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DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

History and Traditions of America's Most Popular Holidays, and How to Work
with Them in ELT

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Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci na téma *History and Traditions of America's Most Popular Holidays, and How to Work with Them in ELT* vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

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Anotace

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Název práce:	Historie a tradice nejpopulárnějších amerických svátků a jak s nimi pracovat ve výuce anglického jazyka.
Název v angličtině:	History and Traditions of America's Most Popular Holidays, and How to Work with Them in ELT.
Anotace práce:	Cílem této diplomové práce je představení nejpopulárnějších amerických svátků a jejich implementace do hodin anglického jazyka. Práce se také zaměřuje na rozbor znalostí žáků a na přístup učitelů k této problematice. Všechny výsledky jsou následně rozebrány a je také navrženo možné využití problematiky v hodinách angličtiny.
Klíčová slova:	Spojené státy americké, Den díkůvzdání, Vánoce, Halloween, Den nezávislosti, Dotazník, Rozhovor, Učební plány
Anotace v angličtině:	The aim of this thesis is to introduce the most popular American holidays and their implementation in English language classes. The thesis focuses on the analysis of pupils' knowledge and teachers' approach to this issue. All the results are then discussed, and the possible use of the issue in English classes is also suggested.
Klíčová slova v angličtině:	The United States of America, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Halloween, Independence Day, Questionnaire, Interview, Lesson plans
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Abstract

The topic of this thesis is *History and Traditions of America's Most Popular Holidays, and How to Work with Them in ELT*. The thesis is divided into two parts, a theoretical part and a practical part. The theoretical part contains information regarding the history and culture of the most popular holidays in the U.S., as well as methodology of teaching and pedagogical research. The practical part is based on the findings of the theoretical part and presents the questionnaire for pupils, interview with teachers and lesson plans. The thesis concludes with the results of the research and recommendations based on them.

Introduction

Language teaching, and not only English, could be divided into two parts. The first part is the language part, in which we encounter the language itself and learn the four basic language skills – speaking, listening, reading, writing. The language part is crucial for subsequent communication with a person speaking the target language. However, the cultural part also plays a big role in learning any language. This part includes everything that belongs to the people speaking the target language and is typical of their territory. This can include their history, customs, traditions, geography, way of life and so on. Therefore, in order for language teaching to bring not only communication but also mutual understanding, the cultural part of a particular language needs to be addressed.

In the Czech Republic, English is currently taught as a first foreign language and as a compulsory subject in primary, lower secondary and upper secondary schools. In most Czech schools, the UK is considered a model for teaching English. There are probably several reasons behind this and one of them is certainly that it is because of Britain that English has spread around the world. Therefore, in English language textbooks we very often see not only the BBC English, but also the textbooks introduce us especially to British culture and how people live in this country. Despite the fact that the United Kingdom and its colonies used to be considered a superpower, it has now been replaced as another English-speaking country by the United States of America, once also a British colony. The influence of the USA on modern history is undeniable, and that includes the culture that is gradually influencing us. It is therefore more than logical that in English language teaching about this country should be mentioned at least in passing. For this reason, the topic of this thesis was created: *History and Traditions of America's Most Popular Holidays, and How to Work with Them in ELT*.

The thesis contains two parts. The first part is theoretical. At the beginning there is an overview of the holidays celebrated in the USA. It also describes what holidays were chosen as the most popular and why this is so. This is followed by a section that describes the historical events behind these four popular holidays: Thanksgiving, Christmas, Halloween, and Independence Day. These holidays are then described in terms of their development, customs, and traditions. The last section summarizes the findings of the methodology of teaching the English language, history and culture, as well as the methodology of pedagogical research. This theoretical part is followed by a practical part which builds on the findings in the theoretical

part. The main aim of the practical part of the thesis is to answer the following research questions:

1. What knowledge do pupils have about U.S. history, culture, and holidays?
2. How do English language teachers work with the history, culture, and holidays of the U.S.?
3. In what way can teaching of the most popular U.S. holidays into English language be incorporated?

As the main objectives of the thesis, these questions are explored in three ways. The first is a questionnaire that was prepared for pupils in grades 6-9 of lower secondary school. It ascertains not only the pupils' knowledge but also their interest in the subject. The second is an interview created for English language teachers that explores how teachers work in their classes and if they work at all with the topic of U.S. history, culture and holidays. The last are lesson plans that were designed for pupils in grades 6, 7, and 9 at the lower secondary school. These three lesson plans are built on the findings from the theoretical part of this work as well as the data collected from the pupils' questionnaires and teachers' interviews. At the end of the thesis, the results of the practical part are recorded, summarizing and answering the research questions listed above, as well as the main theme of how to work with America's most popular holidays in ELT.

1. Most popular holidays in the USA

The United States is a relatively young country compared to, for example, European countries. However, its national diversity is really huge. Thanks to this, it would be possible to record dozens, if not hundreds of holidays that are celebrated on the territory of the USA. Each of these holidays has a different history and tradition, as well as the scale in which these holidays are celebrated. According to the official website of the United States government, all of these holidays can be divided into four categories: federal holidays, state holidays, commonly celebrated holidays, and observances, ethnic and religious holidays.

The most important holidays are federal holidays because they are celebrated all over the country and the vast majority of government offices are closed. Some private businesses are also closed on these days. The following eleven holidays fall into this category:

- New Year's Day – celebrated on the 1st of January as the beginning of the New Year.
- Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. – celebrates on the third Monday in January the birth of a major figure of fight for rights of African Americans.
- Washington's Birthday – also known as Presidents' Day, celebrated on the third Monday in February. This holiday combines the celebration of the birth of former President George Washington, as well as the birth of Abraham Lincoln and other notable and respected presidents.
- Memorial Day – celebrated on the last Monday in May and commemorates all those who have fallen while serving in the U.S. military.
- Juneteenth National Independence Day – a newly created holiday celebrated on the 19th of June. It celebrates the end of slavery and commemorates the emancipation of slaves.
- Independence Day – celebrated on the 4th of July to commemorate the adoption of the Declaration of Independence.
- Labor Day – celebrated on the first Monday in September and commemorates the emergence of the American labour movement.
- Columbus Day – celebrated on the second Monday in October and commemorates not only the arrival of Christopher Columbus, but also all those who came after him and contributed over time to the creation of the United States of America.
- Veterans Day – celebrated on the 11th of November and honours all people who have served in the U.S. military.

- Thanksgiving Day – celebrated on the fourth Thursday in November and celebrates both the bountiful harvest and the help given by Native Americans to incoming European settlers.
- Christmas Day – celebrated on the 25th of December and commemorates the birth of Jesus Christ (USAGov, 2023).

Another type of holiday celebrated in the USA are state holidays. State holidays differ from federal holidays in that they are not celebrated nationwide. This means that they are only celebrated in some of the fifty states as decided by the local authorities. Examples of these holidays are Inauguration Day celebrated every 4 years following a presidential election in the metropolitan area of Washington, DC, or Emancipation Day/Indigenous Peoples Day celebrated in the states and the District of Columbia. The third type is commonly celebrated holidays and observances. These holidays are not federal holidays as much as they are state holidays. However, unlike state holidays, some of these holidays are celebrated throughout the whole United States, such as Halloween or Flag Day. For some of them, it is even common to receive a special proclamation from the President. The last type of holidays that are also not celebrated at the federal level are ethnic and religious holidays. “Various ethnic and religious groups in the United States celebrate days with special meaning to them. These holidays include Easter for Christians, the High Holy Days for Jews, Ramadan for Muslims, Day of Vesak for Buddhists, and Diwali for Hindus” (USAGov, 2023).

As can be seen, many holidays are celebrated in the United States of America, and each of them has an important place in society. After extensive searching on various foreign websites, in books, comparison surveys, or researching the cultural section of English language textbooks, it is almost impossible to pinpoint just one holiday that is voted by all as the most popular. Similarly, it is difficult to establish an accurate ranking of the popularity of each holiday, as this depends on the age, gender, religion, political affiliation, nationality, and so on of the individual people who either participated in the survey, created the individual websites, books, and textbooks. Almost everywhere, however, the following four holidays were mentioned: Thanksgiving, Christmas, Halloween, Independence Day. Christmas featured prominently in the survey and on the websites, while Thanksgiving was represented in the books and textbooks as a typical American holiday. What is more, Christmas, Thanksgiving and Independence Day were enacted as the first ever federal holiday in the USA. For this reason, these four holidays were selected as the most popular holidays celebrated in the U.S. to be used as the starting point for this thesis.

2. Historical events behind the individual holidays

The history of the United States of America is rich in important events that have happened since the arrival of European settlers in this territory. Since this thesis focuses on the history of the most popular American holidays – Christmas, Thanksgiving, Halloween, Independence Day – only those historical events that contributed to the spread and popularization of these holidays will be described in this section of this work. These selected holidays will then be described in more detail, especially from a cultural point of view, in the following chapter.

2.1. Native Americans and the first Europeans

Clearly the most important event with which all holidays are associated was the arrival of Europeans in America, then known as the New World. Because of their arrival over the centuries, these holidays spread not only to the USA, but very often to surrounding countries, or Europeans caused their creation. The first such holiday is Thanksgiving, in which Europeans and the indigenous people of this continent are the main actors. The Olmec are considered to be the very first Americans, followed by the Maya, the Aztec and the Inca populations (OpenStax College, 2014). Although these civilizations are widely known and their descendants can be certainly found in the U.S. today, their empires were mainly located in Central and South America.

There were distinct native cultures in North America that were fewer in number compared to the societies of South America and were not centrally organized in any way. The inhabitants of North America were referred to as Indians, nowadays the term Native Americans is used. Indians were grouped in rather small tribes and were mainly spread in the western part of the continent. These tribes did not have a fixed hierarchy, but it was customary for one person, or several elders, to be involved in the leadership of the tribe and in making important decisions. Particularly important to the incoming Europeans was knowledge of the territory and the procurement of food. It depended on where an individual tribe was located and what it could hunt or grow. “Most tribes, particularly in the wooded eastern region and the Midwest, combined aspects of hunting, gathering, and the cultivation of maize and other products for their food supplies. In many cases, the women were responsible for farming and the distribution of food, while the men hunted and participated in war” (U.S. Department of State, 2013, p.8).

As trivial as the skills of hunting and cultivation may seem, by the time Europeans arrived, it was the Indians' knowledge of how to procure food that constituted a critical survival circumstance for European settlers.

The very first Europeans to reach America were the Norse. However, unlike other explorers, they did not settle there permanently. They were followed by the notorious voyage of Christopher Columbus in 1492. Although he never made it to what is now the USA, he started to bring many others to the new continent. It was he and the Spanish who spread the not-so-true news of the riches and new land awaiting the brave explorers. Gradually, the English, Dutch, and French, in addition to the Spanish, arrived in North and South America (OpenStax College, 2014). An important group arriving in what is now the United States was a religious group called the Pilgrims. They disagreed with the practices of the then Church of England and therefore for them the new lands represented an opportunity to establish a 'pure and uncorrupted' faith. The Pilgrims, led by William Bradford, arrived in Plymouth harbour on the Mayflower in 1620. Although there is often talk of a non-violent seizure of territory, the opposite is true. "When the Pilgrims came to New England they too were coming not to vacant land but to territory inhabited by tribes of Indians" (Zinn, 2009, p.19). Therefore, the arrival of the Pilgrims (and all other explorers) is linked to this controversy with the violent seizure of Indian territory and the spread of diseases that resulted in a significant decline of the indigenous populations in the Americas.

However, the Pilgrims also experienced many hardships during their journey and first years in the new territory. When they set out across the ocean in 1620, there were approximately hundred people on the Mayflower. But their ship sailed later than originally planned. Because of this, they did not arrive in the New World until December. The destination they reached was subsequently named Plymouth. William Bradford then wrote a journal of their voyage and life in book called *Of Plymouth Plantation*. The first year was a difficult one for the new residents. They arrived in Plymouth after the harvest, so their food supplies were insufficient and the new crop could not be grown because of the weather. In addition, due to cold and diseases, almost half of the original explorers died during the voyage and the first few months after landing. It was not until the spring of the following year that they began to prosper, having made the acquaintance of the above-mentioned Indians who lived in that part of the country. The Indians, though timid and frightened at first, came to the aid of the new settlers. They taught them how to hunt game, helped them grow crops, and advised them on the basics of survival. As a result, by the autumn of 1621, the Pilgrims had a bountiful harvest to ensure their survival through the

winter, greatly aided by the willingness of the Indians. “To celebrate, they held a harvest feast with the Indians. That event provided the inspiration for what has become the annual Thanksgiving holiday in the United States” (Tindall, Shi, 2013, p. 68/69).

2.2. Further immigrants from Europe

Another important group of new settlers that significantly influenced the society of the New World at that time were the Puritans. They arrived in America ten years after the Pilgrims. Unlike the Pilgrims, who wanted to separate completely from the Church of England, the Puritans were not as radical. They also wanted change, but they believed that it would be impossible to separate completely from the Church of England and establish new colonies without the support of the then King of England. Therefore, they received official permission and a charter from the king to go to America. Under the leadership of Governor John Winthrop, they founded the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630 (Zinn, 2009).

Although the Puritans refused to separate from the Church of England altogether, there were many disagreements and reservations they had against the Church. One of these was the way Christmas was celebrated in England. The Puritans considered these celebrations to be unholy because they were celebrated in a grandiose way and were contrary to the simplicity of the faith. Therefore, during the 17th and 18th centuries, the celebration of Christmas was forbidden in the colonies and violations were punished. Most other celebrations were similarly frowned upon. This strict attitude of the Puritans persisted until the 19th century (Leone, 2011).

Pilgrims and Puritans were not the only ones who were dissatisfied with the direction religion was taking in Europe. “In the course of time and often by the use of secular force, several major Protestant bodies emerged: Calvinism in Geneva and Holland; Anglicanism in England; Lutheranism in northern Germany” (Johnson, 1997, p. 25). Some of these sought to reform the church in their home countries. Others, on the other hand, rejected their homeland altogether and chose to immigrate and seek their fortunes in the New World. In addition to religious convictions, one of the other reasons for moving were the miserable living conditions or the unrest and strife that persisted in Europe for centuries. Unlike the Puritans, however, these newcomers were not so radical when it came to celebrations and they had been celebrating Christmas since the 17th century (Leone, 2011). The traditions that the Dutch, Germans, English, and later other nationalities that came to America gradually expanded and connected

with each other. Over time, they spread (not only) through what is now the United States and took the form of Christmas as we know it today.

