

LEVELED BOOK • R

The History of HALLOWEEN



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Written by
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www.readinga-z.com

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Focus Question

How has the celebration of Halloween changed throughout the years?

Words to Know

bonfires
carving
Celtic
pranks
predictions

roam
supernatural
tradition
underworld

Title page: A hand-colored woodcut shows people bobbing for apples at a Halloween party in Ireland in the 1800s.

Page 3: An illustration from the 1890s shows a group of children using their jack-o'-lanterns to scare away an adult on Halloween.

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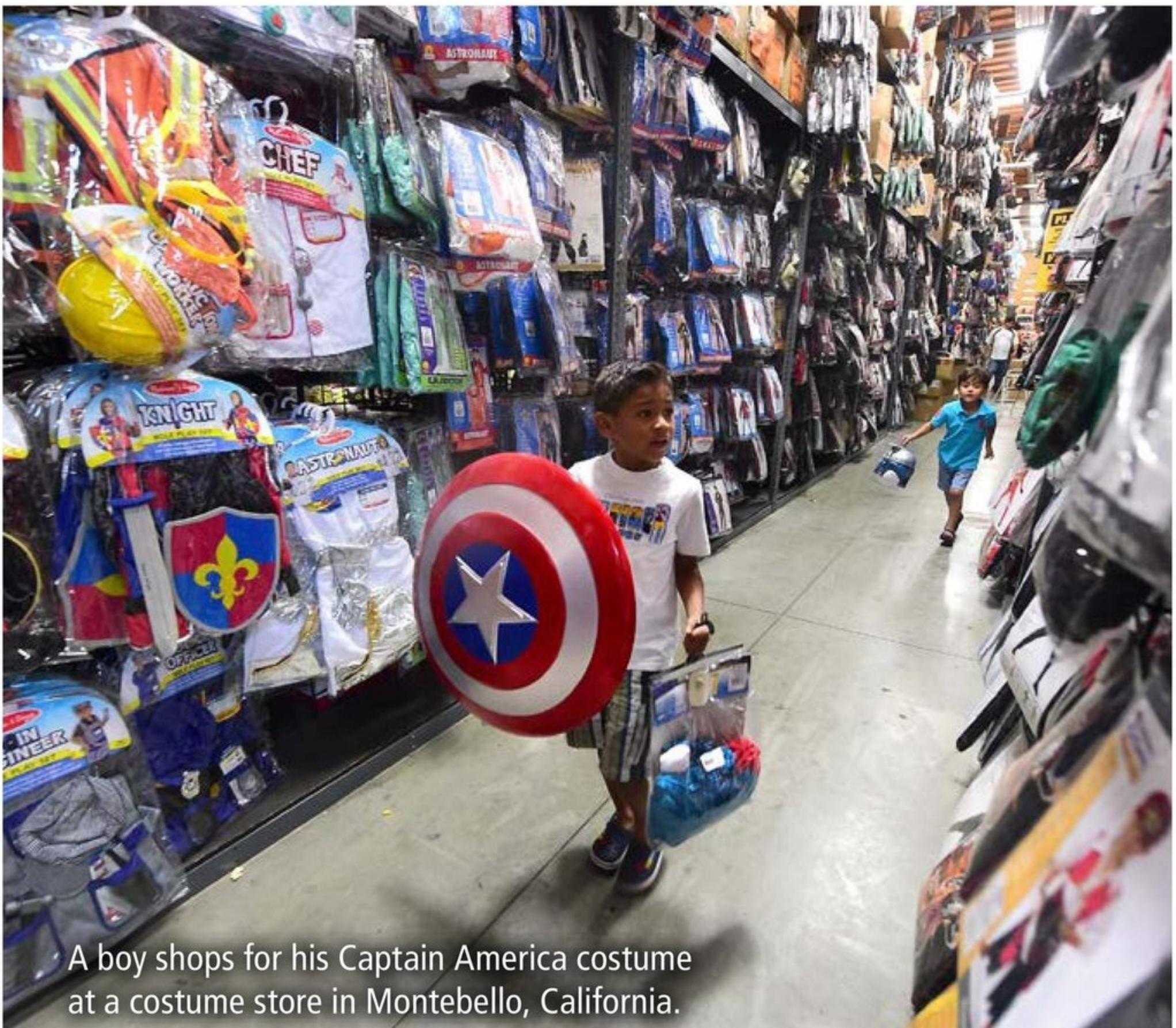
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A Fun and Scary Holiday

