

# Thanksgiving in Art

By Sharon Jeffus Copyright 2014

Thanksgiving is a very special holiday that began in America in 1621 in Plymouth and was prompted by a good harvest. In later years, religious Thanksgiving services were declared by civil leaders such as Governor Bradford, who planned a Thanksgiving celebration and fast in 1623, and it became an annual harvest festival in New England in the late 1660s.

Americans were thankful to God for their many blessings.

How did the turkey get to be part of the feast? From letters and records kept by early American settlers, we know that when the colonists sat down to dine with the Wampanoag Indians that beef and fowl were on the menu. A letter written by pilgrim Edward Winslow mentions a turkey hunting trip before the meal and talks about the celebration and giving thanks to God: <https://autumnalblog.wordpress.com/2014/11/04/thanksgiving-excerpt-from-edward-winslows-letter/>

The wild turkey is a native bird of North America and there are several ideas how it got to have a day all its own. It is general knowledge that Benjamin Franklin claimed the turkey was a more suitable national bird for the United States than the bald eagle. Not everyone agreed with Franklin, however, and the bald eagle became the national emblem for the United States in 1782. During the Revolutionary War period, political influences affected the issuance of Thanksgiving proclamations. As President of the United States, George Washington proclaimed the first nation-wide Thanksgiving celebration in America marking November 26, 1789, "as a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God". In our country today, we use Thanksgiving as a time of getting together. Some people use it as an opportunity to provide food for those less fortunate. For a wonderful story of Thanksgiving by the great writer Louisa May Alcott called "An Old Fashioned Thanksgiving" go to: <http://classiclit.about.com/library/bl-etexts/lmalcott/bl-lmalc-old-fashion.htm>.

In art, there are many master art works about Thanksgiving and the turkey. One of my favorites is by Norman Rockwell who created “The Four Freedoms.” Go to this website to see this wonderful picture of a family celebrating together:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four\\_Freedoms#mediaviewer/File:Freedom from want 1943-Norman Rockwell.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_Freedoms#mediaviewer/File:Freedom_from_want_1943-Norman_Rockwell.jpg).



It is very similar to the photograph above called “Thanksgiving Grace” by Marjorie Collins taken in 1942. It captures a feeling of warmth and family representative of the 1940s, as does Norman Rockwell’s painting. Look at both pictures. What do you see that is similar? What do you see that is different in both works?



”Thanksgiving” by Jennie Augusta Brownscombe pictures one of the first Thanksgivings. What do you notice first when you look at the picture? That is the center of interest? What do you see in the background of the picture? What do you see in the foreground of the picture? Do you notice how the artist uses atmospheric perspective to show depth? Things around the horizon line in the distance are much lighter in color.



"The Embarkation of the Pilgrims" above was painted in (1857) by the American painter Robert Walter Weir. What is the center of interest in this picture? What do you look at first? Do you see where the light is coming from? Can you see anything in the background of the picture? Where does the light come from?



In the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Aelbert Cuyp did the picture above called "Domestic Fowl." Notice his placement of the turkeys. He creates a wonderful composition using four turkeys. The red on the birds contrasts with the blue of the sky. He creates a wonderful feather texture using different values of brown.



The great master artist Audubon did both of the turkey pictures above. He puts the birds in their natural habitat. You can read about him here:

<http://www.audubon.org/john-james-audubon>. He is known for using mixed media; a water paint and pastel combination.

Several other master artists did paintings with turkeys as the subject. In the picture of turkeys below by Monet, you can see the Impressionist style. Impressionism is characterized by a lack of detail. Do you like the realistic approach of Audubon or the Impressionist style of Monet? Before the camera, Audubon gave us an exact replica of the turkey. After the development of the camera and photographs of the turkey could be taken, Monet gave us an artistic expression of the turkey. Which do you prefer?



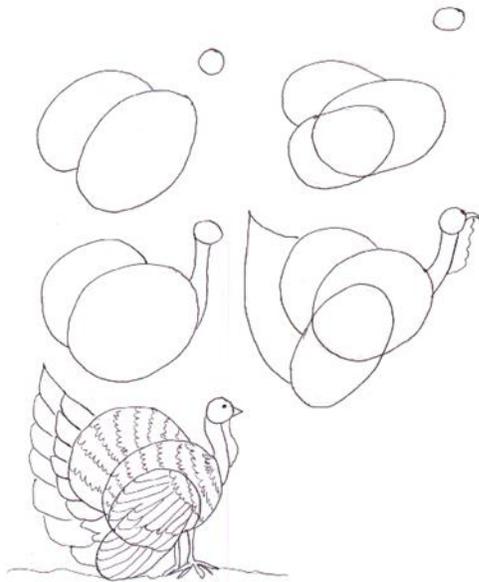
Paul Gauguin was a Post Impressionist who also did a picture about turkeys. What do you notice about his style from the picture below? Notice the colors of the sky? Do you see his brushstrokes? Look up Post Impressionism and define the style. Get ready to do your art project. You will need watercolor paint, pastels, watercolor paper, and pencil. Draw your picture lightly in pencil first and create a very light background of watercolor. Let dry. Add your pastels over this. You can even create your turkey in colored pencil. This will be a mixed media composition.



Use basic shapes to draw your turkey and then add shading, shadow and texture to make him look real. Look at the pictures above of turkeys in their natural habitat and choose a background for your turkey. Always do your background first and then your turkey. Make the pupil of the eye very black with a little dot of white.



<http://www.wikihow.com/Draw-a-Turkey>



Below is a very old Thanksgiving greeting card. You can create a picture of a turkey and write a poem to go with it. Read the poem below. Can you think of a good picture to go with it that would cause people to feel thankful? Can you bring the



poem to life visually?

A nice idea is to have everyone in the family trace their hands. On each finger let them write something they are thankful for. You can do this on cardstock paper and then cut out each hand and create a wreath.

## Thanksgiving

by Ella Wheeler Wilcox (1896)

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We walk on starry fields of white  
And do not see the daisies;  
For blessings common in our sight  
We rarely offer praises.  
We sigh for some supreme delight  
To crown our lives with splendor,  
And quite ignore our daily store  
Of pleasures sweet and tender.

Our cares are bold and push their way  
Upon our thought and feeling.  
They hang about us all the day,  
Our time from pleasure stealing.  
So unobtrusive many a joy  
We pass by and forget it,  
But worry strives to own our lives  
And conquers if we let it.

There's not a day in all the year  
But holds some hidden pleasure,  
And looking back, joys oft appear  
To brim the past's wide measure.  
But blessings are like friends, I hold,  
Who love and labor near us.  
We ought to raise our notes of praise  
While living hearts can hear us.

Full many a blessing wears the guise  
Of worry or of trouble.  
Farseeing is the soul and wise  
Who knows the mask is double.  
But he who has the faith and strength  
To thank his God for sorrow  
Has found a joy without alloy  
To gladden every morrow.

We ought to make the moments notes  
Of happy, glad Thanksgiving;  
The hours and days a silent phrase  
Of music we are living.  
And so the theme should swell and grow  
As weeks and months pass o'er us,  
And rise sublime at this good time,  
A grand Thanksgiving chorus.





