I chose to extend what I had written on the story of the First Thanksgiving as a child because I am really interested in what we teach our children with regard to history. While we often mold the stories of history in a fashion that makes them kid friendly, this often means whitewashing crucial historical events. I feel we should be more accurate about the past when teaching our children the entire story of the pilgrims coming to America, and the treatment of the Native Americans at their hands.

The story I was given in elementary school told of how the pilgrims found America after a very long journey on the Mayflower, having escaped persecution for their beliefs, in search of religious freedom in America. Once in America they struggled to survive, and their numbers dwindled by disease and hunger. As we were told, the magnanimous Native Americans felt so sorry for them, they taught the pilgrims how to hunt and grow crops on the land. And our Thanksgiving feast celebrated every year? It was symbolic of the big feast the Pilgrims shared with the Native Americans, in gratitude for their guidance in how to survive in this new land, and in celebration of a hearty harvest.

I don’t ever remember being in a Thanksgiving play, but I do remember cool crafts each time around Thanksgiving. I’m sure most American children who had a public school education will remember making pictures of turkeys from the outline, paper cut out turkeys, or head bands with feathers to represent the Native Americans. Later we would make turkeys out of candy corn, pretzels, and rice krispies, and I remember thinking it was *so awesome*. And I remember potlucks in class the last day before Thanksgiving break, not with regular turkey feasts, but whatever each student wanted to bring. Also we always had a turkey and gravy lunch at school sometime during that week.

Most of us now know the true story of the Pilgrims and the Native Americans. The friendship and celebration that is discussed in elementary school is far from the truth. The Pilgrims came to America, a place that was already inhabited, and commandeered the land. They did not discover America, it had already been discovered. The pilgrims were not kind to the Native Americans, as told by the stories in elementary school.

All of these banal activities from my earlier education are so irrelevant in the context of the historical event(s) Thanksgiving is said to represent. It feels rather callous to present this view of Thanksgiving in public schools, where children internalize this piece of history under the impression that when the Pilgrims came to America there was an amicable, and even friendly, relationship with the Native Americans.

Instead of telling our children this whitewashed version of the story, where our ancestors come out squeaky clean, why don’t we use the actual truth to teach them lessons of kindness, to teach them tolerance and understanding for your fellow man, no matter your backgrounds. Of course all of this would need to be approached in age appropriate way, but there is no reason, besides hubris, why we should not be teaching our children the true treatment of the Native Americans by the Pilgrims. We can only encourage our children to do better, to be better, than their history, if they know the full truth of that history.