

The customs of the country

[Sarahi Uribe](#), [guardian.co.uk](#), Thursday 24 November 2011

My family celebrated [Thanksgiving](#) much like other families. Well, sort of. We ate turkey and mashed potatoes – with a side of Spanish rice and *tamales*. We watched A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving, after dancing to *cumbias* and salsa. My cousins and I played [Pogs](#) on the floor, while our parents poured steaming cups of rum and punch.

I don't remember a time without Thanksgiving. By the time I was born, in Los Angeles, this American holiday had become a tradition for my extended Mexican immigrant family. Just like other families, for us, Thanksgiving was a time to break bread (or *pan dulce*) and simply be together.

Over time and with age, the holiday became not only about celebrating family, but also recognising its absence. For me, Thanksgiving marked the absence of my father, who was deported to Mexico when I was in high school. The empty seat at the dinner table is a reality in most American households, whether that absence is the result of distance, unresolved drama or the inevitable death in the family. This absence in immigrant families is all the more present this season, when the country's collective memory ignores the immigrant narrative inherent to its founding and intrinsic to this holiday.

My celebration of Thanksgiving evolved when I embarked on my own immigration journey of sorts – from Los Angeles to Yale University. Seriously, it's that different. Over Thanksgiving break, I was welcomed into the homes of friends with strange assortments of food and relatives. One year, I ate turkey and lasagna in New Jersey with the Cammarata family. Another year, I ate turkey and matzo ball soup in Philadelphia with the Stamieszkins. And this year, I'm buying tamales in North Carolina with the Vanderburgh-Wertzes.

The holiday is a mish-mash of our pasts. And like the turkey and Spanish rice, it just tastes better that way. In all my Thanksgivings away from home, I've felt the warmth (and, of course, the dysfunctionality) of this holiday. It's only natural; Thanksgiving is about celebrating with family. It comes with its joys, its pain and its bitter-sweet realisation that Christmas is just around the corner.

I- General comprehension (2 points)

1) This document is :

- a) a survey about the traditions of Thanksgiving
- b) a newspaper report about Thanksgiving in Mexico
- c) a Mexican American's personal experience of Thanksgiving

2) The text focuses on :

- a) The meaning of Thanksgiving for the author
- b) The absence of meaning of Thanksgiving for the author
- c) The misapprehension of the meaning of Thanksgiving by the author

3) The main idea of the text is :

- a) Mexican Americans don't celebrate a proper Thanksgiving
- b) The way Thanksgiving is celebrated depends on the kind of family you live in
- c) Thanksgiving is no longer celebrated nowadays

4) The author's purpose is :

- a) to highlight the importance of Thanksgiving for every American, no matter his or her origin
- b) to show how outdated Thanksgiving has become
- c) to highlight the importance of Thanksgiving all over the world

II- Detailed comprehension (2 points)

1. 'Thanksgiving was a time to break bread' means that

- a) At Thanksgiving people were forbidden to eat bread
- b) Thanksgiving is a special day when people share a meal together
- c) At Thanksgiving bakers visit all families in the neighbourhood and give them their freshly-baked bread.

2. **'the country's collective memory ignores the immigrant narrative inherent to its founding and intrinsic to this holiday' means that**

- a) Nowadays America tends to forget that the nation was born of several waves of immigration and its whole history is based on that .
- b) Yesterday's immigrants have become Americans
- c) The American nation as a whole relies on immigration to survive

3. **'I was welcomed into the homes of friends with strange assortments of food and relatives' means that**

- a) The author felt very uncomfortable spending Thanksgiving away from home
- b) The author spent several Thanksgivings away from home, which enabled him to meet different kinds of people and to taste different kinds of food
- c) When invited to people's homes at Thanksgiving, the author always felt a stranger

4. **'realisation that Christmas is just around the corner' means that**

- a) The author realises that Thanksgiving is nothing compared to Christmas
- b) Americans have realised that Christmas is less important than Thanksgiving
- c) At Thanksgiving, you realise that Christmas celebrations are not far

5) **Find synonyms for the following words and phrases in the text (3 points)**

- a) a habit: _____
- b) a home : _____
- c) a story, a tale : _____

d) to be inextricably linked with : _____

f) a hotchpotch, an untidy mixture of many elements : _____

6) True or false ? (Justify by quoting from the text – 3 points)

a) The author's family celebrated Thanksgiving in a traditional way.

b) The author has always celebrated Thanksgiving.

c) Thanksgiving is a tradition for everybody in America, even for the author of Mexican origin.

d) The whole family of the author used to gather for Thanksgiving.

e) Throughout America, people always eat the same sort food for Thanksgiving.

f) What matters for Thanksgiving is to celebrate with friends or family.

7) Answer the following questions in your own words (10 points)

a) Why is Thanksgiving so important in America ? What is the point of this celebration ?

b) Why does Thanksgiving highlight the absence of loved ones ?

c) According to you, why does 'the country's collective memory ignore the immigrant narrative' ?

d) In what ways does the Thanksgiving holiday reflect everyone's past ?

e) Explain what led the author to feel the 'dysfunctionality' of Thanksgiving.

III- Translation : translate the last paragraph into French (20 points)