

At Our Table

Author's Note

Patrick Hulse

My childhood memories of Thanksgiving take place at my Nana and PopPop's house. I remember helping Nana set the table with her yellow tablecloth, my parents washing dishes elbow to elbow, and the joy of a room filled with everyone I love. A desire to pass these experiences on to my future children led me to write the first draft of *At Our Table*.

Many cultures around the world celebrate holidays similar to American Thanksgiving as a way to gather and share gratitude. In the United States, the holiday is often paired with false depictions of Indigenous people and their relationships with colonial settlers. Inaccurate stories and images hurt Native communities and paint them as figures of the past. Each year, the United American Indians of New England instead acknowledge a National Day of Mourning for this reason. Others choose to skip Thanksgiving in reaction to the ways food waste and holiday excess conflict with the day's messages of gratitude.

I love my Thanksgiving memories. Looking critically at the things we love can be scary, but doing so has given me a deeper understanding of the holiday and our country. This led me to create a story that reflects my hopes for what Thanksgiving could, and sometimes already does, look like. This book is a celebration of family and community, of sharing and learning, of tradition and change, and of similarities and differences. It is a call to strengthen our relationship to the earth and our food, and to uplift and learn from Indigenous voices. It is a promise to hold space for all the complexities this holiday carries.

When I imagine how Thanksgiving might look for my children, I picture us celebrating all the different ways of being that our country has room for. And of course, I see us saving lots of room for dessert. I hope that this book will inspire you to imagine with me.



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Artist's Note Madelyn Goodnight

When I started to make the art for this book, I recalled all the memories I've had of my family's and friends' Thanksgivings and tried to put little details of that same love into each scene. I wanted warm colors, textures, and details to evoke that special feeling of autumn and togetherness, whether by showing a traditional table with food, a bunch of chairs crowded into a tiny apartment, a picnic in the park, or gardening in the community.

It was just as important to me as a First American artist to represent the history of this holiday through the art: The scene of the family mourning and praying in front of the statue of Wampanoag tribal chief Ousamequin (also known as Massasoit) is a quiet, contemplative image, different from the bright energy on other pages in the book. It is meant to inspire reflection of the past—on the peace he advocated for and maintained with English colonists for many years, as well as the harm the colonists brought to the Indigenous peoples of this land. It's equally important to me to celebrate how today's Native populations are leading, inspiring, and sharing all year round, which is spotlighted during November, Native American Heritage Month.

My hope is that readers will be reminded of and cherish their own family traditions and experiences—like enjoying a special dish that's made only once a year, sneaking bites of food to a beloved family pet, or seeing a family member nodding off after eating too much dessert—and to share through the art a bit of that coziness that only comes with delicious food and loved ones.