The last major group to spread the celebration of another holiday – Halloween – across the U.S. to such an extent that Americans almost appropriated it as their own holiday was the Irish. Their immigration was prompted by strife and oppression from the English authorities under whose rule the Irish had lived for centuries. The Irish were not allowed to express or show their traditions and customs in any way. They were forbidden to disseminate Irish culture, to use the Gaelic language, to write texts or songs with an Irish theme or to wear their traditional clothing. They were only allowed into the capital on an exceptional and supervised basis. No one was allowed to sell them horses or guns (Johnson, 1997). Apart from the domination of the English, the different beliefs posed a huge problem. While the Irish were Catholic, most of the English were Protestant. This huge divide that the different religious beliefs presented made the hatred even more intense. The Irish were oppressed culturally and economically. This situation came to a head in 1845. “After an epidemic of potato rot in 1845, called the Irish potato famine, killed more than 1 million peasants, the flow of Irish immigrants to Canada and the United States became a flood” (Tindall, Shi, 2013, p. 396). Since potatoes were the main food intake for the Irish at the time, a potato crop failure spelled disaster. Therefore, so many of them resolved to immigrate. Since they were weak and ill, many of them died during the voyage and that is why these vessels on which they sailed are referred to as coffin ships.

In the mid-19th century, Irish represented about 40 percent of immigrants. Most of them came to America with almost no money and needed to find work as quickly as possible. Since they did not want to do the work of farmers after their previous experiences in their homeland, they began to work in other industries. Men were often hired as labourers to build railways and canals. Women, on the other hand, took jobs in the textile industry or with smaller companies or wealthier families as laundresses and servants. The Irish were initially perceived as the poorest people in America. Over time, people also developed anti-Irish sentiments that were a milder version of the aversion to African Americans. The situation began to improve only after the Irish were allowed to properly participate in elections. Their political influence was increasing and with it the spread of the Catholic faith. The Catholics spread the faith to such an extent that their religion became the largest religious group in the United States (Tindall, Shi, 2013). With the spread of the religion, the culture and traditions of the aforementioned Halloween became extensively popular in the United States of America just because of the Irish immigrants.

2.3. Establishment of the United States of America

The last important historical event to mention, which is connected with the Independence Day celebration, is the path that led to the formation of the United States of America. When the British came to the New World, they initially settled on the east coast of North America. Gradually their territory expanded and they gained a significant portion after winning the war with France in 1763. Although Britain already had 13 colonies in America as a result of the victory, the win brought with it several problems that needed to be resolved. One of these was the massive debt incurred during the war. With the national debt came imperial reforms that resulted in discontent at home as well as in the colonies. Colonists were ordered to pay in gold and silver. The paper currency of the colonists, which they wanted to use on a daily basis, was forbidden. Britain gradually increased the colonists' taxes. In 1764, the Sugar Act was passed, which favoured the British and burdened the colonists. This was followed the next year by the passage of the Stamp Act. "As a direct tax on the colonists, the Stamp Act imposed an internal tax on almost every type of printed paper colonists used, including newspapers, legal documents, and playing cards. While the architects of the Stamp Act saw the measure as a way to defray the costs of the British Empire, it nonetheless gave rise to the first major colonial protest against British imperial control as expressed in the famous slogan 'no taxation without representation' " (OpenStax College, 2014, p. 130). This was the colonists' reference to the fact that if no one represented them in the House of Commons, no taxes of any kind could be introduced.

After these disputes over taxation and representation, the situation was calmer for the next few years and the colonists seemed to let the situation run its course. However, a small group of radical colonists emerged and, led by Samuel Adams, demanded a major step, namely independence. The radicals were then joined by the colonial traders. Some of them were involved in the Boston Tea Party, which had a clear message for Britain, especially in its connection with the previous event, the Boston Massacre. After all these events, Britain looked like a cruel tyrannical power in the eyes of the colonists, which was moreover distant and losing its power over them (U.S. Department of State, 2013).

All these events led to the First Continental Congress, which brought together 56 selected representatives. Although their views were often very different, they managed to form the Continental Association, which boycotted the trade. This suddenly put the colonies in a leadership position, which in the eyes of British King George III represented another act of

rebellion. Armed fights between British and American troops ensued, with casualties on both sides. The Second Continental Congress, whose main theme was already independence, managed, despite the opposition of some of those involved, to decide to launch a revolution, of which Colonel George Washington was elected commander. Britain initially believed that the Revolutionary War would not have enough supporters and that the southern colonies in particular would remain loyal to the Crown due to their need for slaves (U.S. Department of State, 2013). However, as it turned out, the colonies were more likely to join the revolution rather than try to avoid it, despite the initial efforts of some to remain loyal to the king.

Over time, another prominent figure emerged among the radicals, the political activist Thomas Paine. On 10th of January, 1776, he published the pamphlet *Common Sense*, which quickly spread and gained popularity among the citizens. Although it was largely political propaganda, Paine marked a clear goal in the pamphlet, which was again nothing less than the independence of the colonies from Britain. After the uproar that was created over this critical piece of work, Thomas Jefferson came along. He, along with John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Robert Livingston and Roger Sherman drafted in June a Declaration of Independence. The Declaration was subsequently debated and, despite some disagreements, was approved on 2nd of July, 1776, and two days later was adopted by all thirteen colonies under the title *The Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America*. The term United States, which has been officially used ever since, was coined by Thomas Paine. The American Revolutionary War then dragged on until 1783 when the Treaty of Paris was signed on the 8th of September (Johnson, 1997). Although this day was considered the end of the war, giving these former British colonies their final independence and sovereignty as the newly formed United States of America, the 4th of July was declared a national holiday. It was, in fact, the day these thirteen colonies officially joined together to form a new independent nation that broke ties with Britain.

3. Evolution, customs and traditions of holidays

The previous chapter described the historical events that occurred against the historical background of each holiday and led to its popularization in the United States. In this chapter, the individual holidays will be discussed in more detail in terms of their overall development, and the basic customs and traditions associated with the individual holidays will also be presented.

3.1. Thanksgiving

The celebration of Thanksgiving has several key points that are associated with this federal holiday. It involves the arrival of a separatist group of Pilgrims from Great Britain who were dissatisfied with the practices of the Church of England. This group experienced the hardships of starvation, disease, and death during their voyage across the ocean on the *Mayflower*. They arrived to what was then the New World in 1620, and even after their arrival, things did not get any easier as they ran out of food and could not grow any more. It seemed that they were not blessed in their new colony of Plymouth, but the following year things took a turn for the better. In March they met a man called Massasoit who was tribal chief of the Wampanoag Indians. Together they agreed to a mutual cooperation whereby the Indians would allow them to remain on their territory in exchange for the Pilgrims helping them protect the territory against other hostile Indian tribes. Since the new settlers had little choice, they agreed to this offer. The chief left with the settlers a group of Indians and a man named Tisquantuman (the Pilgrims then called him Squanto), whose main role was translation and communication between the Indians and the Pilgrims. “He and other Indians taught the settlers how to grow corn, a new food for the colonists, and showed them crops that grew well in the unfamiliar soil. He taught them how to fish and dig for clams, and how to move quietly through the forest and hunt game” (Brenner, Ford, Sullivan, 2007, p. 41).

Working together, the Indians and settlers managed to grow and gather enough food to survive winter. As a result, the Pilgrims decided to prepare an autumn feast for their new friends as a thank you for their help. The first Thanksgiving was held in 1621 and was attended by Massasoit and a group of ninety Indians in addition to the remaining Pilgrims. This is where the tradition of turkey with cranberries and squash dishes first began, and it was the first time they were eating together. In addition, the Indians made popcorn out of corn. The tradition of

giving thanks not only for the harvest was celebrated in the following years and gradually spread throughout the territory (English Language Programs Division, 2001). After the Declaration of Independence of the United States, it was proposed by George Washington that Thanksgiving will be celebrated on 26th of November. Subsequently, in 1870, Thanksgiving was enshrined in the first federal holiday law (Straus, 2014). Finally, in 1941, the celebration of Thanksgiving, as an official federal holiday, was established on the fourth Thursday in November (Brenner, Ford, & Sullivan, 2007). Thus, each year Thanksgiving is celebrated on a different date. This day is proclaimed annually by the President, who also remembers the significance of the historical events that the meeting of the Pilgrims and the Indians had.

The arrival of the Pilgrims on the Mayflower to the New World in 1620, the subsequent founding of Plymouth Plantation, the meeting with the Indians and their communal celebration of the First Thanksgiving in 1621 is a story known not only throughout the United States. However, it is also necessary to mention the fact that this federal holiday is associated with a number of conflicting and controversial opinions regarding what exactly Thanksgiving represents. “Until recently, school textbooks often presented the story of the Pilgrims as one in which the Pilgrims cooked the entire Thanksgiving feast, offering it to the ‘less fortunate’ Indians. In fact, as we know now, the feast was planned in part to thank the Indians for teaching them how to live in the wilderness, and how to acquire and cook those foods. Without the Indians, the first settlers would not have survived” (Brenner, Ford, Sullivan, 2007, p. 41).

Another and much more serious topic causing discussion regarding Thanksgiving is the overall impact of colonization on the Natives. The first problem was that settlers from Europe brought diseases to America that did not exist there before. Since the Indians were not used to these diseases, even an illness such as the common cold could be a deadly threat to them. More serious diseases, which even posed a danger to Europeans, cost many Indigenous people their lives. Another issue was the struggle for territory that belonged to the Indians. The colonists had essentially come to take it, and since their weapons were more advanced, the Indians had little choice. They could either fight to the death or surrender and leave their home lands. In this way the colonists managed to spread throughout the country and in most cases take over territory by force. Many Indians were also abused as in the wars that the colonists then fought among themselves. The final problem was the discrimination and oppression of the Indians, which was in some ways similar to the racism of African Americans and other cultural minorities. Therefore, nowadays, instead of celebrating Thanksgiving, many Native Americans as well as other critics commemorate what is known as the Day of Mourning, which has a rather

sombre mood in comparison to usual Thanksgiving (McKenzie, 2013). The purpose of this day is to remember what the settlers' encounter with the Native Americans meant and how much of an impact the colonization of the Americas had on the Native Americans.

Despite the mentioned controversy and conflicting opinions surrounding Thanksgiving, the holiday is currently considered by most people to be a rather peaceful family event. On this day, people should be especially thankful for everything they have. People travel long distances every year to be able to join their loved ones for the feast. Therefore, in terms of transportation, this day is one of the busiest. Food preparation is also challenging as several courses are served and American families usually have full tables with a variety of dishes. These include turkey as the main dish, side dishes like stuffing, gravy, cranberry sauce and mashed potatoes. For dessert, various types of pie are served – apple, pumpkin, pecan, sweet potato or chocolate. Each family has its own recipes that have been passed down from generation to generation. The same goes for the activities they do that day. In addition to cooking and traveling, watching American football, the Macy's Thanksgiving parade or the presidential turkey pardon are typical. Other than that, many people are resting and recharging for Black Friday, which follows right after Thanksgiving and for Americans represents a kind of beginning of preparations for Christmas (Matt, 2023).

3.2. Christmas

The concept of Christmas can mean two things to people in English-speaking countries, especially those who are Christians. The first is the period between the 24th of December and the 6th of January, which includes the celebrations of Christmas Eve (24th of December), Christmas Day (25th of December), New Year's Eve (31st of December), New Year's Day (1st of January) and Epiphany/Three Kings' Day (6th of January). The second option is to simplify and combine several words for one day: Christmas – mass on Christ's day – celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ – Christmas Day set in English-speaking countries on the 25th of December. The explicit reason why this particular date was chosen as the day of Jesus Christ's birth is not entirely certain (Hillerbrand, 2024). However, the determination of this date as well as the circumstances surrounding the creation of the celebration of Christmas Day has been a long process in the history of Christianity.

At the beginning of the first millennium, the prevailing belief in the Christian world was that people should commemorate the death of martyrs and the significance of their actions. The

celebration of the birth of future martyrs was therefore not a day for believers to commemorate. On the contrary, their martyrdom represented an actual birth-day that should be celebrated (Hillerbrand, 2024). For this reason, the main Christian celebration was not Christmas Day as the day of Jesus' birth, but Easter as the Passion and subsequent Resurrection. It was not until the 4th century AD that it was decided that the birth of Jesus would also be celebrated, specifically on the 25th of December. "It is commonly believed that the church chose this date in an effort to adopt and absorb the traditions of the pagan Saturnalia festival" (The History Channel, 2022). This strategy gave church leaders a greater chance that the celebration of the birth of Jesus would spread more quickly precisely because of the popularity of celebrating pagan holidays. Although it was not clearly established exactly how to celebrate this important day, the church leaders' strategy worked. Celebrations of the feast spread rapidly over the following centuries, replacing pagan celebrations. Consequently, "Roman Catholic churches celebrated the first Christmas mass at midnight, and Protestant churches have increasingly held Christmas candlelight services late on the evening of December 24" (Hillerbrand, 2024).

Christmas, initially called the Feast of the Nativity, spread throughout Europe and came to the UK in the late 6th century. There followed a period of growing popularity in this country until religious Protestant groups began to emerge. The Puritans and Pilgrims were those who protested against the Church of England and condemned their religious practices and customs, including the celebration of Christmas. Then, when these Protestant groups went to the New World in search of a place where they could create a new faith, they brought with them a negative attitude towards all celebrations. This was also true for the celebration of Christmas, which is why in some Puritan colonies the celebration of Christmas Day was forbidden by law and violations of the law were severely punished (The History Channel, 2022). The situation did not begin to change until the 19th century, and this was mainly due to the new wave of immigrants from Europe. In 1870, Christmas Day along with New Year's Day, Independence Day and the aforementioned Thanksgiving Day were declared as the first Federal Holidays in the United States of America (Straus, 2014).

Although Christmas Day is predominantly associated with the Christian religion, Christmas is nowadays considered a holiday for everyone in the U.S. This holiday, along with Thanksgiving, is considered a family event where individual members as well as friends come together. Similar to Thanksgiving celebrations, there is a huge traffic and shopping mall congestion in the country during Christmas. The most important day during this period is clearly the 25th of December, when children unwrap their presents in the morning, which were brought

to them during the night by Santa Claus on his reindeer-drawn sleigh with a large load of presents that his assistants have helped him to make and wrap. The figure of Santa Claus came to the United States thanks to European immigrants whose traditions of celebrating Christmas mixed after their arrival in the New World. With these immigrants came characters like Saint Nicholas and Father Christmas, who gifted children. The Norse God Odin added to these characters the ability to fly. Eventually, Sinter Claas, which is the Dutch name for Father Christmas, inspired the creation of a name for the person who gives gifts in the U.S. today, which is the aforementioned Santa Claus (English Language Programs Division, 2001). Gradually, a children's story was created about Santa Claus living at the North Pole and children writing him a letter mentioning what they would like for Christmas. On the evening of Christmas Eve, Santa gives out presents, which the children open on Christmas Day morning.

