



**Classroom Guide for**  
**GIVING THANKS**  
**A Native American Good**  
**Morning Message**  
 by **Chief Jake Swamp**  
 illustrated by **Erwin Printup, Jr.**

### Reading Level

Interest Level: Grades K-6

Reading Level: Grades 3-4

(Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula)

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 3.3/.5

Lexile Measure®: 660 AD

### Themes

Native Americans, Environment, Family Traditions

### Synopsis

Mohawk parents have traditionally taught their children to start each day by giving thanks to Mother Earth. "To be a human being is an honor, and we offer thanksgiving for all the gifts of life," begins the Thanksgiving Address. This Native American good morning message is based on the belief that the natural world is a precious and rare gift. The whole universe—from the moon and the stars to the tiniest blade of grass—is addressed as one great family. It is a celebration of the beauty of Mother Earth, which Chief Jake Swamp of the Mohawk Nation, who is also a founder of the Tree of Peace Society, has adapted especially for readers of all ages.

### Background

The words in this book are based on the Thanksgiving Address, an ancient message of peace and appreciation of Mother Earth and all her inhabitants, that are still spoken at ceremonial and governmental gatherings held by the Six Nations. These words of thanks come to us from the Native people known as the Haudenosaunee, also known as the Iroquois or Six Nations—Mohawk, Oneida, Cayuga, Onondaga, Seneca, Tuscarora. The people of the Six Nations are from upstate New York and Canada. According to the Canadian and U.S. census there are 74,518 Iroquois in North America.

The three Mohawk clans—Wolf, Turtle, Bear—in turn contain three sub-clans; they hail nine Chiefs in all (Chief Swamp is a Chief of the Wolf Clan) and nine clan mothers. In all the Six Nations, there are 50 Chiefs, each of whom is selected by clan mothers.

who observe children for leadership skills. The illustrations contain much symbolism. Two examples are: water, which symbolizes continuance because life forms depend on it; and the four winds, which are represented by different animals, i.e., the east by the moose, the west by the cougar, the south by the (gentle) deer, the north by the (strong) bear, and are considered to play a role in how crops grow.

### **BEFORE READING**

#### **Prereading Focus Questions**

Before students read the story, you might want to discuss one of the following questions as a motivation for reading.

1. What do you know about Iroquois culture?
2. As you wake up in the morning, what are some of the first thoughts you have?
3. What are some things that you are thankful for? Where do these things come from and how do you receive them?
4. What do you appreciate about the earth and the environment?

### **AFTER READING ACTIVITIES**

After reading, discuss the story. Some questions that can be used to generate discussion are:

1. Why is it an honor to be a human being? How, then, should we treat other people?
2. If we started every morning by giving thanks, what effect do you think it would have on us?
3. What are the "gifts of life" that are mentioned? What is the sequence of thanksgiving?
4. Why is the author thankful for these gifts? Who does the author say gave these gifts?
5. What are some things that keep the environment healthy? That damage it?
6. Who is responsible for helping make the environment healthy? How can this be done?
7. Why is the earth referred to as "Mother Earth?" How are the different parts of nature addressed? What sequence or order does the book follow?
8. Did you learn anything new about the Iroquois tradition or culture? Do you want to learn more about the Iroquois? What more would you like to know? (Lead students to research material.)

### **Vocabulary**

Ask students to write down words they do not know into their vocabulary notebooks. After studying the meanings, ask them to define the words in their own terms. (They might want to guess meanings by putting the words in context, or substituting another word for words they know.)

### **Reader's Response Journal**

To promote active reading, you might want students to keep a reader's response journal as they read the story. This journal will help students personalize what they are reading.

1. How does this book affect your attitude toward the environment?
2. What does it look like where you live? How is it similar to and/or different than what is pictured in the book?
3. Are there things for which your family traditionally gives thanks or mentions at family gatherings? What are they?
4. What things would you include in a list of what you need or what sustains your life? Why are these things so important to you?
5. What did you learn about Iroquois culture or about the environment from this book?

### **Other Writing Activities**

Ask students to respond to one or more of the follow writing activities:

1. What kind of environment would you like to live in (Let students use imagination in this exercise)
2. Write a letter about something for which you are thankful and explain why you are thankful for it.
3. Read haiku or other poems that are odes to nature or that contain nature imagery (the selection is plentiful). Let students write some of their own.
4. Create a folder for anecdotes of things for which the class members are thankful so that they can record any moments or events they are thankful for (it can also be a means of preparing them to join group lessons or activities). This folder can be expanded and categorized according to people, places, things, events, for example; thereby, it also helps students classify.

### **ESL Teaching Strategies**

Following are activities for engaging students who speak English as a second language.

1. Suggest to students that they write down any questions that they have about the reading.

2. As a class, read the story aloud.
3. For a game of concentration, use two sets of blank cards. On one set, have students draw pictures of items that they are thankful for (or use items from the book), one on each card. On the second set, have students write the words of these items, one on each card. Then have students mix all their cards together and lay them face down on the floor for a group game of concentration.

### **INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES**

In order to integrate students' reading experiences with other subject areas, you might want to have students complete some of these activities.

