

Thanksgiving: Fact or Fiction

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"The reason that we have so many myths associated with Thanksgiving is that it is an invented tradition. It doesn't originate in any one event. It is based on the New England puritan Thanksgiving, which is a religious Thanksgiving, and the traditional harvest celebrations of England and New England and maybe other ideas like commemorating the pilgrims. All of these have been gathered together and transformed into something different from the original parts."-James W. Baker, Senior Historian at Plimoth Plantation

1. FACT OR FICTION: THANKSGIVING IS HELD ON THE FINAL THURSDAY OF NOVEMBER EACH YEAR.

Fiction. In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln designated the last Thursday in November as a national day of thanksgiving. However, in 1939, after a request from the National Retail Dry Goods Association, President Franklin Roosevelt decreed that the holiday should always be celebrated on the fourth Thursday of the month (and never the occasional fifth, as occurred in 1939) in order to extend the holiday shopping season by a week. The decision sparked great controversy, and was still unresolved two years later, when the House of Representatives passed a resolution making the last Thursday in November a legal national holiday. The Senate amended the resolution, setting the date as the fourth Thursday, and the House eventually agreed.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 2018, President Trump pardoned two turkeys named Peas and Carrots.

2. FACT OR FICTION: ONE OF AMERICA'S FOUNDING FATHERS THOUGHT THE TURKEY SHOULD BE THE NATIONAL BIRD OF THE UNITED STATES.

Fact. In a letter to his daughter sent in 1784, Benjamin Franklin suggested that the wild turkey would be a more appropriate national symbol for the newly independent United States than the bald eagle (which had earlier been chosen by the Continental Congress). He argued that the turkey was "a much more respectable Bird," "a true original Native of America," and "though a little vain and silly, a Bird of Courage."

3. FACT OR FICTION: IN 1863, ABRAHAM LINCOLN BECAME THE FIRST AMERICAN PRESIDENT TO PROCLAIM A NATIONAL DAY OF THANKSGIVING.

Fiction. George Washington, John Adams and James Madison all issued proclamations urging Americans to observe days of thanksgiving, both for general good fortune and for particularly momentous events (the adoption of the U.S. Constitution, in Washington's case; the end of the War of 1812, in Madison's).

4. FACT OR FICTION: MACY'S WAS THE FIRST AMERICAN DEPARTMENT STORE TO SPONSOR A PARADE IN CELEBRATION OF THANKSGIVING.

Fiction. The Philadelphia department store Gimbel's had sponsored a parade in 1920, but the Macy's

parade, launched four years later, soon became a Thanksgiving tradition and the standard kickoff to the holiday shopping season. The parade became ever more well-known after it featured prominently in the hit film *Miracle on 34th Street* (1947), which shows actual footage of the 1946 parade. In addition to its famous giant balloons and floats, the Macy's parade features live music and other performances, including by the Radio City Music Hall Rockettes and cast members of well-known Broadway shows.

5. FACT OR FICTION: TURKEYS ARE SLOW-MOVING BIRDS THAT LACK THE ABILITY TO FLY.

Fiction (kind of). Domesticated turkeys (the type eaten on Thanksgiving) cannot fly, and their pace is limited to a slow walk. Female domestic turkeys, which are typically smaller and lighter than males, can move somewhat faster. Wild turkeys, on the other hand, are much smaller and more agile. They can reach speeds of up to 20-25 miles per hour on the ground and fly for short distances at speeds approaching 55 miles per hour. They also have better eyesight and hearing than their domestic counterparts.

6. FACT OR FICTION: NATIVE AMERICANS USED CRANBERRIES, NOW A STAPLE OF MANY THANKSGIVING DINNERS, FOR COOKING AS WELL AS MEDICINAL PURPOSES.

Fact. According to the Cape Cod Cranberry Growers' Association, one of the country's oldest farmers' organizations, Native Americans used cranberries in a variety of foods, including "pemmican" (a nourishing, high-protein combination of crushed berries, dried deer meat and melted fat). They also used it as a medicine to treat arrow punctures and other wounds and as a dye for fabric. The Pilgrims adopted these uses for the fruit and gave it a name-"cranberry"-because its drooping pink blossoms in the spring reminded them of a crane.

7. FACT OR FICTION: THE MOVEMENT OF THE TURKEY INSPIRED A BALLROOM DANCE.

Fact. The turkey trot, modeled on that bird's characteristic short, jerky steps, was one of a number of popular dance styles that emerged during the late 19th and early 20th century in the United States. The two-step, a simple dance that required little to no instruction, was quickly followed by such dances as the one-step, the turkey trot, the fox trot and the bunny hug, which could all be performed to the ragtime and jazz music popular at the time. The popularity of such dances spread like wildfire, helped along by the teachings and performances of exhibition dancers like the famous husband-and-wife team Vernon and Irene Castle.