Halloween is celebrated in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Ireland, where it first began. On October 31, trick-or-treaters take to the streets. Creepy music comes from Halloween parties, and people dress up in costumes. Monsters, ghosts, superheroes, and princesses of all ages celebrate together.



Three girls show off their Halloween costumes in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1929.



A boy shops for his Captain America costume at a costume store in Montebello, California.

Today, Halloween is especially popular in the United States, where it's important in both culture and business. Halloween turns up in Hollywood movies and popular songs. The holiday means big business for American stores, too. People spend a lot of money on Halloween candy and costumes every year.

Halloween is part of a very old **tradition**. It began with the **Celtic** (KEL-tik) peoples who lived in Great Britain, Ireland, and northern France two thousand years ago.



Modern-day druids perform a blessing at Stonehenge in southern England.

The Celts: Samhain

The Celts celebrated a festival called Samhain (SOW-in) each fall. In the Celtic calendar, October 31 was the final day of the year. The Samhain celebration on October 31 was a way to say goodbye to the old year.

Samhain also had a **supernatural** side. The Celts believed that spirits of the dead traveled to the **underworld** at Samhain. To help the dead on their journey, people lit **bonfires** and sacrificed crops and animals. The Celts also believed that priests could see the future during this festival. The **predictions** made at Samhain were an important part of planning for the new year.

The Beginnings of Halloween

Later, as Christianity spread throughout Europe, the Catholic Church tried to replace Samhain with its own traditions. For example, the Church declared an All Saints' Day on November 1. This celebration was also known as All Hallows Day. October 31, the day before All Hallows, was called All Hallows Eve. The name was later shortened to Halloween.

Many of the older Celtic traditions lived on in this new holiday. Today's Halloween traditions come from the Celts, the Catholic Church, and old European customs.



Catholic churchgoers make a procession through a town in Poland to celebrate All Saints' Day.

Costumes and Trick-or-Treating

Halloween costumes probably began with the Celts, who dressed up as animals during Samhain. In England, people walked the streets dressed like fairies, witches, and ghosts.



Dressing up this way was called *mumming*, and people gave the mummers food and drink. People thought that these gifts would make the spirits leave without causing trouble. Today, this tradition is called *trick-or-treating*. Adults give a treat so that each child in a costume will leave without playing any tricks.

A modern druid wears a stag costume during a Samhain celebration in England.



The legend of Stingy Jack started one big Halloween tradition.

Jack-o'-Lanterns

Many people create jack-o'-lanterns at Halloween. Jack-o'-lanterns are made by **carving** designs into a pumpkin. Then a candle is placed inside the pumpkin to light up the carving. Jack-o'-lanterns come from an Irish story about a man named Stingy Jack.

Jack liked to play tricks on his friends. When he died, his spirit was forced to **roam** in the darkness as punishment. To light his way, he carved a hole in a turnip and placed a candle inside. Because of this, the Irish called him “Jack-o'-lantern.”

People in Ireland and England made jack-o'-lanterns out of turnips and beets. Many Irish people moved to North America in the 1800s, bringing the jack-o'-lantern tradition with them.

The tradition of using pumpkins in jack-o'-lanterns, however, began in the United States in the mid-1800s. Pumpkins make great jack-o'-lanterns because they are big enough to be carved in all kinds of designs. Today, jack-o'-lanterns are an important part of the Halloween celebration.



Some people still carve turnips for Halloween.



Children bob for apples at a party in the United States in the early 1900s.