The tradition of giving gifts is not only for children, but adults also give gifts to each other. Recently, however, many people have been pointing out that Christmas is not what it originally was and is over-commercialized. "Often referred to as the Paradox of Christmas, materialism and commercialism are heightened during the holiday season, which is paradoxical since the Christian religion preaches anti materialistic ideals" (Leone, 2011, p. 1). Although it used to be an unofficial custom that the preparation for Christmas would begin after Thanksgiving, at the end of November, in recent years retailers have been trying to start advertising and displaying Christmas products as early as October. In addition, children want more and more presents and adults spend a lot of money on these presents. The same is true of Christmas decorations, which tend to be more extensive every year, and neighbours often compete with each other to decorate the house more spectacularly. Therefore, it can sometimes seem that the simplicity and plainness of Christmas, which was mainly associated with the celebration of reuniting family and friends, is slowly disappearing (Leone, 2011). Fortunately, there are also traditions that recall the modesty with which Christmas originally began. These are, for example, the Christmas Cards that people send to each other wishing them well not only on Christmas Day but also for the whole New Year. Volunteers also go out to cook and distribute food for people in need, and each year money is collected for the needy in hospitals or toys for children in orphanages.

3.3. Halloween

The celebration of Halloween, which falls on October 31, has its origins with the Celts and its history predates the beginning of celebration of Christmas Day. The Celts referred to this holiday as Samhain. They believed that this day brought the end of summer/light/life and the beginning of winter/dark/death, and that evil spirits could come to Earth. For this reason, bonfires were lit and people wore various types of usually scary masks so that these evil spirits would not recognize them, and the Celts would chase them away with their costumes. With the advent of Christianity came the effort not to practice non-Christian celebrations, but at the same time it was not entirely possible to forbid people from celebrating. Therefore, as with the celebration of Christmas, Christians came up with an analogy of Samhain that would more closely match their ideals. The 1st of November was proclaimed as All Saints' Day, commemorating all saints and martyrs. Subsequently, the 2nd of November was to commemorate the souls of all those who were no longer among the living and was named All Souls Day. "All Saints' Day later became known as All Hallows' Day, and the previous day, October 31, became known as All Hallows' Eve, then later, Halloween" (Pagan, 2018). Thus, Halloween has survived all attempts by the Christian Church to replace this holiday and has continued to be celebrated. Over time, the newly created form of Samhain was first celebrated as Halloween, especially in Ireland. After the Irish experienced one of the biggest tragedies in their country's history in 1845 in the form of the Great Famine, around one million people decided to immigrate to the United States. In their new homeland, Halloween spread and gained such popularity that Americans essentially appropriated it. Although Halloween has never been declared as a federal holiday, it can certainly be classified as a special occasion, which is currently enjoying immense popularity across the U.S.

The main tradition of Halloween is dressing up in masks and going from house to house for trick-or-treating. This tradition is said to date back to the 16th century, when not only children but also poor adults in England would go and ask for food or money on All Souls' Day. This custom was later practiced only by children and eventually took its current form in the United States, where it merged with a similar tradition called Belsnickling, brought by immigrants from Germany. In the U.S., trick-or-treating became hugely popular especially after World War II, when candy was once again plentiful. In addition, it was much easier for households to give wrapped candy to children than, for example, nuts or fruit, as had been the case before the war. This is why each year in the U.S., sales of candy, especially chocolate candy, are the highest of any time of the year during Halloween. It is not only candy sellers

who have seen an increase in sales, but also costume manufacturers. As the emerging consumer society was no longer satisfied with the ordinary costumes that represented the ghosts of the original Samhain celebrations, suits of characters from television began to be produced on a huge scale (Martin, 2022). Nowadays, Halloween is no longer about simple spooky costumes to ward off evil spirits, but about the most elaborate costume portraying popular characters, superheroes or celebrities. Halloween celebrations are sometimes similarly criticized as Christmas celebrations. For both holidays are slowly losing their simplicity and the main reason why people started celebrating them in the first place. Consumer-oriented companies have made them just another opportunity for big profits. Despite the occasional criticism, Halloween retains its popularity and is celebrated annually, including the traditional symbols that often originated in the formal celebrations.

In addition to trick-or-treating, Halloween symbols include a witch with a flying broom. This character was brought into Halloween more from Christianity, where it was previously believed that some women were just witches who were connected to the devil. Black cats were also associated with this connection as witches' helpers. Evil spirits, which in the original Samhain featured as dangerous figures that people feared and tried to drive away, have been replaced by ghosts, skeletons, vampires, and goblins living in haunted houses. The purely American thing they added to Halloween was Dracula and bats. The last very important symbol is the Jack-O-Lantern. Legend has it that "a man named Jack who, after dying, could not get into either heaven or hell. He was doomed to walk the Earth in search of a final resting place. Jack became known as 'Jack of the Lantern', which, over time, became abbreviated to 'Jack-O-Lantern' " (Amin, 2019, p. 5). Lantern was added to his name because when he walked the earth, he lit his way with a lantern. The Irish and Scots began to make their own Jack-O-Lanterns based on this legend. These were hollowed out turnips or potatoes with scary faces. In England, on the other hand, they used beets. After Halloween spread to the U.S., Americans began making their own version of the Jack-O-Lantern, which was made from pumpkins. A candle was inserted into the hollowed out pumpkin to illuminate the ghostly face and to ward off any monsters (Amin, 2019). Although nowadays Halloween does not have as much of a gloomy and scary atmosphere as it originally had, it is still the darkest and scariest holiday of the year.

3.4. Independence Day

The Fourth of July, 4th of July or July 4th are colloquialisms that are all used in written form to refer to Independence Day of the United States of America. On this day, Americans commemorate the event when the independence of the 13 American colonies over Britain was first declared and the newly formed nation was proclaimed under the official name of the United States of America. This happened in 1776 and from the following year the holiday was regularly celebrated. The American colonists had come a long way toward independence, which included dissatisfaction with taxation from England and the rule of King George III, the Boston Massacre and the Boston Tea Party, and the beginning of the American Revolutionary War, known as the American War of Independence, which began in 1775. The Revolutionary War ended on the 3rd of September, 1783, and that same year the Independence celebrations were officially declared (English Language Programs Division, 2001). Independence Day was then proclaimed in 1870, along with New Year's Day, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day as the first federal holiday for federal employees in the District of Columbia (Straus, 2014). For the entire country, Independence Day was recognized by Congress as an official federal legal holiday in 1941 (English Language Programs Division, 2001). In terms of historical events, this day is one of the most important celebrations of the year that is properly enjoyed by the American people.

The manner in which this day would be commemorated and celebrated was predicted by John Adams, who was, among others, the first of those who signed the Declaration of Independence in 1776, and later became President of the United States of America. In his letter he wrote: "The Second Day of July 1776, will be the most memorable Epocha, in the History of America. – I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated, by succeeding Generations, as the great anniversary Festival. It ought to be commemorated, as the Day of Deliverance by Solemn Acts of Devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be Solemnized with Pomp and Parade with Shrews, Games, Sports, Guns, Bells, Bonfires and Illuminations from one End of this Continent to the other from this Time forward forever more" (Adams, 1776). Except for the date of the Independence Day celebration, Adams was right. Over time, guns were abandoned because their use during celebrations often caused fatal injuries. Also, fireworks were restricted and the phrase 'A Safe and Sane Fourth' is often associated with their use. Today, in many areas, only small fireworks are allowed for personal use. The large fireworks that can be seen in towns and cities each year are always organised under the supervision of experienced pyrotechnists. In addition to the fireworks, which are usually after dark, parades are held during the day, often featuring costumes of the 'founding fathers' who first signed the Declaration of Independence

(Brenner, Ford, & Sullivan, 2007). Last but not least, the day is associated with picnics where families and friends gather, often dressed in blue, white, and red as a symbol of the national colours.

4. Methodology of Teaching

English language is an independent subject in the educational process, for the successful acquisition of which teachers must know specific methods and theories of teaching. Although the teaching of the language is very different from, for example, the teaching of mathematics or biology, it is based on the common educational objectives developed by Benjamin Bloom in 1956. His taxonomy contains a total of three domains of learning objectives namely cognitive, affective and psychomotor (Gershon, 2018). Furthermore, we can also see Bloom's revised taxonomy in schools, which was developed by David Krathwohl. He modifies learning objectives into two dimensions – the cognitive process dimension and the knowledge dimension (Krathwohl, 2001). Although there are differences in both taxonomies, currently the findings of Bloom and Krathwohl are still used in the Czech education system and teachers should draw on them when preparing for teaching. They then proceed according to the subject they are going to teach, which in this case is the English language.

4.1. Teaching English Language

According to Penny Ur's *A Course in Language Teaching* (1996, p. 175), “the content of language courses may be divided into two components: the language itself (its pronunciation, grammar, how to read it, etc.), and the ideas, or subject matter which the language is used to express.” If we proceed from this division, we can name the first part of language teaching as linguistic and the second as non-linguistic. Since the topic of this thesis is more focused on the non-linguistic topic, the teaching of history and culture will be described in more detail in the following chapter. However, even while working with non-linguistic topics in English language teaching, it is possible to engage the linguistic part, namely the four skills of language proficiency – speaking, listening, writing, and reading. These language skills can then be divided into two parts, namely receptive skills and productive skills. As the name suggests, receptive skills are mainly about receiving language and therefore include listening and reading. Since these skills require less creativity on the part of the learners, we refer to them more as passive skills. On the other hand, there are productive skills, which are about language production and are therefore considered active skills. These include writing and speaking (Harmer 2007). Although these skills are used together in everyday life by native speakers and not separately, the following paragraphs describe how to teach each skill.

There are two types of tasks for teaching receptive skills (listening and reading). “Type 1 tasks are those where we get learners to read or listen for some general understanding, rather than asking them to pick out details or get involved in a refined search of the text. Type 2 tasks, on the other hand, are those where we get learners to look at the text in considerably more detail, perhaps for specific information or for language points” (Harmer, 2007, p. 270). The procedure for the first type of tasks is as follows. The teacher first introduces the topic and gives instructions about the text or recording that the learners will be working with. This is followed by the learners’ work itself, at the end of which they can discuss the results with their classmates and only then with the teacher. Or after the learners’ work is finished, the teacher’s feedback follows. The feedback may or may not be followed by some follow-up activities. If the teacher wants to use the type 2 task mentioned above, teacher’s feedback is followed by more detailed learner work with the text/recording (Harmer, 2007).

In her book, Penny Ur (1996, p. 113/114) describes four types of listening activities that can be used with learners during a lesson. These are no overt response, short responses, longer responses, and extended responses. The types vary in the range of learners’ responses depending on the activity. For the reading activities, we can then encounter a text comprehension and different types of questions that build on the text, or other activities related to the information contained in the text.

Teaching productive skills (writing and speaking) has a similar sequence of activities that the teacher and learners go through. It all starts with an introduction to the topic and the assignment on which the learners will work. After the learners start working on the task, the teacher’s job is to monitor their work and provide them with the necessary feedback after the activity is completed. Finally, the teacher can decide whether to stop the activity completely or prepare follow-up activities. There is also a third option and that is re-setting of task. (Harmer, 2007)

The different activities that we can see in learners’ writing can be divided into three groups. The first group is writing as a means. In this group, “writing is simply used either as a means of getting the learners to attend to and practice a particular language point, or – even more frequently – as a convenient method of testing it” (Ur, 1996, p. 162). In the second group, writing as an end, learners focus more on “the writing itself. At the ‘micro’ level they practice specific written forms at the level of word or sentence (handwriting or typing, spelling, punctuation); at the ‘macro’ level the emphasis is on content and organization” (Ur, 1996, p. 162). The last group of activities is writing as both means and end, which actually combines

the previous two groups. As for speaking activities, there is a huge variety of them. The main activity used for practicing speaking is working in pairs or groups. It can be a discussion on the specific topic, role play, simulations, debates, and so on. Then, the teacher can use a picture description or a learner presentation as individual speaking practice in the classroom (Ur, 1996). There are no limits in the choice of activities, but the rule should always be that the activities are alternated and not monotonous for the learners.

4.2. Teaching History and Culture

Every language is a symbol of a nation that has a long evolution. Therefore, it is very important for teachers to focus not only on the language itself but also on its history and culture when teaching languages. If teachers focus on teaching the language in their classes and also mention aspects related to the people themselves, it is then possible to achieve a greater understanding of the culture by the learners.

Since most of the holidays celebrated have some origin in the past, it is necessary to mention not only the cultural background but also the historical context while teaching. History is what shapes the identity of nations, shows us the development of society and helps us learn from mistakes. (Bourdillon, 2006). Moreover, English language teaching can be linked to the teaching of history itself in cross-curricular teaching and learning. In this way, learners connect knowledge from multiple subjects, which is nowadays considered as one of the ways to teach, and many textbooks already respond to this trend and incorporate cross-curricular relationships in their content.

As far as culture is concerned, it can also be considered extremely necessary in the context of foreign language teaching. In fact, the term culture can be broadly understood as everything that a given nation has created during its existence. It can be about traditions, customs, history, art and so on. The relationship between language and culture cannot be denied. For this reason, teachers should not only focus on the language aspect of teaching. Another fact is that although the United States were influenced by the culture of the United Kingdom and still belongs together with Australia to the Inner Circle of English, they managed to create many cultural peculiarities after their independence (Listuen, 2017). One of the best ways to expose learners to the culture in any language taught is to introduce them to the most important holidays

celebrated in a particular country. In this way, learners can gain insight into both history and cultural curiosities.

The teaching of history and culture is closely related to learners' communicative competence, which is currently considered an ideal educational goal in foreign language teaching. Communicative competence has a total of four judgements. "The first judgment refers to the ability to produce sentences which are grammatical. The second judgment refers to the ability to produce sentences which are feasible or psychologically acceptable. The third judgment refers to the ability to use correct forms of language in a specific socio-cultural context. The fourth judgment is about the occurrences of the linguistic forms" (Sun, 2013, p. 1). Based on this division, teachers can use communicative language teaching, which aims precisely at achieving communicative competence in all four judgments. Next, Lili Dai in her paper *Practical Techniques for Culture-based Language Teaching in the EFL Classroom* (2013) presents some tips on how to create lessons containing cultural facts that will be beneficial to learners. These include alternating the sources from which the teacher and learners draw. Also using different activities so that the lessons are not monotonous and finally engaging the learners themselves including emphasizing positive classroom interactions. If a teacher uses these tips when teaching a language, they can provide interesting lessons that will increase learners' interest in the language and culture.

