

1. They honored Demeter, their goddess of grain.
2. They eat little round, yellow cakes to symbolize the moon.
3. Sukkoth is celebrated by Jewish families around the world.
4. Min was the ancient Egyptian god of vegetation.
5. Native Americans celebrated their harvest festival by singing, dancing and praying.
6. The Pilgrims left England looking for religious freedom and a better life in America.
7. The settlers learned to survive in the new land thanks to teachings from the Native Americans.
8. Canadians celebrate Thanksgiving earlier because the growing season is shorter and crops are harvested sooner in Canada.
9. They spend the day gathering with family and friends, going to church, relaxing at home, or sharing a festive meal.
10. A traditional meal may include turkey and stuffing, mashed potatoes, squash or turnips, cranberry sauce and pumpkin pie for dessert.
11. Individual answer.
12. Individual answer.

**Activity Two – Vocabulary**

Follow up by having the students give their own sentences with the new words.

**A. Matching**

1. f    2. j    3. l    4. b    5. c    6. h    7. d    8. g    9. i    10. k    11. a    12. e

**B. Underline**

1. c    2. d    3. a    4. b    5. c    6. c    7. b

**C. Odd one out**

1. study      2. beef      3. find      4. failure      5. same

**Activity Three – Pair Work/Information Sharing – The Symbols of Thanksgiving**

Break the class into pairs. Each student has a different reading about the symbols of Thanksgiving. Have the students read their articles silently and then share the information with their partner by completing the comprehension questions together. Review together with the whole class.

1. Cranberries grow in soft, wet ground called bogs.
2. A cranberry is a small, red sour berry.
3. They used cranberries as medicine to treat infections and to dye rugs and blankets.
4. They were taught by the Native Americans.
5. The settlers thought that the flower of the cranberries looked like a long-necked bird called a crane and so they began to call the berry “crane-berry”.
6. They did not know how to grow them because pumpkins did not grow in the Old World.
7. They tried to grow plants that they were familiar with.
8. The settlers were shown by the Native Americans.
9. To show them their gratitude.
10. Turkeys today are usually farm raised and are no longer wild.
11. The horn of plenty.
12. It originated in ancient Greek times.
13. The cornucopia is a symbol of the productivity of nature.
14. A goat’s horn.
15. People often decorate their tables with horn shaped baskets filled with fruits and vegetables.

**Activity Four – Vocabulary, Idioms and Expressions**

The idioms given include words used in the context of Thanksgiving (*thanks, turkey, stuffed*, etc). Explain the meanings, use them in context, have the students complete the sentences, and then write their own sentences using the idioms.

1. talk turkey      2. grateful      3. quit cold turkey      4. thank your lucky stars      5. count our blessings  
6. Thanks a million      7. Thank heavens      8. stuffed

**Activity Six – Group Interaction / Practice Making Questions – “Find Someone Who..”**

First have the students write the questions they will be asking their classmates. Then have the students circulate around the class asking the questions on the sheet. When the student finds a classmate who can answer the question, he/she will then write the student’s name on the line and follow-up with one more question of his/her own. Ex. “*Have you ever eaten cranberry sauce*”? If the student answers “yes”, the second question might be: “*Did you like it?*” or “*Where did you eat it?*”, etc. Try to encourage the students to engage in real conversation during this activity. Follow up by sharing the information with the whole class.