Traditions of the Past

Some older Halloween traditions are less well known today. The Halloween party game of bobbing for apples, for example, began as a form of fortune-telling. In this game, players try to remove an apple from a tub of water using only their mouths. The first person to get an apple was supposed to be the first to marry later in life. Today, fortune-telling is no longer part of many Halloween games. People might meet a fortune-teller at a Halloween party or haunted house, though.

Halloween Today

The modern Halloween celebration is fairly new, though it is often mixed with older traditions. This is especially true in North America, where the holiday was not widely celebrated until the 1800s. Halloween was frowned upon by many of the first European settlers in the New World.

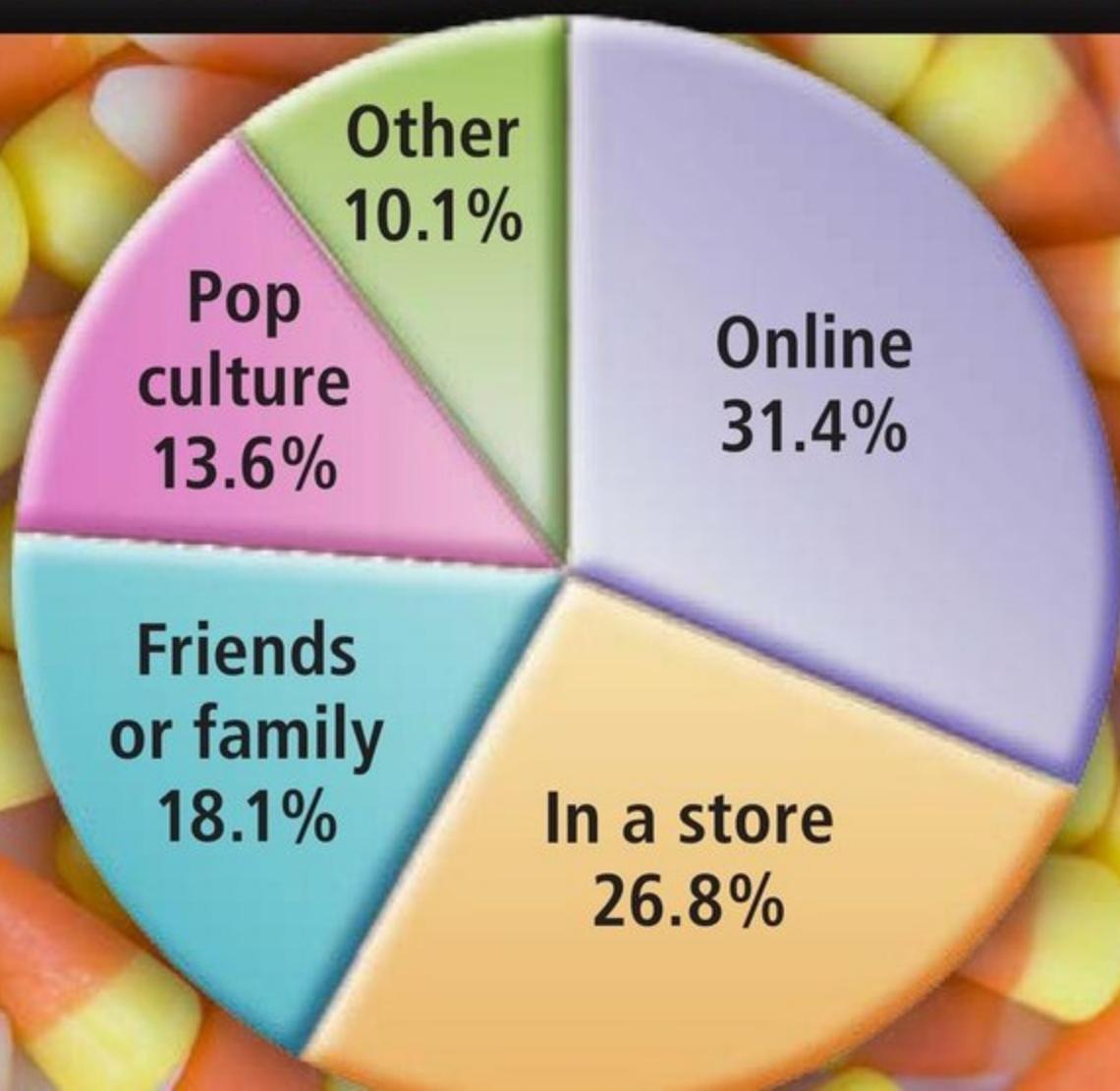
That changed when many Irish settlers came to the United States in the 1800s. They brought their Halloween traditions with them, including jack-o'-lanterns and mumming. Slowly, more and more Americans celebrated Halloween. Sadly, as Halloween became more popular, **pranks** became common. By the 1930s, the pranks were a big problem. To make things better, some cities tried to change Halloween into a holiday for families. Many held trick-or-treating events for children. Trick-or-treaters in the 1930s and 1940s received cookies, fruit, toys, and coins.



