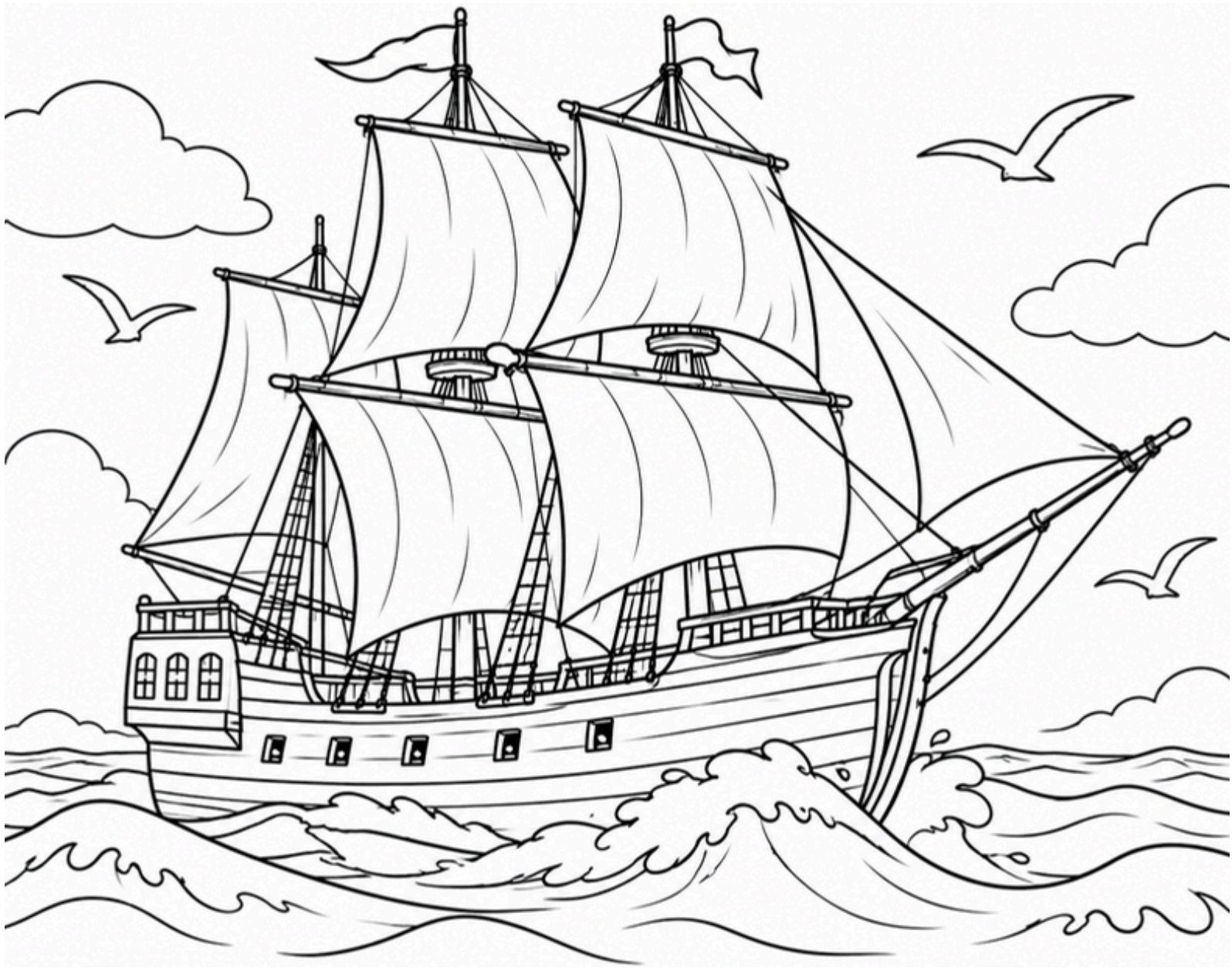


The Story of Thanksgiving



More than 400 years ago, a group of English people decided to make a new home across the ocean. Some of them had left England because they wanted freedom to worship God the way they believed. Others joined the journey for different reasons. Together, they sailed toward America.





In September 1620, 102 passengers set sail from England aboard a ship called the Mayflower. The trip across the Atlantic Ocean was long and difficult. For more than two months, the passengers lived in crowded conditions as the little ship crossed the rough sea.

The *Mayflower* reached the coast of what is now Massachusetts late in 1620. The English settlers built their new colony at Plymouth.

Their first winter was very difficult. There was not enough good food or shelter, and many people became sick. About half of the *Mayflower* passengers died during that first winter.





The Wampanoag people lived in the region long before the English settlers arrived.

They grew crops such as corn, beans and squash, and they hunted and fished for food.

In 1621, the Wampanoag and the settlers at Plymouth began communicating with one another.