#### **Social Studies**

1. Learn to say "thank you" in different languages. Students who already know how to say "thank you" in another language can share what they know with the others. In addition, play a tape of "thank-you's" spoken in different languages and ask students to repeat and learn the phrase (be sure to have the phonetic spelling of each phrase). Also, point out on a map where each language is spoken.
2. Invite an official from a local recycling plant for a discussion on how students can play a part in restoring a clean environment. Students can actively pursue some of these suggestions and also share them with other classes.
3. The League of the Iroquois, established by Deganawideh and Hiawatha, encouraged peaceful negotiations among Indian tribes that formerly sought revenge if a tribe member was murdered. This league is considered to have been an important influence upon the Founding Fathers as well as upon the United Nations.  
Find out more about this League, i.e., how it was established, who was involved, what situations they handled and what its practices were. Perhaps as a class, you could follow the model of the League of Iroquois in deliberating and/or reconciling a class issue.
4. Native Americans have lived throughout North America. Was there/is there a Native American populace in your local area? What tribe(s) have lived or do live there? (Contact your local librarian and governing body to find out.)
5. There are many different Native American tribes. Assign small groups of students a tribe and let them find out as much as possible about that tribe, i.e., customs, beliefs, locale, history, clothing, if they are hunters and/or farmers, itinerant or not. Groups can share their discoveries via skits, oral presentations, slide shows, interview panels, radio talk shows, etc. Then, compare differences and similarities among groups.

#### **Science**

1. Ask students to focus on any one of the components mentioned in the book—water, plants, the moon—and to find out more about what its function(s) is/are and how they are fulfilled. Next, combine different groups, i.e., the moon with the

water (tides); the stars with the sun and the moon (facts about the solar system); thunder, lightning, and rain; the plants with the water; and let the combined groups then study what their relationship is and how they interact. (Since this task requires sophisticated prior knowledge, you might want to guide the students' research.)

2. How do animals keep the forests clean? Look at the ecosystem and study its dynamics.
3. Geographically locate the currently forested areas of the earth. Add statistics regarding the rate of deforestation. Also, model examples of the different kinds of environments we live in, i.e., tropical forest, desert, etc. Locate such places on a globe and also show photographic examples of each environment type.  
Ask students to consider how the environment we live in affects our lifestyle. (For example, in desert areas, people want to be near water sources.) To do this, you might want to let students create models of different environments (by dioramas, drawing or 3-D models) illustrating the land type, flora, and fauna indigenous to that area after having gathered information in small groups and through several resources. Encourage students to depict people dressed in clothing appropriate for their climate (if a place is seasonal, the students can articulate that fact).
4. Plant a tree (or smaller plant) together as a class after having studied such things as what plants need in order to grow and how they grow. The class can be responsible for nurturing this plant and charting its growth.
5. Organize the phases of the moon. Let students draw the moon in its different stages and perhaps even write a description of how the moon looks in that stage. (To understand why the moon undergoes different phases, model a demonstration of how the moon and earth move in relation to one another.)
6. The book mentions the four winds that travel from the north, south, east, and west. Illustrate these four directions to the students using examples such as California is (what direction) of Montana? Discuss different ways to tell direction, i.e., the sun, stars, compass. Learn the historical uses of these navigation tools.

### **Mathematics**

Find out the distance between the earth, sun, and moon. (Since the numbers are astronomical put them in relation to distances that the students are more readily acquainted with, i.e., proportional to the number of football fields, certain states, etc.)

### **Music**

1. Listen to music that is intended to be representative of, allude to, or take place in, nature, e.g., "The Flight of the Bumblebee."
2. There are many sounds found in nature. Play tapes of different environments (oceans, forest, etc.) and have students identify the different sounds.

### **Art**

1. Create a mural of different things for which class members can be thankful.
2. Observe Native American artwork, such as beading, clothing, pottery, and painting, both contemporary and historical.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR**

**Chief Jake Swamp** was born on the Akwesasne Mohawk Reservation, which occupies 14,000 acres of forest land in upstate New York near the Canadian border. He has been a Mohawk Chief for over 25 years.

In 1983 Chief Swamp co-founded the Tree of Peace Society, an environmental organization established to continue a centuries-old Iroquois tradition of planting trees as symbols of peace. Since then, Chief Swamp has planted trees of peace throughout the world, including the United Nations in New York City and Geneva, Switzerland; the Berlin Wall; Mount Fuji, Japan; the Aboriginal Outback in Australia; and American state capitals from coast to coast. The Thanksgiving Address, from which *Giving Thanks* is adapted, is delivered at the opening of each tree planting ceremony.

Chief Swamp also delivers the address and lectures at schools and universities and gatherings ranging from the annual Thanksgiving program at The Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York, to the opening of the 1994 Woodstock Festival. It is Chief Swamp's vision that the message of hope contained in *Giving Thanks* Reach all the children of the world and their families.

Chief Swamp is father to seven children and eleven grandchildren. He and his wife live in Hogansburg, New York. *Giving Thanks* is his first picture book.

**Erwin Printup, Jr.** is a Cayuga/Tuscarora painter, sculptor, and printmaker. Born in Niagara Falls, New York, he received a degree in fine arts from the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

The illustrations for *Giving Thanks* were rendered in acrylic on canvas. For each image, Mr. Printup drew from the many symbols of the Six Nations heritage. "Most of my work is based on Iroquois culture," the artist explains. "A lot of this culture was lost during the past few centuries, and I feel that by doing this work I can preserve a little bit of what is left."

Mr. Printup lives in Lewiston, New York. *Giving Thanks* is his first picture book.

### **Awards & Reviews**

- **READING RAINBOW** Feature Title
- **50 Multicultural Books Every Child Should Know 2001**, Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC)

"The Thanksgiving Address... the haunting internal repetition and rhythm that mark many of the world's most affecting prayers."—*The Horn Book Magazine*

### Resources on the Web

Learn more about *Giving Thanks*:

[http://www.leeandlow.com/books/55/hc/giving\\_thanks\\_a\\_native\\_american\\_good\\_morning\\_message](http://www.leeandlow.com/books/55/hc/giving_thanks_a_native_american_good_morning_message)

*Giving Thanks* in Spanish:

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