5. Pedagogical research methodology

Before starting the practical part of this thesis, it is necessary to define some basic concepts related to (pedagogical) research methodology. The subchapters found in this chapter serve as a connecting bridge between the theoretical part and the practical part.

5.1. Methods of science

The first concept, which represents the basic pillar of the scheme developed here, is the word science. There is no single definition that can capture the whole concept. However, more important than the definition of the term itself is what science as such brings us. The process of scientific research brings important knowledge, the results of which are constantly moving our humanity forward. In order to reach these conclusions, science uses the knowledge of methodology, which deals with the study of methods. It is possible to move from methodology itself to the methodology of pedagogy, which combines knowledge from psychological and pedagogical research (Skutil, 2011). Pedagogical research is central to this thesis, as the practical part focuses on research in educational reality.

In order to arrive at the conclusions of research, it is not enough to establish the theory and hypotheses, but also to verify their truth or falsity. Research methods can be divided into two categories/types. The first type is quantitative research. “Quantitative methods look to quantify data and generalise results from a sample of the population of interest. They may look to measure the incidence of various views and opinions in a chosen sample for example or aggregate results” (MacDonald and Headlam, 2014, p. 8). On the other hand, “qualitative methods provide insights into the setting of a problem, generating ideas and/or hypotheses” (MacDonald and Headlam, 2014, p. 8). If a researcher uses both quantitative and qualitative methods, we can talk about mixed methods research.

5.2. Questionnaire

In this thesis, specifically in its practical part, two basic data collection methods will be used and therefore will also be described in detail. The first research method is a questionnaire. Before starting to design the questionnaire itself, several factors need to be taken into account. The author of the questionnaire must determine what the purpose of the research is, who will

represent the study sample, what types of questions and measurements will be used, and the author must also create the basic research construct. This initial stage is followed by the creation of the questionnaire. The types of questions the researcher may use are as follows:

- Closed/Closed-ended questions, which are questions that have a fixed question as well as a list of answers. The respondents then select one or more answers from these, but does not add any of their own. Examples of closed questions include dichotomous questions, where the respondents choose from two possible answers. Often there are Yes/No or True/False questions. In contrast, multiple choice questions offer several possible answers. Then, rating scales exist, where the respondents rate how much they (dis)agree with the question. Finally, we can find constant sum questions, where the respondents distribute points to a list of offered items. In the category of closed questions we could also include rank ordering or ratio data questions (Cohen, 2007).
- Open/Open-ended questions also have a fixed question, but the respondents answer freely. This means that they do not choose from the given options, but answers at their own discretion. Very often these questions start with the interrogative words how, what, which, when, why, who or where. Simple answers that begin in this way can be referred to as classical text questions. Then there are questions in which the respondents fill in missing text and complete unfinished sentences. The last type are matrix questions, where multiple-choice questions are combined with the respondents' own text (Cohen, 2007).

Since there are many types of questions, mixed question items that combine two or more types of closed and open questions are very often developed. As a result, it is not crucial whether questions from one or the other category were used in the questionnaire, but whether they reliably and effectively served to achieve the most accurate result.

5.3. Interview

The second core research method for this thesis is the interview. The interview involves questions and answers, just like a questionnaire. However, in contrast to the questionnaire, the interview is based on oral communication where the researcher asks the respondents. An interview can take three forms in total. The first type is the structured interview, where the researcher has questions prepared in advance and follows them exactly during the interview. The second form is the unstructured interview, where the research topic is known but the

researcher creates and modifies the questions freely according to the situation and need. The researcher can therefore ask for details or completely change the direction of the discussion. The third and final type is the semi-structured interview, which is the result of a combination of structured and unstructured interviews. In a semi-structured interview, there are questions that have been prepared in advance, but also questions that the researcher asks during the interview and in relation to the specific situation (Emanovský, 2013).

6. Research at the lower secondary school

Following the findings in the theoretical part of this thesis, the practical part can be carried out, which will include a total of three parts of the research. The first part of the research is a questionnaire that was created for English language pupils who are currently studying at a lower secondary school. The questionnaire was designed to assess the pupils' knowledge of U.S. history and U.S. culture from their English classes, what holidays celebrated in the U.S. they know, and finally if they would like to learn more about these three topics. The second part of the research is an interview for English language teachers. The purpose of the interview was to find out to what extent the teachers were involved in teaching U.S. history and U.S. culture, holidays celebrated in the U.S., and finally what their opinion is about teaching these topics in each class. The last part of the research was lesson plans created in part from pupils' and teachers' responses, as well as the author's knowledge and assumptions about the curriculum covered in lower secondary schools.

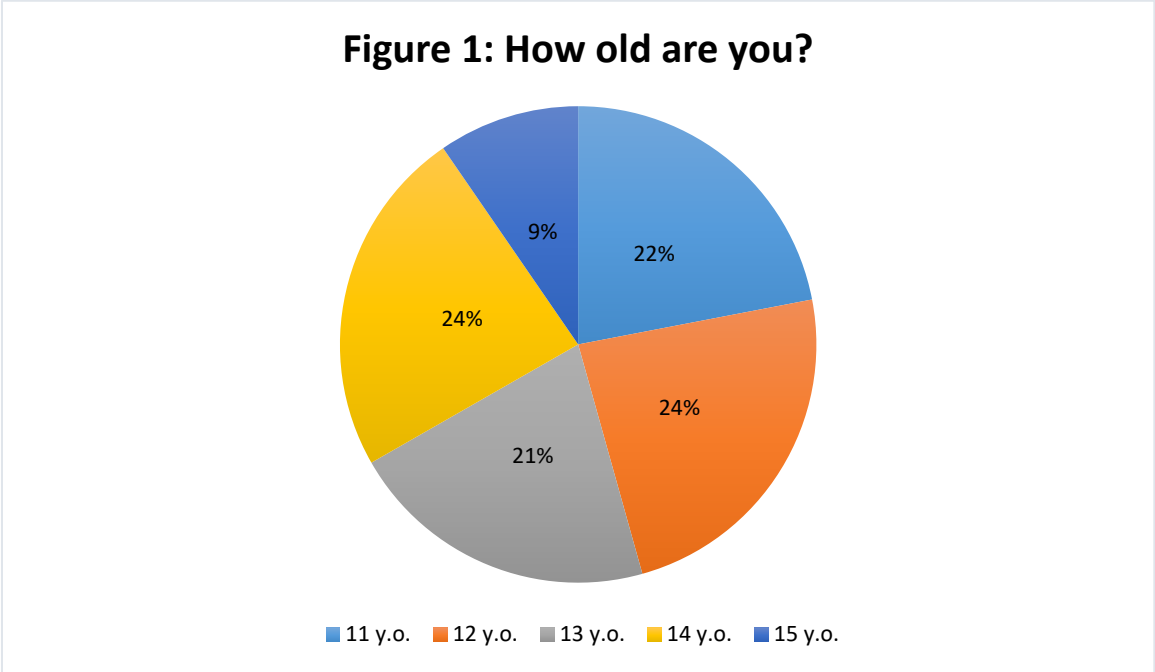
6.1. Structure of the questionnaire

The research was conducted during the second teaching practice at ZŠ a MŠ Jiráskovo náměstí in Hradec Králové in October and November 2023. The pupils who participated in the research were in grades 6 – 9 at a lower secondary school at the time of completing the questionnaire. The questionnaire was created using Google Forms and was distributed online via a shared QR code. Each class received an identical questionnaire. Although the research was conducted in the context of English language teaching, the questions were prepared in Czech for the pupils to avoid possible misunderstanding. The questionnaire in Czech, exactly as it was shared with the pupils for completion, can be found in the *Appendices*. Here in the text is its English version of asked questions so as not to interfere with the flow of the work. It is also important to note that some practical notes were provided to the pupils before the questionnaire itself was distributed. First, it was explained how they were to understand the difference between federal and non-federal holidays. Then pupils were briefly reminded of how each holiday is celebrated and what all goes with it, so as not to confuse the information. The last important point was to emphasise that questions 7 – 9 were not only about knowledge of the terms (i.e. whether pupils know that Christmas in Czech means Vánoce), but whether pupils knew these holidays from their English lessons and had at least some knowledge of them. Then the questionnaire itself was distributed among the pupils and they were asked to fill it in.

6.2. Results of the questionnaire

Question 1: How old are you?

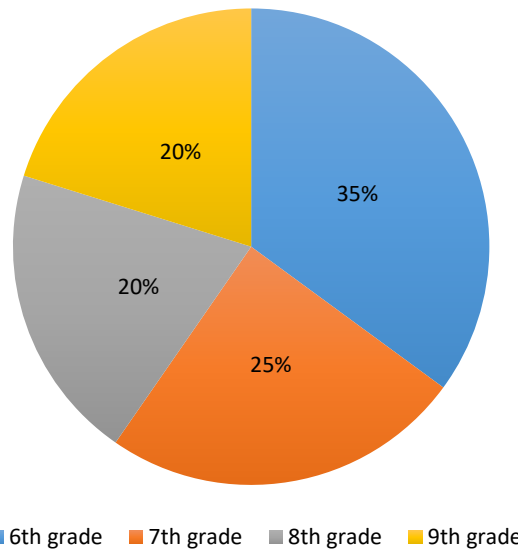
A total of 114 pupils answered the questionnaire. All questions except Figure 9 were compulsory. As can be seen in the first graph, the age of the pupils ranged from 11 to 15 years. Pupils who were 15 years old represented the smallest number of respondents, while the other age groups were fairly evenly distributed.



Question 2: What grade are you in?

The second question focused on what grade the pupils were currently in. Since all who responded were in sixth, seventh, eighth or ninth grade, the requirement that respondents have to be in lower secondary school at the time of answering the questionnaire was adhered to. Thus, the first two Figures can be referred to as control questions confirming correctness of the sample of respondents.

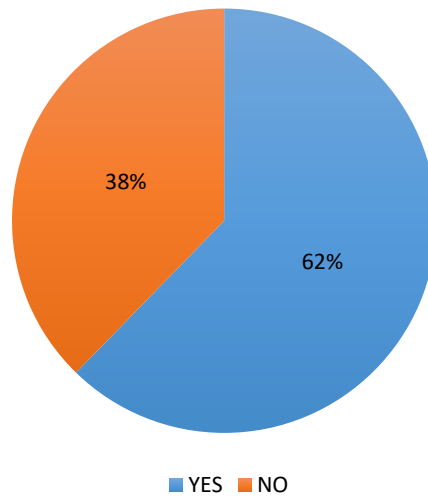
Figure 2: What grade are you in?



Question 3: Have you ever learned anything about U.S. history in your English class?

Question number 3 focuses on pupils' knowledge or at least awareness of history of the United States from their English language classes. When asked *Have you ever learned anything about U.S. history in your English class*, 38 percent of pupils answered "NO" and 62 percent answered "YES". The pupils who answered "NO" could have done so for several reasons. It could have been because they were in a lower grade level and therefore the topic may not have been covered yet. The second reason could be that the teacher who teaches English in their classes does not deal with this issue at all. These reasons may also be linked, or there may be other reasons that are not related to the age of pupils or the teacher itself. Conversely, respondents who answered "YES" may have had the same reason for their answer as those who answered "NO", only in the opposite sense. That is, they are in a higher grade and have already discussed the topic or their teacher has already lectured to them about U.S. history.

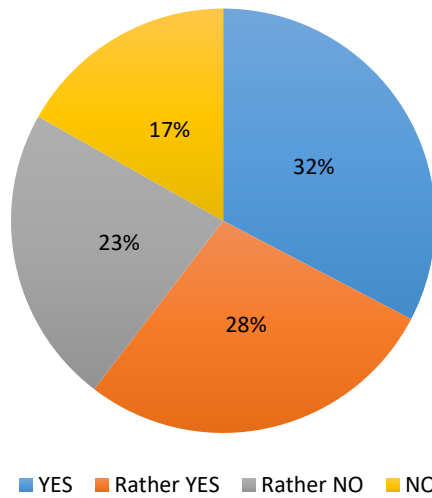
Figure 3: Have you ever learned anything about U.S. history in your English class?



Question 4: Would you like to learn more about U.S. history in your English classes?

The fourth question focuses on pupils' willingness to learn something new or just more information about the history of the United States in their English language classes. 32 percent of respondents answered "YES" and 28 percent answered "Rather YES". Conversely, 23 percent of respondents answered "Rather NO" and 17 percent "NO". This indicates that more than half of the pupils would (rather) like to learn more about U.S. history, showing a positive attitude toward this topic. Pupils who answered negatively may have several reasons for their response, such as a lack of interest in U.S. history or a lack of interest in history in general.

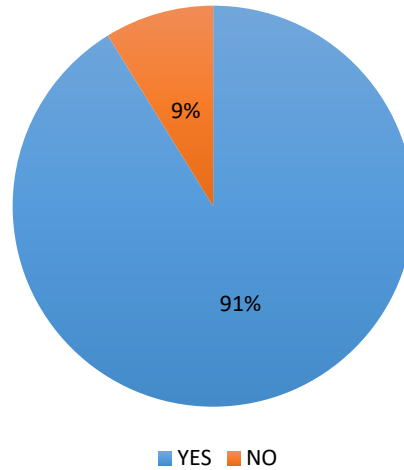
Figure 4: Would you like to learn more about U.S. history in your English classes?



Question 5: Have you ever learned about the culture, traditions and customs of the USA in your English classes?

Figure 5 focuses on knowledge or at least awareness of the culture of the United States. When asked *Have you ever learned about the culture, traditions and customs of the USA in your English classes*, 91 percent of pupils answered “YES” and 9 percent answered “NO”. Compared to question 3 on pupils’ knowledge of U.S. history from their English language classes, many more pupils responded positively. Again, the reason for their responses may be because they are in a higher grade or their teacher usually discusses this topic in their English classes. However, it is a good finding that majority of the pupils have at least some awareness of this topic.

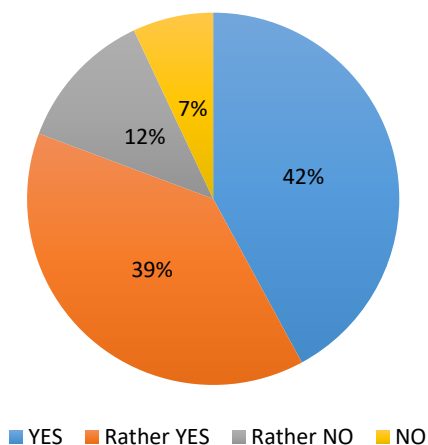
Figure 5: Have you ever learned about the culture, traditions and customs of the USA in your English classes?



