

How We Kept Thanksgiving at Oldtown

by Harriet Beecher Stowe *from Oldtown Folks*

Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote "Oldtown Folks" in 1869. She

tells about life in a New England village called Oldtown. The passage below tells about Thanksgiving preparations in a Massachusetts town.

The making of pies at this period assumed vast proportions that verged upon the sublime. Pies were made by forties and fifties and hundreds, and made of everything on the earth and under the earth.

The pie is an English institution, which, planted on American soil, forthwith ran rampant and burst forth into an untold variety of genera and species. Not merely the old traditional mince pie, but a thousand strictly American seedlings from that main stock, evinced the power of American housewives to adapt old institutions to new uses. Pumpkin pies, cranberry pies, huckleberry pies, cherry pies, green-currant pies, peach, pear, and plum pies, custard pies, apple pies, Marlborough-pudding pies – pies with top crusts, and pies without, – pies adorned with all sorts of fanciful flutings and architectural strips laid across and around, and otherwise varied, attested the boundless fertility of the feminine mind, when once let loose in a given direction.

Fancy the heat and vigor of the great pan-formation, when Aunt Lois and Aunt Keziah, and my mother and grandmother, all in ecstasies of creative inspiration, ran, bustled, and hurried, – mixing, rolling, tasting, consulting, – alternately setting us children to work when anything could be made of us, and then chasing us all out of the kitchen when our misinformed childhood ventured to take too many liberties with sacred mysteries. Then out we would all fly at the kitchen door, like sparks from a blacksmith's window.

Questions

- 1) What does "rampant" mean in this passage: "The pie is an English institution, which, planted on American soil, forthwith ran rampant and burst forth into an untold variety..."?

- 2) What does "evinced " mean in this passage: "Not merely the old traditional mince pie, but a thousand strictly American seedlings from that main stock, evinced the power of American housewives to adapt..."?

- 3) What does "vigor" mean in this passage: "Fancy the heat and vigor of the great pan-formation, when Aunt Lois and Aunt Keziah..."?

- 4) What does "liberties" mean in this passage: "when our misinformed childhood ventured to take too many liberties with sacred mysteries..."?

- 5) Explain the simile "like sparks from a blacksmith's window."

Vocabulary List

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. sublime
2. rampant
3. evinced
4. adorned
5. boundless
6. liberties

Context Clues

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1) "The making of pies at this period assumed vast proportions that verged upon the **sublime**."

- a. highly valued b. lime flavored c. millions d. extremely tasty

2) "The pie is an English institution, which, planted on American soil, forthwith ran **rampant** and burst forth into an untold variety of genera and species."

- a. quickly b. slowly c. in one direction d. out of control

3) "Not merely the old traditional mince pie, but a thousand strictly American seedlings from that main stock, **evinced** the power of American housewives to adapt old institutions to new uses."

- a. hid b. showed c. challenged d. stole

4) "Pies **adorned** with all sorts of fanciful flutings and architectural strips laid across and around, and otherwise varied..."

- a. covered b. decorated c. cooked d. eaten

5) "...attested the **boundless** fertility of the feminine mind, when once let loose in a given direction."

- a. limited b. limitless c. timeless d. timely

6) "Then chasing us all out of the kitchen when our misinformed childhood ventured to take too many **liberties** with sacred mysteries."

- a. bites b. samples c. ideas d. freedoms