

*Once upon a time*, there were two places that people settled from a great distance. But they had very different histories. You could call them the “Tale of Thanksgiving” and the “Tale of the Un-Thanksgiving.”

The first story is about religious dissenters who fled their homeland. We all know the story: they nearly starved until they learned from the local indigenous people the skills they needed to survive. In gratitude, settlers held a feast in honor of their indigenous benefactors. This is the story of Thanksgiving.

The other story took place 2500 miles to the northeast and a couple of centuries earlier. These settlers were from a warrior society that dominated much of Europe. The settlers called their new home the Green Land, but as it turned out that was probably due to an unusually warm turn to the climate. When the climate changed, the settlers struggled to survive but ultimately disappeared. Meanwhile, indigenous people survived, living on seals and other food sources that weren’t familiar to the settlers. Since the settlers failed to learn from the indigenous people, there was obviously no feast to thank them for their help. And in fact, pretty soon there really wasn’t much food at all, or any settlers left. This was the [story](#) of the Un-Thanksgiving.

Here’s the moral: Indigenous people know important things about their lands, its plants, and animals. Failure to learn from them can be costly. They also have knowledge about genetic resources that can benefit others. It is wise to learn from their knowledge and share some of the benefits with them in return.

Of course, this is just a fable. But it’s something to think about as you eat your turkey, cranberries, cornbread, and pumpkin pie — all of them New World foods, by the way.