Question 6: Would you like to learn more about the culture, traditions and customs of the USA in your English classes?

Question number 6 asks if pupils are interested in learning more about the culture, traditions, and customs that are typical for the United States in their English language classes. 43 percent of respondents answered “YES” and 39 percent answered “Rather YES”. Conversely, 12 percent of respondents answered “Rather NO” and 7 percent answered “NO”. A positive result can be drawn from these responses in that more than three-quarters of the pupils are (rather) interested in learning more about this topic. Conversely, less than one-fifth of the pupils are (rather) not interested in this topic, which may be due to, for example, a lack of interest in the culture and traditions of another country or a lack of interest in the culture of the USA.

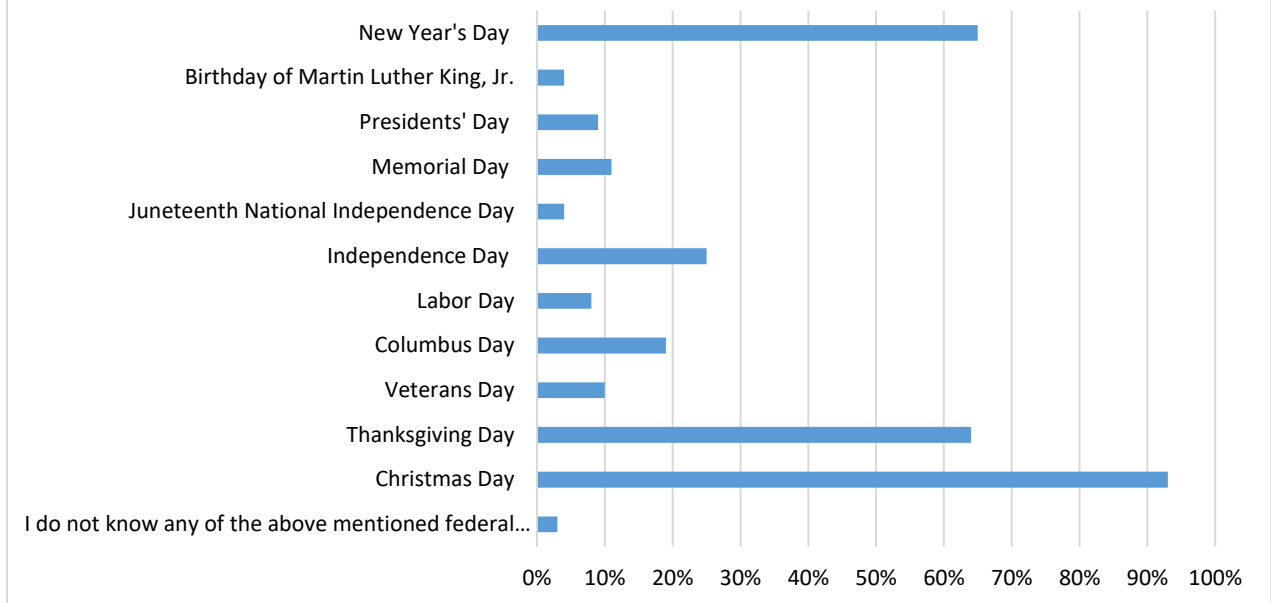
Figure 6: Would you like to learn more about the culture, traditions and customs of the USA in your English classes?



Question 7: Have you ever learned about any of the following federal U.S. holidays in your English lessons?

The seventh question focused on eleven federal holidays celebrated in the U.S. The pupils were asked to select all the holidays they have learned about in their English language classes. More than one answer could be selected in this question. The holiday that most pupils knew from their English classes was Christmas Day. A total of 93 percent of the respondents ticked this holiday in the questionnaire. Next in order of highest to lowest number of votes were New Year's Day with 65 percent, Thanksgiving Day with 64 percent, Independence Day with 25 percent, Columbus Day with 19 percent, Memorial Day with 11 percent, Veterans Day with 10 percent, Presidents' Day with 9 percent, Labor Day with 8 percent, Juneteenth National Independence Day and Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. with 4 percent. Pupils were also given the option of responding that they did not know any of the above mentioned holidays from their English classes. This response was chosen by 3 percent of respondents. Thus, as can be seen, Christmas Day, New Year's Day, and Thanksgiving Day are the three holidays that a large majority of pupils at this school are familiar with.

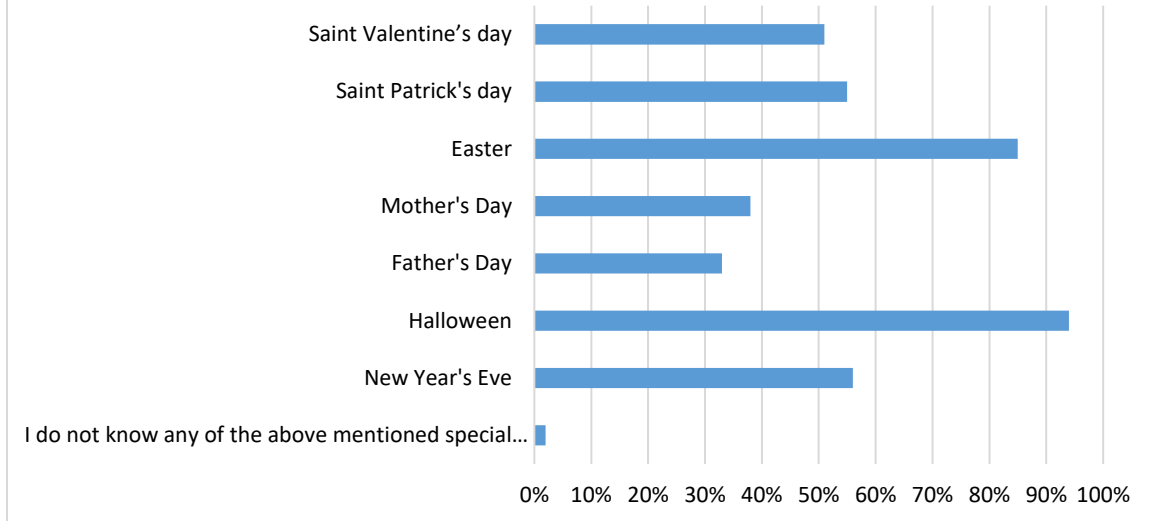
Figure 7: Have you ever learned about any of the following federal U.S. holidays in your English lessons?



Question 8: Have you ever learned about any of the following special occasions celebrated in the USA in your English classes?

Figure 8 focused on other special occasions celebrated in the USA, which were chosen by the author. The pupils were asked to select all the holidays they have learned about in their English language classes. More than one answer could be selected for this question. Halloween received the most votes, with 94 percent. Next in order of highest number of votes to lowest number was Easter with 85 percent, New Year's Eve with 56 percent, Saint Patrick's Day with 55 percent, Saint Valentine's Day with 51 percent, Mother's Day with 38 percent and Father's Day with 33 percent. In contrast to the previous question, none of the pupils' responses fell below 30 percent except that pupils from English classes did not know any of the above holidays. This response had 2 percent. The answers indicate that Halloween and Easter are known by the majority of pupils at this school.

Figure 8: Have you ever learned about any of the following special occasions celebrated in the USA in your English classes?



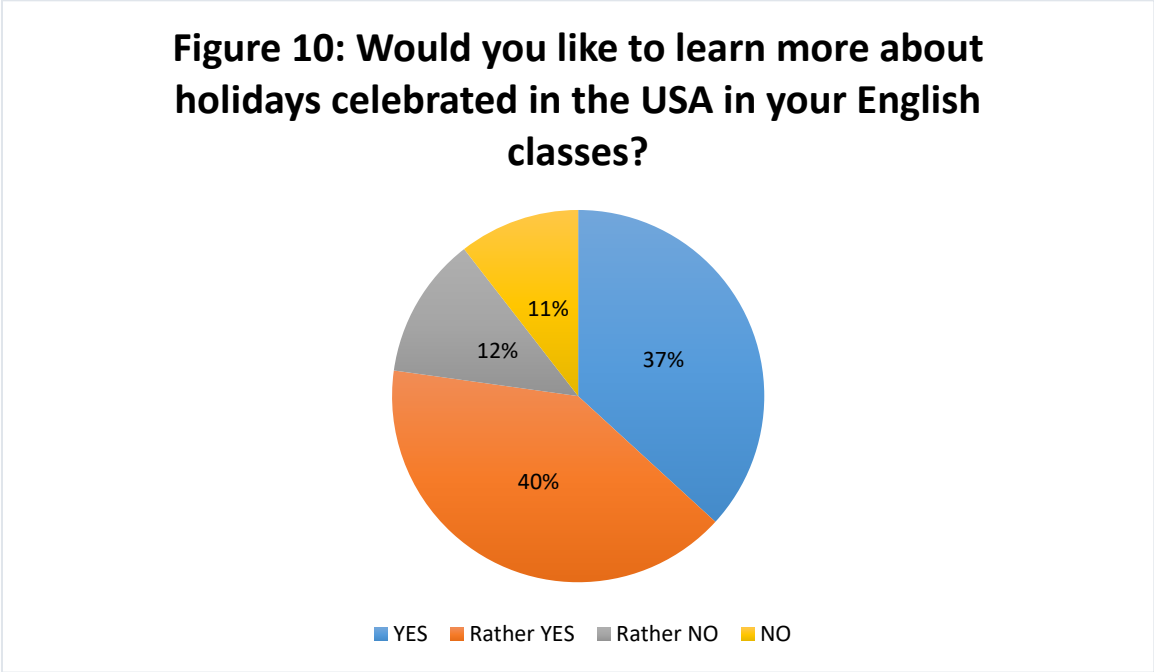
Question 9: If you know of any other holidays that are celebrated in the USA but were not mentioned in the previous questions, list their names here.

Question number 9 was optional, and although a total of 14 responses were received, none of them were relevant. In fact, the pupils forgot the fact that this question was not compulsory and either sent a blank answer or answered “No”, “I do not know”, “I do not know any other holiday”, or “I cannot remember”.

Question 10: Would you like to learn more about holidays celebrated in the USA in your English classes?

The last question focused on whether pupils would like to learn more about holidays celebrated in the United States in their English language classes. 37 percent of respondents answered “YES” and 40 percent answered “Rather YES”. Conversely, 12 percent answered “Rather NO” and 11 percent answered “NO”. From these responses, a similar result to question 6 can be inferred, namely that pupils’ attitude toward new information about holidays celebrated

in the United States is quite positive. This is probably because the questions are similar and because the celebration of each holiday can be classified as a subcategory of culture.



6.3. Summary of the results of the questionnaire

The questionnaire for lower secondary school pupils can be divided into three areas of interest. The first one was to find out whether the respondents are really lower secondary school pupils, that is, whether they are in grades 6 to 9, and whether their age corresponds to this category. As it turned out, all respondents met this requirement. The second part was to determine their knowledge regarding the United States of America that they had acquired during their English language classes. Specifically, the topics covered were history, culture, traditions, customs, federal holidays, and special occasions of the United States. The responses indicated that the pupils knew more about culture, traditions, and customs than they did about history. Then from the list of federal holidays, they were most familiar with Christmas Day and from the list of special occasions they were most familiar with Halloween. The last part was the willingness or possible interest in more information that pupils could receive in their English classes. Interest in United States history was slightly lower than interest in culture, traditions, and customs. Conversely, interest in more information on individual holidays celebrated in the U.S. was essentially comparable to interest in culture, traditions, and customs.

7. Research among teachers

The second part of the research, which follows the questionnaire designed for lower secondary school pupils, is a research focused on teachers teaching English language especially in lower secondary school.

7.1. Structure of the interview

The interview for the research part of this thesis were conducted during the teaching practice that took place in October and November 2023 at ZŠ a MŠ Jiráskovo náměstí in Hradec Králové. The interviews were conducted with three teachers who are full-time employees at this school. All of them have experience teaching pupils in grades 6 – 9 at a lower secondary school. Since all these three teachers have been teaching English for a long time, three other teachers from different schools who have only been teaching English at a lower secondary school for a short time were asked to be interviewed. This was in order to find out, in particular, how the generation of new teachers felt about teaching history, culture, and holidays celebrated in the U.S. in English classes. Teachers were then asked each of the following seven questions.

1.) How long have you been teaching English?

2.) Do you deal with U.S. history in your English language classes? If yes, to what extent; if no, why not.

3.) Do you deal with U.S. culture, traditions, and customs in your English language classes? If yes, to what extent; if no, why.

4.) Do you discuss any of the following federal holidays celebrated in the U.S. in your English language classes? If yes, which one and in what way; if none, why not.

- New Year's Day
- Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr.

- Presidents' Day
- Memorial Day
- Juneteenth National Independence Day
- Independence Day
- Labor Day
- Columbus Day
- Veterans Day
- Thanksgiving Day
- Christmas Day

5.) Do you discuss any of the following special occasions celebrated in the U.S. in your English language classes? If yes, which one and in what way; if none, why not.

- Saint Valentine's day
- Saint Patrick's day
- Easter
- Mother's Day
- Father's Day
- Halloween
- New Year's Eve

6.) Can you think of any other holidays celebrated in the U.S. that are not mentioned in the questions above but you mention in your English classes?

7.) Do you think it is important to cover the history, culture and holidays celebrated in the U.S. in English language classes?

7.2. Results of the interview

1.) How long have you been teaching English?

Teacher 1:

“I have been teaching English for 20 years.”

Teacher 2:

“I have been teaching English for 32 years.”

Teacher 3:

“I have been teaching English for 17 years.”

Teacher 4:

“It is my first year teaching English.”

Teacher 5:

“It is my first year teaching English.”

Teacher 6:

“It is my first year teaching English.”

2.) Do you deal with U.S. history in your English language classes? If yes, to what extent; if no, why not.

Teacher 1:

“Since we teach British English we tend to focus on UK history, so we do not learn that much about American history.”

Teacher 2:

“I do not usually deal with the history of the United States. If pupils have an article in a magazine on historical facts about Great Britain, we sometimes compare these facts with the USA or add some information. Therefore, we mention some facts occasionally, but I do not talk about the history of the United States by myself.”

Teacher 3:

“We do not really deal with the history of the United States. At the end of each unit we have a short text about history and we usually discuss it, but we do not focus specifically on U.S. history.”

Teacher 4:

“I have not yet devoted myself to the history of the United States of America as a separate subject. There has not been room for it yet, but I think that in the future I would definitely like to include some U.S. historical facts in my teaching. Either this information will be in the materials we work with or I would prepare some extra materials for the pupils.”

