

## Standing Rock #2017: Thanksgiving Talking Points

*“Let us put our minds together and see what life we can make for our children.”*

*-- Sitting Bull*

**Purpose:** These Talking Points have been created to help prepare parents and primary school educators to talk with children about the campaign of water protectors at Standing Rock, North Dakota, in order to make Thanksgiving relevant to contemporary events and honor the best of the holiday. Standing Rock was more of a beginning than end—participants hope the movement continues to raise national consciousness on a wide array of Native American issues that are often otherwise overlooked.

**Background:** In 2014, the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, members of the Lakota and Dakota people, learned of the plans of the Texas-based Energy Transfer Partners to create a “Dakota Access Pipeline” (“DAPL”) to transport approximately over 500,000 barrels of crude oil daily. Their ancestors had warned of a “black snake,” and they fear such a fossil fuel project would destroy their water supply. Since the Standing Rock Sioux tribe believes “Water is Life” (mní wičóŋi), they want to protect their water supply. Calling on allies to stand up against this pipeline, in 2016, the campaign of water protectors at Standing Rock, North Dakota, became one of the largest demonstrations of tribal sovereignty and calls for environmental justice in the history of the United States. In July 2016, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe sued the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers arguing the pipeline destroyed sacred sites and threatens water quality. In October 2017, a federal judge ruled that the DAPL can continue operation pending an environmental review (a study likely to extend until spring 2018). In [March 2017](#), the pipeline leaked in two places, and in November 2017, the Keystone Pipeline—a different pipeline also protested against by indigenous environmental activists—[leaked approximately](#) 210,000 gallons of oil in South Dakota.

**3 Talking Points:** The Standing Rock campaign is still relatable to children and enables us to discuss some key values this Thanksgiving season, as well as learn more about contemporary issues of Native Americans and the gathering of their allies at Standing Rock.

**1. Give thanks to Earth.** We depend on Earth for food, water, and the air we breathe. Thanksgiving is an opportunity to pause in our busy lives to be thankful for how much this planet provides for us.

**At Standing Rock:** Native Americans and people who stand in solidarity with them are defending the right to clean water and to protect this planet for future generations (“intergenerational rights” for our children’s children and so on). LaDonna Brave Bull

Allard from Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, stands “because we must protect our children and our grandchildren.” (For more on Native Americans working to protect Earth, see [Women’s Earth & Climate Action Network](#), [Wisdom of the Elders website](#), and the [Indigenous Environmental Network](#)).

**Discuss:** What are we grateful to Earth for? What foods are we looking forward to cooking and/or eating? What does food need to grow (hint: water & sun)? What will we drink? How often will we use water to bathe, drink, and wash this holiday? Which fuels will we use to visit family and friends? Which fuels would we like to use in the future? Listen to how children imagine their lives to be connected with the planet. Ask them to make art to show their gratitude. How do they imagine energy might be made in the future? What will fuel our transportation to visit each other?

**2. Express gratitude for community.** We all are connected and can make this world a better place to live. Thanksgiving season is an opportunity to gather with those you love in the same place and spend time reconnecting with family and friends, as well as serving the communities in which we live.

**At Standing Rock:** The people of [Standing Rock](#), often called “Sioux,” are members of the Dakota and Lakota nations, and “Dakota” and “Lakota” mean “friends” or “allies.” Look at these images from Standing Rock in October 2016. The “Water is Life” school, [Mní Wičhóni Nakíčiziŋ Owáyawa](#), is an important part of the Standing Rock community.

**Discuss:** With whom are you spending Thanksgiving? Who will you miss? Does your family have a tradition of giving thanks for community at the holiday, such as prayer or volunteering at a local food bank? Who are the people who help you everyday? How can you try to help others?

**3. Learn what Native Americans have & are contributing to the United States.**

Thanksgiving is a time when we can reflect on the past and present roles of Native Americans. There are more than 500 federally recognized Indigenous nations comprising nearly 3 million people in the United States today.

**At Standing Rock:** One of the most famous Native leaders in [history](#) is Sitting Bull, a Hunkpapa Lakota Sioux who lived in the 1800s. He was called “Sitting Bull” because he had the courage of the bison. Today, Native peoples continue prayer, ceremony, and peacefully organizing to protect water, [sacred sites](#), burial sites, and Indigenous rights. The leader of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, Dave Archambault, Jr., [testified](#) before the

United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland: “Oil companies are causing deliberate destruction of our sacred places.”

**Discuss:** Read this [list](#) of 11 living Native Americans: which one do you admire? Why? Which Native American peoples live and work near you? What places are considered sacred in your community? How are these places protected? How do you practice peace during the holidays, or other times of the year?



**See [Standing Rock Thanksgiving School Fundraising & Resources for more information and activities.](#)**

This handout was written by [BoulderTalks](#), fostering community and knowledge through democratic engagement.