8. FACT OR FICTION: ON THANKSGIVING DAY IN 2007, TWO TURKEYS EARNED A TRIP TO DISNEY WORLD.

Fact. On November 20, 2007, President George W. Bush granted a "pardon" to two turkeys, named May and Flower, at the 60th annual National Thanksgiving Turkey presentation, held in the Rose Garden at the White House. The two turkeys were flown to Orlando, Florida, where they served as honorary grand marshals for the Disney World Thanksgiving Parade. The current tradition of presidential turkey pardons began in 1947, under Harry Truman, but the practice is said to have informally begun with Abraham Lincoln, who granted a pardon to his son Tad's pet turkey.

9. FACT OR FICTION: TURKEY CONTAINS AN AMINO ACID THAT MAKES YOU SLEEPY.

Fact. Turkey does contain the essential amino acid tryptophan, which is a natural sedative, but so do

a lot of other foods, including chicken, beef, pork, beans and cheese. Though many people believe turkey's tryptophan content is what makes many people feel sleepy after a big Thanksgiving meal, it is more likely the combination of fats and carbohydrates most people eat with the turkey, as well as the large amount of food (not to mention alcohol, in some cases) consumed, that makes most people feel like following their meal up with a nap.

10. FACT OR FICTION: THE TRADITION OF PLAYING OR WATCHING FOOTBALL ON THANKSGIVING STARTED WITH THE FIRST NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE GAME ON THE HOLIDAY IN 1934.

Fiction. The American tradition of college football on Thanksgiving is pretty much as old as the sport itself. The newly formed American Intercollegiate Football Association held its first championship game on Thanksgiving Day in 1876. At the time, the sport resembled something between rugby and what we think of as football today. By the 1890s, more than 5,000 club, college and high school football games were taking place on Thanksgiving, and championship match-ups between schools like Princeton and Yale could draw up to 40,000 fans. The NFL took up the tradition in 1934, when the Detroit Lions (recently arrived in the city and renamed) played the Chicago Bears at the University of Detroit stadium in front of 26,000 fans. Since then, the Lions game on Thanksgiving has become an annual event, taking place every year except during the World War II years (1939-1944).

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. When is Thanksgiving held today?

- A. the first Thursday of November
- B. the last Thursday of November
- C. the fourth Thursday of November
- D. after any particularly important event

2. This article is structured in a list format. What does the article list?

- A. myths that people associate with Thanksgiving and turkeys
- B. reasons why Thanksgiving was first created
- C. ways in which the turkey is important to Thanksgiving
- D. arguments for moving Thanksgiving to a different date

3. Some leaders of the United States have had a major impact on the way Americans celebrate Thanksgiving today.

What evidence from the text best supports this conclusion?

- A. Two turkeys pardoned by George W. Bush were flown to Disney World in Orlando, Florida.
- B. Franklin Roosevelt decreed that the Thanksgiving holiday should be celebrated on the fourth Thursday in November every year.
- C. Benjamin Franklin felt that the turkey would be a better national symbol for the United States than the bald eagle.
- D. George Washington issued a proclamation urging Americans of the time to observe a day of thanksgiving for the adoption of the U.S. Constitution.

4. Based on the information in the text, what effect might Abraham Lincoln's setting an annual day of Thanksgiving have had?

- A. The turkey became the national bird of the United States.
- B. Holiday shopping was hurt, and continues to suffer.
- C. The decision caused controversy among many Americans.
- D. New traditions grew around the annual Thanksgiving celebration.

5. What is this article mostly about?

- A. the role of the turkey in the U.S. and during Thanksgiving
- B. traditions, little-known facts, and myths about Thanksgiving
- C. the way Thanksgiving has affected shopping patterns
- D. U.S. Presidents' and Founding Fathers' contributions to Thanksgiving

6. Why might the author include the phrase "fact or fiction" in every heading throughout the article?

- A. to suggest that some of the statements in the headings are fact, but some are fiction
- B. to convince the reader that all of the statements in the headings are factual
- C. to force the reader to decide whether the information in the article is factual or fictional
- D. to show that the author is not sure if the information in the article is true or not

7. Choose the answer that best completes this sentence.

In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln designated the last Thursday in November as a national day of Thanksgiving, _____ in 1939, President Franklin Roosevelt decreed that the holiday should always be celebrated on the fourth Thursday of the month.

- A. for example
- B. therefore
- C. but
- D. so

8. How has the holiday shopping season affected Thanksgiving traditions?

9. How have U.S. Presidents contributed to Thanksgiving traditions over time? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

10. James W. Baker, the Senior Historian at Plimoth Plantation, says that Thanksgiving is an invented tradition. What evidence from the text supports the idea that today's Thanksgiving is an invented tradition?