American children wear Halloween costumes in 1898.

Trick-or-treaters began to receive candy in the 1950s. However, the little Halloween candy bars common today didn't appear until the 1970s. The treats have changed over the years, but kids have stayed excited about the holiday. In the United States alone, more than 41 million children went trick-or-treating in 2014.

Where Costume Ideas Come From



Fun Halloween Facts

Pounds of fresh pumpkin consumed per person in the United States in 2013: 4.2

Percentage of dedicated Halloween fans who begin shopping before September: 5%

Total spent on Halloween in the United States in 2015: \$6.89 billion



Celebrating in a Crowd

Halloween is growing even more popular. Especially in the United States and Canada, more people celebrate Halloween every year. Some cities hold trick-or-treating events at malls, churches, or other places. These events help to keep trick-or-treaters safe from street traffic.

The crowds aren't made up of kids alone, though. Many adults celebrate Halloween, too. In 2015, people planned to spend more on costumes for adults than on costumes for children. Halloween is fun for kids—but adults definitely don't want to be left out.



Children trick-or-treat at an organized event in Moonachie, New Jersey.

A Mix of Old and New

Halloween today looks very different from celebrations of the 1950s, the 1800s, and the Samhain festival of the ancient Celts. Its traditions keep changing, mixing the old with the new. Today, Halloween has traditions from several different cultures that people of all ages can enjoy.



Two girls dress up for Halloween in the United States in 1898.

Do You Know?

An entire industry is built around Halloween candy, costumes, and party supplies. A survey in 2015 found that 93.7 percent of Halloween shoppers planned to buy Halloween candy. Shoppers planned to spend \$2.1 billion on candy alone. Shoppers also planned to spend about \$28 on costumes per household, and many even planned to buy costumes for their pets. 44.8 percent of people celebrating Halloween planned to decorate their yards. And 31.5 percent of shoppers planned either to host a Halloween party or go to one. The average amount spent by people celebrating the holiday was \$74.34.

Source: National Retail Federation, 2015.

Glossary

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| bonfires (<i>n.</i>) | large fires built outside for celebrations, as signals, or to burn trash (p. 6) |
| carving (<i>v.</i>) | cutting with care; to make something, such as a sculpture, by carefully cutting and shaping a material (p. 9) |
| Celtic (<i>adj.</i>) | of or relating to a group of people who lived in ancient Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and western Europe (p. 5) |
| pranks (<i>n.</i>) | tricks or practical jokes (p. 12) |
| predictions (<i>n.</i>) | guesses about what might happen in the future (p. 6) |
| roam (<i>v.</i>) | to travel or move around without a specific plan (p. 9) |
| supernatural (<i>adj.</i>) | beyond what can be explained by natural laws; often relating to religion (p. 6) |
| tradition (<i>n.</i>) | a belief or custom that is passed down from year to year and generation to generation (p. 5) |
| underworld (<i>n.</i>) | the place where dead souls go in some myths (p. 6) |

The History of Halloween

A Reading A-Z Level R Leveled Book
Word Count: 934

Connections

Writing

Create a Venn diagram comparing how Halloween is celebrated today to how it was celebrated long ago. Then, use the information to write a paragraph.

Social Studies

Research to learn more about the history of Halloween. Create a timeline outlining the major events. Share your timeline with your class.

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