In the spring, the English settlers met a Native American named Squanto. Years earlier, he had been kidnapped by an English sea captain and taken away from his homeland. After years away, he finally returned home. Because he had learned English, Squanto was able to communicate with the Plymouth settlers. He became an important guide and interpreter for the Pilgrims.





The Native Americans and the Plymouth colonists made an agreement in 1621. They promised to help protect one another.

Squanto and Massasoit (one of the chiefs) and other Native Americans helped the English understand their new surroundings as the settlers prepared for another winter.

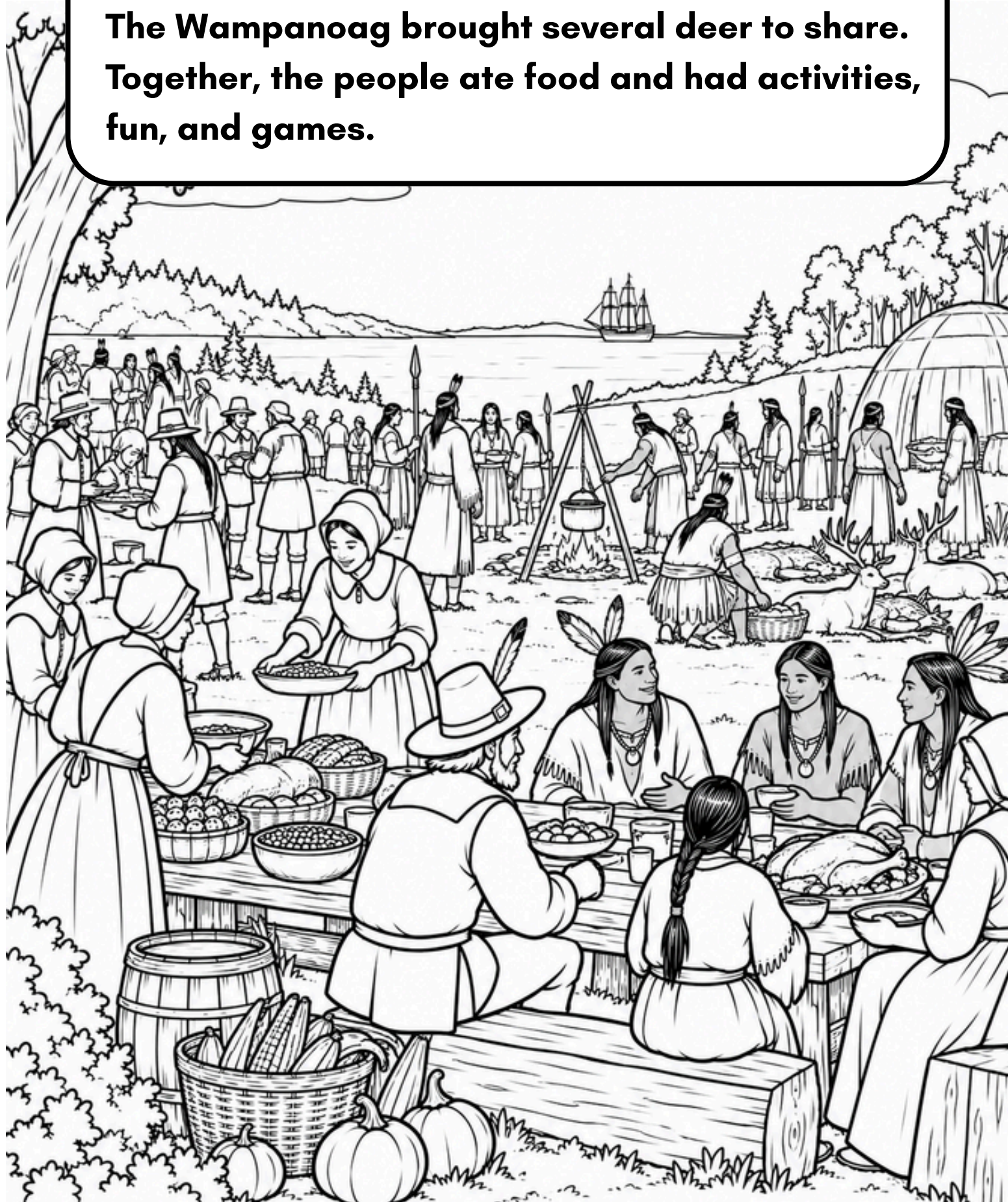
By the fall of 1621, things were looking much better for the Plymouth settlers.

They had gathered their crops, hunted wild birds, and had enough food to eat.

Governor William Bradford decided it was time to celebrate their successful harvest.