Teacher 5:

“Because of my short time as an English teacher, I did not have many opportunities to do so. In the future, however, I plan to incorporate U.S. history into my teaching if the information are useful and relevant to the topic. For example, Thanksgiving, the settlement of America, the Civil War, the World Wars, and so on. We will also discuss these topics with pupils through cross-curricular topics such as current world events so that pupils know the context and are up to date on what is happening in the world right now.”

Teacher 6:

“We only dealt with U.S. history in English classes on a marginal basis. We specifically dealt with the discovery of America and the founding of the United States, but only briefly.”

3.) Do you deal with U.S. culture, traditions, and customs in your English language classes? If yes, to what extent; if no, why.

Teacher 1:

“We deal a lot with the culture, traditions and customs of the United Kingdom. When it comes to the United States of America, we always discuss it only peripherally. However, there is always a little mention when we compare the difference between the UK and the USA.”

Teacher 2:

“We do not discuss the culture, traditions and customs of the United States as a separate topic, but we do compare them with British culture. However, every year we have a rector from the university come to our school from the U.S. with two or three teachers, and they go around the school, visit each class and give short lectures to the pupils about their culture.”

Teacher 3:

“Yes, we do. Pupils are given monthly magazines which sometimes have articles focusing on this topic. We then read the articles together or the pupils read them independently at home and then discuss them. Sometimes we even create projects. In addition to working with the magazines, I sometimes show the pupils photos or videos from the internet so that they have additional information and know what the topic is about. In the textbooks, this topic is also mentioned, but very rarely.”

Teacher 4:

“I have a similar situation with U.S. culture, traditions, and customs as with history, where I have not paid much attention to this topic yet. However, I think it is definitely good to mention some basic information, perhaps in conjunction with historical facts about the U.S. I hope to have more time to deal with this subject matter in the future.”

Teacher 5:

“As with the history of the United States, I have not had many opportunities to discuss culture, traditions, and customs in my English classes. In the future, however, I would definitely mention the most important and familiar information. However, I did manage to prepare a lesson for the pupils focusing on Halloween and Christmas. These lessons included information such as why these holidays are celebrated, when they are celebrated, how they are celebrated, what are the differences between the Czech Republic and the USA in celebrating these events, typical signs, and so on. It is also important to develop the cross-cultural component in a foreign language for better understanding. This requirement is also mentioned according to the framework curricula, which says that pupils should be able to know the main differences of English-speaking countries.”

Teacher 6:

“Culture, traditions, and customs of the USA are briefly dealt with in English language teaching. I think it is more of an upper secondary school curriculum, but I do mention some traditions.”

4.) Do you discuss any of the following federal holidays celebrated in the U.S. in your English language classes? If yes, which one and in what way; if none, why not.

- New Year’s Day
- Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Presidents’ Day
- Memorial Day
- Juneteenth National Independence Day
- Independence Day
- Labor Day
- Columbus Day
- Veterans Day
- Thanksgiving Day
- Christmas Day

Teacher 1:

“Of these holidays, I occasionally mention Columbus Day, but really only briefly. My pupils and I talk a little bit about Thanksgiving Day every year. We discuss Christmas Day the most, since the pupils know it from various movies and fairy tales. We always compare Czech, British and American Christmas.”

Teacher 2:

“We discuss New Year’s Day in quite a bit of detail. We only mention the Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. as a historical fact. Memorial Day is also discussed, but more in connection with Great Britain, because when we went there with our classes on a trip, we often found that Memorial Day was celebrated and people wore a red poppy flower on their clothes. We talk about it so that the pupils would know what this celebration is about. We mention Independence Day especially as a historical event. Often pupils come across it in magazines which they have as extra study material. Veterans Day is also discussed but, as with Memorial Day, more in connection with the UK. We talk about Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day the most out of all the holidays, and that is also due to the fact that pupils have a basic knowledge of these two holidays from primary school.”

Teacher 3:

“I discuss New Year’s Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day with my pupils in my classes. The pupils either create projects, presentations, or I prepare a special lesson. These are the classic holidays that all teachers cover in their classes, so the pupils have some awareness of them. We do not discuss the other holidays mentioned.”

Teacher 4:

“In my English classes we have only shortly discussed Christmas Day so far. It is possible that at the end of the school year I will briefly introduce Independence Day. In the future I would like to cover holidays like New Year’s Day or Thanksgiving Day, which I think are quite popular and the pupils should know at least basic information about them.”

Teacher 5:

“I managed to discuss New Year’s Day, as it is celebrated right after Christmas, so it is a good opportunity to combine these two holidays. I have discussed Christmas Day and definitely want to discuss it with the pupils in future years as it is one of the most famous and celebrated events of the year. Pupils often enjoy the topic of Christmas and can make use of it. They learn more new vocabulary and enjoy taking part in conversations where they share their experiences and opinions. Lastly, of the holidays mentioned above, I would like to focus on Thanksgiving Day as a cross-cultural component that introduces us to the theme of U.S. history and colonization.”

Teacher 6:

“Of the federal holidays listed, we discuss New Year’s Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day. These lessons were designed in several ways. Either as a retelling with pupils about the holidays, listening, worksheets, or reading comprehension. For the topic of Christmas, we compared how this holiday is celebrated in the Czech Republic, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.”

5.) Do you discuss any of the following special occasions celebrated in the U.S. in your English language classes? If yes, which one and in what way; if none, why not.

- Saint Valentine’s day
- Saint Patrick’s day
- Easter
- Mother’s Day
- Father’s Day
- Halloween
- New Year’s Eve

Teacher 1:

“We only mention Saint Valentine’s day and Saint Patrick’s day in passing in class. We discuss Easter similarly to Christmas in the sense that we compare traditions in Czech, British and

American families. We cover Halloween every year and are able to spend a whole lesson on it.”

Teacher 2:

“Saint Valentine’s Day is mentioned only marginally and pupils are more likely to encounter it in their magazines. Saint Patrick’s Day is discussed but more in connection with Ireland. We talk about Easter every year, but we only compare Czech Easter versus those celebrated in English-speaking countries, especially the UK and the USA. However, I feel that pupils do not differentiate between how Easter is celebrated in the UK and the USA. On the contrary, we already think of Halloween as an American holiday. We discuss New Year’s Eve in connection with Christmas.”

Teacher 3:

“We very briefly discuss Mother’s Day and Father’s Day. We usually just say the date on which it is celebrated and something about what to do on that day. For Saint Valentine’s Day, I always tell the story of Saint Valentine and how the tradition has gradually spread around the world. We discuss New Year’s Eve along with Christmas and New Year’s Day. We also mention Saint Patrick’s Day, but more in connection with Ireland. Most of all, we focus on Easter and Halloween. We usually do projects comparing customs in English-speaking countries and the Czech Republic. Every year the whole school is involved in the celebration of Halloween, so this holiday is already widespread here.”

Teacher 4:

“So far I have not discussed any of these holidays in my English classes. If there is time, I would like to work with Easter, as this holiday’s celebration is very different from ours. In addition, I would also like to focus on Halloween and New Year’s Eve in connection with Christmas Day and New Year’s Day, which I think are also important holidays to mention in class.”

Teacher 5:

“In the future, I plan to discuss Saint Valentine’s day as an opportunity for team bonding. Then I will definitely include Halloween as a cross-cultural component, which I would like to contrast with the Czech All Souls’ Day in my teaching. Finally, New Year’s Eve, which will be a complement to the celebration of Christmas as well as New Year’s Day.”

Teacher 6:

“Of the holidays listed, so far we have only covered Halloween on the day it was celebrated, talking about the history and making masks. We have also discussed New Year’s Eve in conjunction with Christmas. I also plan to discuss Saint Valentine’s day, Saint Patrick’s day, and Easter on or around the day these holidays will be celebrated.”

6.) Can you think of any other holidays celebrated in the U.S. that are not mentioned in the questions above but you mention in your English classes?

Teacher 1:

“I cannot think of any other holiday and, as I have mentioned, we are more concerned with the United Kingdom and all that goes with it.”

Teacher 2:

“No, I do not know of any other holidays.”

Teacher 3:

“There is maybe Bonfire Night, which is mostly celebrated in the UK but may have some tradition in the U.S.”

Teacher 4:

“I would not add other holidays or special occasion, as I do not think I know any other.”

Teacher 5:

“I cannot think of another holiday.”

Teacher 6:

“No, I cannot think of any other holiday celebrated in the U.S.”

7.) Do you think it is important to cover the history, culture and holidays celebrated in the U.S. in English language classes?

Teacher 1:

“It is definitely important to study the history, culture and holidays of any country whose language pupils want to learn. I always tell pupils that when they learn a language, they need to know the customs and traditions of that country so that when they come to that country, they know what to expect. I think that this cultural and historical part should be started as early as possible, of course, taking into account the age of the pupils. It certainly belongs to foreign language teaching. It is not enough to know the language, but also to see how to behave in certain situations and what can surprise us. Just as foreigners might be surprised, for example, by how we celebrate Easter, we might be surprised that Christmas Day is celebrated on the 25th of December in the USA and Great Britain. Or that pupils should not be shocked if they arrive in the USA at Halloween and think there is a zombie apocalypse because there are monsters everywhere.”

Teacher 2:

“I personally think that at certain moments it is important to compare the cultural, historical, but also the linguistic part. The United States has a lot of overlap with the United Kingdom in English teaching these days. We can surely use the term Americanisation for this situation. In addition, pupils now often watch films and TV shows where this is reflected, and we can then talk about American pronunciation influencing the typical British pronunciation with which they originally started. British English is starting to simplify along the lines of American

English, so with the U.S. having such an influence, it is definitely good to know a bit of their history and culture.”

Teacher 3:

“I think the history of the United States of America is not necessary, and if any mention is made, it is only in passing. I think it is important for pupils to know mostly the history of their own country. I think the history of other countries is knowledge that is not required until upper secondary school or university. On the other hand, the culture and at least the most famous holidays should be known not only in lower secondary school, but some basic information during primary school. There are some holidays that are celebrated in their country and not in ours, so that the pupils are not surprised. Therefore pupils should have some information from textbooks, magazine or internet.”

Teacher 4:

“I think it is definitely important to cover history, traditions and holidays when learning a language because it can help pupils to understand not only the language itself, but also other cultural things like movies, songs, books, jokes, and so on.”

Teacher 5:

“It is not the most important part of the language and often there is no time for it in class, but I think it is important to know basic information about English-speaking countries. With this knowledge we can understand the country better and have a topic to talk about with foreigners. History is an important element in gaining a basis for understanding how the society works in terms of, for example, the politics of that country, the economy, the development of technology, and so on. Pupils should certainly have an overview of what is happening in the world, which is again linked to the development of key competences.”

Teacher 6:

“Yes, I definitely think it is important to deal with history, culture and holidays in English language teaching because it all goes together. I think this topic belongs more in the upper grades at the lower secondary school, so 8th and 9th grade. In the lower grades, in my opinion, it is quite sufficient for pupils to know the basic information about the most famous holidays. It is always important to take into account the level of English of each class.”

7.3. Summary of the results of the interview

As mentioned above and also as can be seen, the questionnaire was answered by three teachers who have many years of experience in teaching English at lower secondary school. These teachers (hereafter referred to as experienced teachers) talked mostly about their experiences and how they work with the topic of history, culture, traditions, customs, federal holidays and special occasions of the United States of America in their English language classes. Then, three additional teachers (hereafter referred to as novice teachers) who are just beginning to teach English were interviewed. Since they do not have much experience with this topic yet, the questions for them were rather forward-looking (e.g. *Do you plan to deal with U.S. history in your English language classes? If yes, to what extent; if no, why not.*; and so on). For these teachers, therefore, the goal was to find out how they will approach the topic of U.S. history, culture, traditions, customs, federal holidays, and special occasions.

The responses of experienced teachers indicated that they hardly deal with the topic of United States history. If there is any mention of the history of an English-speaking country, it tends to be about the history of the United Kingdom. Two of these teachers also talk only briefly about the culture, traditions, and customs of the United States. The third teacher, on the other hand, covers this topic more extensively and often has the pupils research the topic themselves and then create a project or presentation. Regarding federal holidays, all three of the experienced teachers agreed that they discuss Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day as the most well-known holidays in the United States in their English classes. They were also in agreement about the celebration of special occasions, as they all discuss Halloween and Easter with their pupils each year. They also identified these occasions as the most well-known holidays of the United States. None of the teachers would add any other holiday to these holidays that is typical of the U.S. For the last interview question, all the experienced teachers agreed that it is important to address the culture, traditions, and customs of the United States in English

language teaching, including the selected holidays that are considered the most well-known, and pupils should have at least basic knowledge about them.

The responses of novice teachers indicated that two teachers had not yet been involved in teaching U.S. history, but certainly plan to do so in the future. The third teacher discussed history only marginally. In terms of culture, traditions, and customs of the USA, the teachers did not cover this topic or if they did, then only briefly. However, they all agreed that they thought it was good to mention at least the most famous holidays of this country. There was also agreement on federal holidays, with novice teachers discussing Christmas with New Year's Day, Thanksgiving and Independence Day. For special occasions, there was agreement on New Year's Eve and Halloween. None of the teachers would add any other holidays that are typical of the U.S. For the last question, the novice teachers as well as the experienced teachers agreed that it is important to address the culture, traditions, and customs of the United States in English language teaching.

8. Lesson plans

The last section of the practical part of this thesis was a total of three lesson plans that were created for 6th, 7th, and 9th grade at a lower secondary school. These lesson plans were then tested during a teaching practice in October and November 2023 at ZŠ a MŠ Jiráskovo náměstí in Hradec Králové. In total, two 6th grades, one 7th grade and two 9th grades were involved. The holidays that were taught in the classes were Christmas, Thanksgiving, Halloween, and Independence Day. The assumption was that Christmas was the least challenging topic for pupils in terms of content. Next in order of difficulty was Halloween, Thanksgiving, and finally Independence Day. Pupils' knowledge of English, history, and culture in each grade was also taken into account, with 6th grade having the lowest and 9th grade having the highest. From these two assumptions, it was then decided that the 6th grade class would focus exclusively on Christmas, the 7th grade class on Christmas and Halloween, and the 9th grade class on all four holidays. If the experimental lessons were also conducted in 8th grade, Christmas, Halloween and Thanksgiving would be taught there. Two main aspects were observed: the pupils' knowledge, and the organization of the lessons. In terms of pupils' knowledge, it was examined whether they understood the information related to the specific holidays and whether the information was new to them, or whether they already knew everything about the holidays and therefore it was just a repetition. In terms of the organisation of the individual lessons, it was examined whether the number of holidays taught in each lesson was adequate and whether the individual activities were appropriate to the historical, cultural and linguistic knowledge of the pupils. The content of the individual lessons and their reflections are as follows.

