



## The Thanksgiving Day Proclamation

New York, October 3, 1789

On October 3, 1789, the nation's first President under the Constitution of the United States issued a proclamation declaring a national day of thanksgiving. George Washington was first approached by members of the House of Representatives to offer a national day of thanksgiving after the end of the Revolutionary War and the development of a new Constitution establishing the rule of law, democratic government, and civil liberties.

Not all members of Congress agreed with the issuing of a national day of thanksgiving as they were concerned that Americans should not be told by their government to honor a day of thanksgiving.

This proclamation was the first of several written by early American Presidents. The Thanksgiving Day which we now observe as a nation is usually celebrated on the last Thursday in November and was established under President Lincoln during the Civil War.



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# Document excerpt:

"...Now therefore I do recommend and assign Thursday the 26<sup>th</sup> day of November next to be devoted by the People of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be. That we may then all unite in rendering unto him our sincere and humble thanks, for his kind care and protection of the People of this country previous to their becoming a Nation, for the signal and manifold mercies, and the favorable interpositions of his providence, which we experienced in the course and conclusion of the late war, for the great degree of tranquility, union, and plenty, which we have since enjoyed, for the peaceable and rational manner in which we have been enabled to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national One now lately instituted, for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed..."

## Questions:

1. Circle what you think are the three most important words in the excerpt. Explain why you chose those three words.
2. Read the Preamble to the Constitution of the United States of America below:

**We the People** of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

3. Underline the five words which you see in both the preamble to the Constitution and the excerpt from the Thanksgiving Proclamation.
4. List and describe two major events which had occurred in the decade prior to 1789.
5. How do you think the two events described in question number four influenced the writing of the Thanksgiving Proclamation?
6. What kinds of activities do we engage in today to show our appreciation for our Constitution and our democracy?

## Connections to California Common Core Literacy in History/Social Science Standards:

- Analyze seminal documents of historical and literary significance including how they address related themes and concepts.
- Analyze seventeenth-eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century foundational U.S. documents of historical and literary significance for their themes, purposes, and rhetorical features.
- Draw evidence from literary or information texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.



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