**The English celebrated for three days.
About 90 Wampanoag men joined the gathering.
The Wampanoag brought several deer to share.
Together, the people ate food and had activities,
fun, and games.**



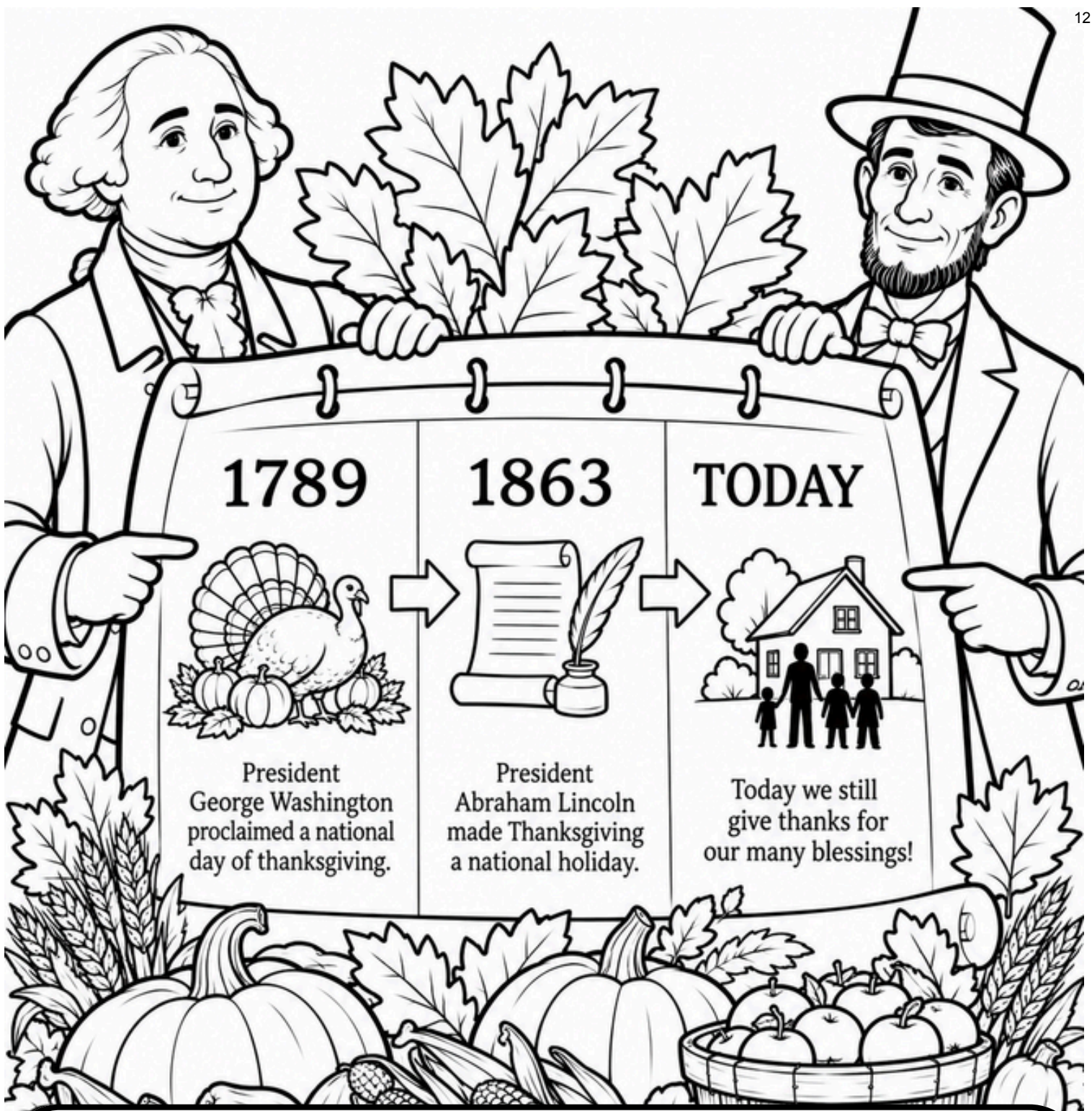


Their feast didn't look much like our Thanksgiving dinner! We know they ate venison and wildfowl. Fish, shellfish and corn were also plentiful at Plymouth, although we don't know everything that was served.

They didn't have the pumpkin pie, mashed potatoes and cranberry sauce that we often eat on Thanksgiving today.

Today, we call the 1621 harvest celebration the “First Thanksgiving.” The Plymouth celebration of thanking God for their bountiful harvest became an important part of the Thanksgiving story Americans tell today.





In 1789, President George Washington proclaimed a national day of thanksgiving. Then, in 1863, President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed a national Thanksgiving observance during the Civil War. Thanksgiving eventually became the yearly American holiday we know today.

Today, Americans celebrate Thanksgiving on the fourth Thursday of November. Families have many different Thanksgiving traditions. We may gather with family and friends, enjoy a special meal, help others, and remember the things for which we are thankful. What are you thankful for?