8.1. Lesson plan for 6th grade

Lesson: English

Topic: Christmas in the USA

Lesson aim: At the end of the lesson, pupils will be able to describe the differences between American and Czech Christmas, and argue which way of celebrating Christmas is better. They will also explain the reasons for the criticism of Christmas and list possible solutions to this problem.

Lesson time: 45 minutes

Materials: 1. Worwall website with Christmas vocabulary:

<https://wordwall.net/cs/resource/39119169/angli%c4%8dtina/christmas-vocabulary>

2. Christmas Songs for Children with lyrics – *We Wish You a Merry Christmas* on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYgFcgpM9Kg>

Lesson procedure:

Warm-up activity (duration approximately 5 minutes)

The teacher greets the pupils and introduces the topic of the lesson, which is Christmas in the USA. The first activity to activate the pupils is a question the teacher asks. The teacher asks what the difference between Christmas celebrated in the Czech Republic and in the United States of America is. The pupils answer to the teacher. They can mention anything they can think of on this topic. It is important that they work together to come up with four main differences. The first difference is the date of celebration of Christmas Day. While in the Czech Republic the main day for opening presents is the evening of the 24th of December, in the USA it is the morning of the 25th of December. Furthermore, in the Czech Republic, Baby Jesus brings presents, while in the U.S. Santa Claus brings presents. The third difference is what is eaten on this festive day. Carp is typical for Czechs and turkey for Americans. The last difference, which is related not only to Christmas but also to the culture and character of the Americans, is the magnificence. In this case, it is decoration, which the Czechs, compared to the Americans, take more modestly, while the Americans are grandiose (the teacher may mention the movie *Home Alone*, which shows the lavish decoration of a huge house both inside and outside). At the end of this activity, the teacher summarises what the pupils have said and lists the main differences.

Christmas vocabulary (duration approx. 5 minutes)

Pupils write the word CHRISTMAS vertically in a notebook or on paper, with each letter of the word having its own line. The teacher then asks them to write as many English words as possible on each line that begin with each letter in the word Christmas and these words must be related to the theme of Christmas. The aim of the activity is to write as many words as possible, which the teacher checks by asking the pupils after about one minute how many words they have

thought of. After this activity, the teacher projects the Wordwall website (see Materials above) on the interactive whiteboard, which has a Christmas vocabulary activity. Pupils walk individually to the interactive whiteboard and match the correct words to the pictures.

Czech versus American Christmas (duration approximately 10 minutes)

The teacher assigns each pupil number 1 or 2. Pupils are divided into two groups accordingly. The group of pupils with the number 1 has to describe how Czech Christmas is celebrated (food, drink, traditions, activities on each day, etc.). This group also has to write down the advantages and disadvantages of celebrating Christmas Day on the 24th of December in the Czech Republic. The group of pupils numbered 2 has to describe in a similar way how Christmas is celebrated in the USA, and also write down the advantages and disadvantages of celebrating Christmas Day in the USA on the 25th of December. Each group then has approximately one minute to present all their findings, with each pupil having to say at least one piece of information. Finally, the teacher prepares a short poll where each pupil has to decide, based on all the information presented, whether they would rather celebrate Christmas Day on the 24th or the 25th of December with all the customs that belong to that country and culture.

Quiz (duration approximately 5 minutes)

The teacher asks the pupils to form pairs or small groups. Then the teacher projects the following 10 sentences on the whiteboard. Pupils are asked to discuss and decide in groups which sentences are true (T) and which are false (F). They can also ask the teacher if they do not understand a word or the whole sentence. At the end of the activity, they check their answers together, correct the wrong sentences and the teacher provides additional information to each sentence.

1. *In the USA, people open their presents from Santa Claus on the evening of the 25th of December. T/F*
2. *Many Christmas traditions were brought to the U.S. by immigrants from Europe. T/F*
3. *The name Santa Claus comes from the Dutch name Sinter Claas. T/F*
4. *Americans do not decorate their houses at Christmas. T/F*
5. *In the past, it was forbidden to celebrate Christmas in parts of the USA for a few years. T/F*

6. *At Christmas, people celebrate the death of Jesus Christ. T/F*
7. *The typical Christmas food of Americans is carp. T/F*
8. *Americans have artificial or live trees in their homes. T/F*
9. *All U.S. residents have snow at Christmas. T/F*
10. *In the USA, children leave cookies and a glass of milk near the Christmas tree for Santa Claus. T/F*

Santa Claus writes a letter (duration approximately 10 minutes)

In this activity, the aim is for the pupils to write a Letter to Santa. However, the main idea is that pupils write the letter as if Santa Claus himself was writing it. This means that they write what they think Santa would wish for Christmas. Pupils can write a traditional long letter in full sentences or just points and phrases. At the end, they read the letters in pairs and see where they agree with their classmates and where they differ.

Critique of Christmas (duration approximately 5 minutes)

The teacher introduces the pupils to the fact that there are people who criticize the way Christmas is currently celebrated, not only in the USA. The teacher then invites pupils to form pairs or small groups to discuss what could be criticized about the celebration of Christmas. At the end of this activity, pupils share together any conclusions they have reached. The main idea should be that Christmas has become a commercial event, and also that the materialistic desire to have as many presents as possible often prevails. The teacher should end the activity with the idea that people should not just think about presents, but more importantly about family and friends coming together again as they do every year in good health for Christmas dinner.

We Wish You a Merry Christmas (duration approximately 5 minutes)

In this final activity, pupils and teacher review the lesson and summarise how Christmas is celebrated in the USA. The teacher thanks the pupils for their cooperation and says goodbye with the Christmas carol *We Wish You a Merry Christmas* (see Materials above), which they sing together to set the right Christmas mood.

8.1.1. Reflection of the lessons

As previously explained, the 6th grade pupils were focusing on the topic of Christmas. It was important to firstly remind them that this lesson was an experimental lesson and therefore was taught in October during author's teaching practice. Normally this lesson would have been taught in December just before Christmas. This fact was emphasised to the pupils in order to move their minds to the pre-Christmas period and to be able to concentrate on the whole lesson. From observation and pupils' reactions, they found the lesson interesting and all the activities entertaining. All the planned activities were managed during the lesson so there was no need to use any extra activity. In terms of the difficulty of the activities, the pupils found them all easy. The only activity they found a little more difficult was the Quiz. Some pupils had difficulty translating and understanding individual sentences. In terms of Christmas vocabulary, the pupils had a good grasp. This was due to the fact that the topic of Christmas celebrated in the USA (as well as in the UK) is discussed in English language classes every year since first grade. It was also surprising that the pupils had interesting insights into the Critique of Christmas activity. Some of their views were in line with what was expected from this activity. Therefore, it can be said that the number of activities was adequate and there was no excess time to fill. In addition, the pupils seemed engaged and satisfied especially during the discussions and voting.

8.2. Lesson plan for 7th grade

Lesson: English

Topic: Halloween and Christmas in the USA

Lesson aim: By the end of the lesson, pupils will be able to describe the history and celebration of Halloween, as well as the differences between American and Czech Christmas. They will also explain the reasons for the criticism of Halloween and Christmas, and list possible solutions to this problem.

Lesson time: 45 minutes

Materials: 1. Learn how to explain Halloween on YouTube – *What is Halloween:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLn576Ga5c&>

Lesson procedure:

Introduction (duration approximately 2 minutes)

The teacher greets the pupils and introduces the topic of the lesson, which is Halloween and Christmas, two very popular holidays celebrated in the USA. The first part of the lesson is devoted to Halloween and the second to Christmas. Therefore, the teacher begins by asking what the pupils know about Halloween. The pupils share all the information they know about this topic.

What is Halloween? (duration approximately 6 minutes)

Pupils are given a paper with the questions written below by the teacher. The teacher then shows them a short teaching video which briefly describes what Halloween is (see Materials above). The video is played twice and the pupils' task is to answer all the questions. At the end, everyone checks the answers together and review the main information they have learned from the video.

1. *Is Halloween the most popular holiday in America?*
2. *Which competition is happening in bars and restaurants?*
3. *What does Halloween look like in schools?*
4. *What is Trick-or-Treating?*
5. *What do people decorate their houses with?*

Samhain and Jack-o'-lantern (duration approximately 5 minutes)

The teacher divides the pupils into groups of approximately four individuals. The teacher then projects two texts with the statements written below on the whiteboard. The task of the pupils in groups is to read the text and discuss together whether the sentences are true (T) or false (F). After writing the results on the paper, the groups exchange their answers and together with the teacher they discuss the correct answers. Pupils correct their classmates' answers and finally return the results to the group to which the paper belongs.

First text: *Halloween is celebrated every year on the 31st of October in many countries around the world. Although this holiday is currently most popular in the USA, it originated in what is now Ireland and the UK. Halloween was celebrated in that area by the Celts. They did not call*

this holiday Halloween, but Samhain. Samhain was celebrated a little differently than how Halloween is celebrated now. The Celts believed that evil spirits came to Earth on this day. So they dressed up in scary costumes and lit bonfires to ward off these evil spirits. The new name for Samhain came later from the words All Hallows' Eve = Halloween. Halloween was then brought and spread in the United States by the Irish in the 19th century. The tradition of trick-or-treating, during which children dress up in various costumes, also spread in the USA. During Halloween, Americans buy a quarter of all the candy produced annually in the USA.

- 1. Halloween is celebrated in every country in the world. T/F*
- 2. Halloween was invented by Americans. T/F*
- 3. Samhain is the predecessor of Halloween. T/F*
- 4. The Celts feared evil spirits and chased them away with bonfires and scary masks. T/F*
- 5. Halloween came to the USA thanks to the Irish. T/F*
- 6. Around 50% of all candy produced during the year is bought by Americans on Halloween. T/F*

Second text: An important part of Halloween is also the spooky decoration of the house. Typical decorations include bats, vampires, spiders, black cats, spider webs, skeletons, witches, ghosts and other monsters. The most popular, however, is the Jack-o'-lantern. This is a pumpkin that is hollowed out and carved to give it a scary face. The Irish and Scots made it from potatoes and turnips, the English from beets. Later on, Americans started making Jack-o'-lantern from pumpkins. Making of Jack-o'-lantern has a spooky story. There was a man named Jack who died one day. Unfortunately, he could not get to heaven or hell. So he had to walk the earth looking for the final resting place. In order to see the road clearly, he lit his lantern. People started calling him 'Jack of the Lantern'. He became the inspiration for the making of the Jack-o'-lantern.

- 1. Decorating the house for Halloween is not important. T/F*
- 2. The tradition of carving Halloween pumpkins began in the USA. T/F*
- 3. Jack-o'-lantern used to be made from beets, turnips and potatoes. T/F*
- 4. According to legend, Jack walked the Earth because he did not want to go to heaven or hell. T/F*

Complete the sentences (duration approximately 5 minutes)

The teacher gives the pupils a paper with the activity, the content of which is written below. Pupils work individually to complete the words in the sentences correctly. Then they discuss the completed sentences with a neighbour. Finally, they check the correct solution with the teacher.

Words: *decoration, Jack-o'-lantern, trick-or-treating, costumes, traditions, sweets, parties, pumpkin*

Sentences: 1. _____ of Halloween were brought to the United States by the Irish.

2. Children, as well as adults, wear different kinds of _____ on Halloween.

3. People often use spider webs and skeletons as _____ for their houses.

4. Americans buy huge amounts of _____ on Halloween.

5. On Halloween, children go from house to house for _____.

6. Adults have _____ on Halloween night.

7. A Jack-o'-lantern is a hollowed-out _____ with a scary face and a candle inside.

8. Beets, turnips and potatoes were formerly used to make _____.

Who or what am I? (duration approximately 3 minutes)

Pupils are divided into pairs and play the game *Who or what am I?*. One pupil per pair chooses a character, animal, food, item or anything else that is connected to Halloween. He/she then begins to describe it without mentioning the name of the thing. His/her classmate must guess the thing described. They then switch roles. That is, the one who is done describing guesses and the one who is done guessing now describes. Each pupil should guess at least once and describe at least once.

Halloween in our country (duration approximately 4 minutes)

The last activity of the first part of the lesson with the theme of Halloween is a discussion. Since Halloween is celebrated every year at this school, the teacher asks the pupils to describe how

these celebrations take place and everything that happens on that day. This is followed by a discussion about whether it is appropriate to celebrate Halloween in the Czech Republic, given that it is a foreign holiday that has nothing to do with Czech history or culture.

Christmas (duration approximately 20 minutes)

In the second part of the lesson, which focuses on Christmas, the teacher uses and recycles a total of three activities that were used and described in the previous subchapter of the *Lesson plan for 6th grade*. These activities are reused mainly so that the teacher can evaluate the pupils' knowledge and opinions on this topic, as well as compare this knowledge and opinions with other classes. The first is a *Warm-up activity* (duration approximately 5 minutes), followed by a *Czech versus American Christmas* activity (duration approximately 10 minutes). The last activity is a *Critique of Christmas* activity (duration approximately 5 minutes), to which a critique of Halloween is added. Pupils should come to the conclusion that both Christmas and Halloween have become commercial events, losing their simplicity and the original intent of the celebration. They should also come up with ideas on how to return these holidays to their original values and present ideas on what should be most important about these celebrations.

8.2.1. Reflection of the lesson

As explained at the beginning of the chapter, the seventh grade pupils were focusing on Halloween and Christmas. The topic of Halloween was appropriate for them as the lesson was taught on the exact day Halloween is celebrated. Halloween was then followed up with the topic of Christmas, as another popular holiday celebrated in the United States. All the activities were carried out in the lesson, however, the final discussion had to be cut a little short in order to finish the lesson on time. The pupils worked with enthusiasm, perhaps a little too loudly at some points. The activity on the history of *Samhain and Jack-o'-lantern* was probably the most difficult for pupils as they had to query the meaning of some of the vocabulary in the text and their answers were not always correct, although they worked in groups. The reason could be that they did not pay attention to the meaning of the words in the sentences and therefore made unnecessary mistakes. The other activities seemed to be appropriate. The pupils also had sufficient vocabulary for both topics, probably for the same reason as the sixth grade pupils. Indeed, Christmas and Halloween have been covered in English lessons at this school since first grade. In the final discussion the pupils had interesting opinions and came to similar conclusions

as the sixth graders. The only difference was that their ability to articulate their views was slightly enhanced due to their advanced level of English.

