

## **The Plymouth Thanksgiving Story**

*Instructions – cut apart each paragraph and tape to 3x5 card for each boy to read/present at the November Pack meeting.*

*Earns: Arrowpoint #10A*

The Pilgrims crossed the Atlantic Ocean in 1620 and landed on a territory of the Wampanoag (Wam pa NO ag) Indians. The Indians lived in villages along the coast of what is now Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Their round-roofed houses, made of poles covered with flat sheets of elm or birch bark, were called wigwams.

The Wampanoags moved with each season to find food. In the spring they would fish in the rivers for salmon and herring. In the planting season they moved to the forest to hunt deer and other animals. During the winter they moved inland and lived on the food they had gathered and hunted earlier in the year.

The men wore the breech clout, which was deerskin looped over a belt in the back and front. The women wore deerskin wrap-around skirts. Men and women wore moccasins on their feet and braided their hair. Men wore a single feather in the back of their hair.

The Iroquois Indians also lived in the region near the Wampanoags. Both men and women of the Iroquois enforced the laws of the village and helped solve problems. The details of their democratic system were so impressive that 150 years later Benjamin Franklin invited the Iroquois to New York to explain their governing system. It became the “Albany Plan of Union” and served as a model for the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution of the United States.

The Wampanoags also treated each other with respect. Visitors to their homes were given a share of whatever food the family had to offer. This same courtesy was extended to the Pilgrims when they met. We can only guess what the Wampanoags must have thought when they first saw the Pilgrim’s ships arriving on their shores.

The kindness of the Wampanoags was the main reason the Pilgrims survived at all because the wheat grains the Pilgrims had brought to plant would not grow in the rocky soil of the new land. The Indian named Squanto taught the Pilgrims new ways to grow food in the new world. He brought them deer and beaver skins, taught them how to grow corn and other vegetables and how to build Indian-style houses. He pointed out poisonous plants and plants that could be used for medicine. He showed the Pilgrims how to dig for clams, make maple syrup, and use fish for fertilizer.

By the following year the Pilgrims had learned so much from Squanto they wanted to thank him for the help they had received. They decided to have a thanksgiving feast to celebrate their good fortune. Captain Miles Standish, the leader of the Pilgrims, invited Squanto, Samoset, Massasoit (the leader of the Wampanoags), and their families to join them in a celebration.

The Pilgrims didn't realize that Indian's families were so large so they didn't have enough food for everyone. Massasoit gave orders for the Indian men to bring more food for the celebration. They brought: deer, wild turkeys, fish, beans, squash, corn soup, corn bread, and berries.

Captain Standish sat at one end of the long table and the Clan Chief Massosoit sat at the other end. It was the first time the Wampanoag Indians had ever sat at a table to eat instead of on mats or furs on the ground. The Indian women ate with the men while the Pilgrim women stood behind the table while the men ate, since that was their custom. The feast went on for three days and a peace and friendship agreement was made between Massosoit and Miles Standish.

Today the town of Plymouth Rock has a Thanksgiving ceremony each year in remembrance of the first Thanksgiving. There are still Wampanoag people living in Massachusetts. In 1970, a Wampanoag Indian was asked to speak at the ceremony marking the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Pilgrims arrival. Part of his speech that day was, “Although our way of life is almost gone, we, the Wampanoags, still walk the lands of Massachusetts. . . . today we work toward a better America, a more Indian American where people and nature once again are important.”