



Anti-Bias Education: Thanksgiving



Many early childhood educators have questions about how to approach the holidays. *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves* offers useful information and tools for teachers as they consider the specific families in their program. The following text is a partial excerpt from the chapter titled “Learning About Holidays & Fairness.”

Thanksgiving

Although Thanksgiving is a holiday widely celebrated by people in the United States, including new immigrants, it is not embraced by all. While many families use it to express thankfulness for family and for their current lives, Thanksgiving does raise challenging issues. Its story and traditions largely reflect the perspective of the European colonists, not the indigenous people who had been living on the continent for many thousands of years already. And while the holiday honors the social struggle of a group who immigrated in search of a better life and religious freedom, it does not recognize what the cost was to the Native Americans they displaced.

Unless teachers are well informed and thoughtful, Thanksgiving can become (even if unintentionally) a “unit” that teaches young children damaging misinformation and stereotypes.

Countering disrespectful and stereotypical messages about Native Americans

Some teachers choose to use the Thanksgiving holiday period to help children appreciate American Indian people as they are now:

Native peoples are everywhere in the Americas. We number in the tens of millions; we speak hundreds of languages. We live in the hemisphere’s remotest places and its biggest cities. We are still here. . . . We work hard to remain Native in circumstances that sometimes challenge or threaten our survival. We are still here. (Smithsonian 2007)

Most people in the United States have grown up surrounded by so much misinformation about and stereotypical images of Native Americans that it is essential to clarify our own thinking and to find out children’s ideas about them before planning curriculum about these present members of our communities. Plan and carry out many activities before, during, and after the Thanksgiving period. A one-time activity is not enough to counter children’s mistaken images or ideas.

Planning activities that recognize the newest immigrants to our nation

Many early childhood programs serve increasing numbers of recent immigrant children and families. Since Thanksgiving honors the Pilgrims (European immigrants who settled in what is now New England), the holiday is a good time to counter misinformation and negative attitudes children may have about today's "pilgrims."