8.3. Lesson plan for 9th grade

Lesson: English

Topic: Most popular holidays in the USA

Lesson aim: By the end of the lesson, pupils will be able to describe the history and celebration of Independence Day, Halloween and Thanksgiving Day, as well as the differences between American and Czech Christmas. They will also explain the reasons for the criticism of Thanksgiving and Christmas, and list possible solutions to this problem.

Lesson time: 45 minutes

Materials: 1. Learn all about the history of Independence Day on YouTube – *Independence Day History / The Fourth of July*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fFnItnVIWws>

2. Sixth activity from website ESL Holiday Lessons – *English Lesson on Halloween*:
<https://eslholidaylessons.com/11/thanksgiving.html>

Lesson procedure:

Introduction (duration approximately 3 minutes)

At the beginning of the lesson, the teacher greets the pupils and introduces the topic of the lesson, which is the most popular holidays in the USA. These holidays include Independence Day, Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas, which is discussed in that order. The teacher asks the pupils to go to the blackboard and write all the information they know about these four holidays. Individual pieces of information must not be repeated. The teacher may briefly discuss with the pupils the facts they have written.

Independence Day (duration approximately 10 minutes)

Pupils are presented with the questions below on a sheet of paper by the teacher. The teacher then plays a teaching video on the whiteboard twice about the history and celebration of Independence Day. The pupils' task is to answer all the questions. Then the pupils check the correct answers with the teacher. Finally, the teacher asks the pupils to summarise in their own words the historical events behind Independence Day and how the celebrations are carried out.

1. *What is another name for Independence Day?*
2. *What happened on the 4th of July, 1776?*
3. *How many colonies did the British found?*
4. *What did the inhabitants of these colonies dislike?*
5. *When exactly was the Declaration of Independence accepted?*
6. *When exactly was the Declaration of Independence announced to the world?*
7. *What do people organize during the 4th of July celebration if the weather is nice outside?*
8. *What are some of the most popular foods for Independence Day?*
9. *How many cases of beer are consumed during Independence Day weekend?*
10. *What are some other very popular events celebrated in the USA?*

Halloween (duration approximately 10 minutes)

Pupils break into small groups of approximately four individuals. The teacher projects the quiz on the whiteboard with questions and possible answers written below. Each group then reads the question, writes its number on a piece of paper and writes the letter of the answer they think is correct next to the number. Only one answer is correct. After all the answers have been written down, the groups exchange the papers and correct each other's answers with the help of the teacher. The groups return the corrected answers. The teacher then summarizes background information about the history and celebration of Halloween. The activity is concluded with a discussion similar to the activity in the *Lesson plan for 7th grade – Halloween in our country*.

1. *When is Halloween celebrated?*
 - a) *on the 31st of October*
 - b) *on the 1st of September*
 - c) *on the 30th of November*

2. *The predecessor of Halloween is called Samhain, the celebration of which began in ...*
 - a) *what is now Canada*
 - b) *Australia*
 - c) *what is now Ireland and Great Britain*
3. *What did Samhain mean to the Celts who celebrated this holiday?*
 - a) *the end of winter*
 - b) *the beginning of spring*
 - c) *the end of summer*
4. *What is a Jack-o'-lantern, which is a typical Halloween decoration?*
 - a) *a hollowed-out pumpkin with a scary face and a candle inside*
 - b) *a skeleton hanging upside down from the nearest tree*
 - c) *a spider tangled in its own web*
5. *What was the Jack-o'-lantern made of in the past?*
 - a) *oranges and kiwis*
 - b) *beets, turnips and potatoes*
 - c) *melons*
6. *On Halloween night, children go from house to house for a tradition called ...*
 - a) *begging-for-money*
 - b) *trick-or-treating*
 - c) *give-me-candy*
7. *Who brought the tradition of Halloween to the United States?*
 - a) *the Irish*
 - b) *the Spanish*
 - c) *the Japanese*
8. *How much candy made in the USA in an entire year do Americans buy during Halloween?*
 - a) *one third*
 - b) *one half*
 - c) *a quarter*

Thanksgiving (duration approximately 8 minutes)

The teacher gives the pupils a printed text with the sixth exercise from the *English Lesson on Thanksgiving* website – *Choose the correct word* (see Materials above). The pupils read the text about Thanksgiving independently and choose the correct words that belong in the sentences. They then read the text aloud one sentence at a time and check the correct answers with the teacher. At the end of the activity there is a discussion. The teacher introduces the pupils to the fact that some people criticise the celebration of Thanksgiving. The pupils' task is to work out what could be criticised about Thanksgiving celebrations. Pupils should work together to conclude that the main problem was the impact of colonization on Native Americans. In light of this fact, pupils should come up with ideas on how to reflect this fact in the Thanksgiving celebration so that criticism is reduced or eliminated altogether.

Christmas (duration approximately 12 minutes)

Similar to the *Lesson plan for 7th grade*, the last topic of this lesson recycles the activities from the *Lesson plan for 6th grade*, only the time limit is slightly shorter. Specifically, the activities are *Czech versus American Christmas* (duration approximately 8 minutes) and *Critique of Christmas* (duration approximately 3 minutes).

Conclusion (duration approximately 2 minutes)

At the end of the lesson, the teacher asks the pupils to say the most important thing they took away from the lesson for each of the holidays discussed. The teacher can also point out any information that the pupils wrote down at the beginning of the lesson and, if necessary, correct any mistakes that were made. Finally, the teacher thanks the pupils for their cooperation and says goodbye.

8.3.1. Reflection of the lessons

Lesson in the 9th grade was based on the assumptions written at the beginning of the *Lesson plans* chapter. Therefore, the pupils worked with all four of the aforementioned holidays celebrated in the USA. The holidays were taught in the order in which they are celebrated during the year. In addition, they started with the holiday that is considered the most challenging and ended with the holiday that is considered the easiest. This hypothesis regarding the difficulty of each holiday was confirmed in class, given that pupils knew the most information about Christmas and the least about Independence Day. One of the reasons for this is certainly the fact that Christmas is discussed in English language classes from the first grade (as well as Halloween), while Thanksgiving is only discussed in the upper grades and Independence Day is only marginally covered in this school. However, it was surprising that the pupils were interested in all the holidays and activities despite being quite passive in regular English classes. They participated in all the activities and it was clear from their responses that they enjoyed the Halloween quiz in the groups the most. Pupils were also active during the discussions and in most cases came to the expected conclusions. Discussions were clearly more extensive compared to the sixth and seventh graders, which is logical from their knowledge and their level of English. All activities were completed in time for the class, however, it must be mentioned that the class was fast-paced and any delays would have significantly affected the progress of the activities.

Conclusion

As stated and argued at the beginning of this thesis, teaching any language involves two parts. The first is the linguistic part, which deals with the language as such. The second part of language teaching, which is also very important, is the cultural and historical component of the nation of the target language. The language studied in this thesis is English. English language teaching in the Czech Republic currently focuses mainly on the British English language, culture and history. Since the United States of America is another major English-speaking country in modern history, there was a need to fill this gap. Thus, the topic of the thesis is *History and Traditions of America's Most Popular Holidays, and How to Work with Them in ELT*.

The thesis is divided into two parts. The first is the theoretical part, which is divided into three areas. The first area is dedicated to the most popular holidays celebrated in the United States of America. There, it was determined that a total of four holidays celebrated in the USA would be selected to represent the most popular and well-known holidays. These are Thanksgiving, Christmas, Halloween, and Independence Day. The historical events behind each holiday were described first, followed by their evolution, customs, and traditions. The second area is devoted to the methodology of teaching, specifically language teaching as well as the teaching of history and culture. As this thesis also contains a practical part in which research is conducted, the last area of the theoretical part is briefly devoted to the methodology of educational research, dealing with the methods of science, questionnaire and interview.

The second part of the thesis is the practical part focusing on research at a lower secondary school. The practical part is based on the knowledge written in the theoretical part. The questionnaire prepared for the pupils and the interview prepared for the teachers contain mainly the information presented in the section on the methodology of pedagogical research. On the other hand, the preparation of lesson plans was based on the knowledge obtained in the chapters on the most popular U.S. holidays. The content of the lesson plans also applied information from the methodology of language teaching, and especially the teaching of history and culture. The practical part of the thesis is then divided into three areas. These areas capture the main aim of the thesis which consists of answering the following research questions:

1. What knowledge do pupils have about U.S. history, culture, and holidays?

2. How do English language teachers work with the history, culture, and holidays of the U.S.?

3. In what way can teaching of the most popular U.S. holidays into English language be incorporated?

The first area, which among other things is the answer to the first research question, is a questionnaire that was prepared for pupils in grades 6 to 9 at a lower secondary school. A total of ten questions bring the following results. More than half of the pupils covered the history of the United States of America in their English classes, and almost the majority covered the culture, traditions and customs of the United States. The responses also indicated that pupils were interested in learning more about culture, traditions and customs rather than U.S. history. In terms of knowledge about individual holidays, pupils most frequently addressed Christmas Day, New Year's Day, and Thanksgiving as representatives of federal holidays in the USA. In the category of special occasions, pupils most frequently selected Halloween and Easter. From these responses, a conclusion can be drawn to the first research question, namely that pupils' knowledge of English language learning is more extensive in the culture of the United States rather than its history, and the most well-known holidays for this research group include Christmas Day, New Year's Day, Thanksgiving, Halloween, and Easter.

The second area of the research was interviewing English language teachers and answering the second research question. Six teachers participated in the interviews, three of whom were teachers with many years of experience, for whom the term experienced teachers was used, and then three teachers who were referred to as novice teachers who were only in their first year of teaching English. Their responses indicated that experienced teachers engaged significantly less with U.S. history compared to novice teachers. The situation was similar for them when asked about the culture, traditions, and customs of the United States. In terms of the U.S. federal holidays, all six teachers deal with Christmas Day and Thanksgiving Day in their English classes. For special occasions, there was an agreement between all the teachers to incorporate Halloween into the English lessons. Finally, they also all agreed that they think it is important to at least partially address the culture, traditions, and customs of the United States in their English classes.

The third and final area was lesson plans prepared for pupils at the lower secondary school to answer the third research question. The individual lesson plans were taught a total of five times, twice in sixth grade, once in seventh grade, and twice in ninth grade. Sixth grade

focused on Christmas, seventh grade on Halloween and Christmas, and ninth grade on all of the selected most popular holidays in the USA, which include Independence Day, Halloween, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day. The goal was to determine, among other things, what knowledge pupils have about each holiday, how interested they are in the topic, whether the topic and activities are appropriate for them, and most importantly, how many holidays to teach in each class. It turned out that the pupils have the most knowledge about Christmas and Halloween, as these holidays are discussed from the first grade. Even though these topics are discussed annually, the pupils showed interest in them. The very last research objective was to find out how many holidays can be taught in one lesson. It turned out that it is possible to prepare activities for only one holiday. As long as the activities are varied, the pupils do not mind at all that the whole lesson is focused on only one topic. On the other hand, it is also possible to put all four holidays in a lesson, which was done in ninth grade. However, it should be pointed out that the lesson in this class was fast-paced and if there was any glitch, all the planned activities might not be done. Hence, the maximum number of holidays taught in one lesson should not exceed four, supposing that the teacher wants to cover each holiday and mention the most important things about it. Another important fact is that in the lower grades, the teacher might not be able to cover all the holidays as their level of English and general knowledge of the pupils is lower. Therefore, all of the above findings suggest that it is up to the teacher whether there is time to cover each holiday for an entire lesson (for example, on the day the holiday is celebrated) or whether the teacher combines several holidays together in one lesson (for example, in a lesson dealing specifically with the United States). It also goes without saying that the teacher must not forget to take into account the pupils' knowledge and their level of English, and then structure the lessons accordingly.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Questionnaire for pupils in Czech

1.) Jak starý jsi?

2.) Do jakého ročníku chodíš?

- 6. ročník
- 7. ročník
- 8. ročník
- 9. ročník

3.) Dozvěděl ses někdy v hodinách anglického jazyka něco o historii USA?

- ANO
- NE

4.) Chtěl by ses v hodinách anglického jazyka dozvědět více informací o historii USA?

- ANO
- Spíše ANO
- Spíše NE
- NE

5.) Dozvěděl ses někdy v hodinách anglického jazyka něco o kultuře, tradicích a zvycích USA?

- ANO
- NE

6.) Chtěl by ses v hodinách anglického jazyka dozvědět více informací o kultuře, tradicích a zvycích USA?

- ANO
- Spíše ANO
- Spíše NE
- NE

7.) Dozvěděl ses někdy v hodinách anglického jazyka něco o některém z následujících státních svátků?

- ANO, z hodin anglického jazyka vím něco o:
 - New Year's Day = Nový Rok
 - Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. = Den narození Martina Luthera Kinga
 - Presidents' Day = Den prezidentů
 - Memorial Day = Den obětí války
 - Juneteenth National Independence Day = Den nezávislosti černochů
 - Independence Day = Den nezávislosti
 - Labor Day = Den práce
 - Columbus Day = Den Kryštofa Kolumba
 - Veterans Day = Den válečných veteránů
 - Thanksgiving Day = Den děkování
 - Christmas Day = Vánoce
- NE, z hodin anglického jazyka neznám žádný z výše uvedených státních svátků

8.) Dozvěděl ses někdy v hodinách anglického jazyka něco o některém z následujících svátků?

- ANO, z hodin anglického jazyka vím něco o:
 - Saint Valentine's day = Den svatého Valentýna
 - Saint Patrick's day = Den svatého Patrika
 - Easter = Velikonoce
 - Mother's Day = Den matek

- Father's Day = Den otců
 - Halloween
 - New Year's Eve = Silvestr
-
- NE, z hodin anglického jazyka neznám žádný z výše uvedených svátků

9.) Pokud znáš nějaké další svátky, které se slaví v USA, ale nebyly zmíněny v předchozích otázkách, vypiš zde jejich název.

10.) Chtěl by ses v hodinách anglického jazyka dozvědět více informací o svátcích slavených v USA?

- ANO
- Spíše ANO
- Spíše NE
- NE

Resumé

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá tématem *Historie a tradic nejpoblárnějších amerických svátků a jak s nimi pracovat ve výuce anglického jazyka*. Podle informací, které byly sepsány v teoretické části práce, byl následně vytvořen dotazník pro žáky druhého stupně základní školy, rozhovor pro učitele angličtiny a učební plány pro tři odlišné vyučovací hodiny. Výsledky praktické části práce ukazují znalosti, které žáci o amerických svátcích mají a způsob jakým učitelé ve svých hodinách s tímto tématem pracují. Učební plány, které vycházejí jak z poznatků teoretické části, tak z výsledků výzkumu, obsahují postupy práce s nejpoblárnějšími americkými svátky, stejně tak jako návrhy na co nejefektivnější uchopení tohoto tématu.