

LEVELED BOOK • N

Jack-o'-Lanterns

**Multi
level
K•N•Q**

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www.readinga-z.com

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Focus Question

How did the tradition of carving jack-o'-lanterns begin, and how have jack-o'-lanterns changed over time?



Table of Contents

What Is a Jack-o'-Lantern?	4
Modern Jack-o'-Lanterns	6
Carving Jack-o'-Lanterns	9
Jack-o'-Lantern Events	12
The Tradition Continues	15
Glossary	16



People carve pumpkins into all sorts of creative designs.

What Is a Jack-o'-Lantern?

Carved pumpkins are called *jack-o'-lanterns*. Jack-o'-lanterns are popular decorations around Halloween. Simple jack-o'-lanterns are carved with spooky faces or a toothy grin.

People started carving pumpkins more than a hundred years ago. Stories say the jack-o'-lantern **tradition** began in Ireland before that, though. People in Ireland carved turnips or potatoes instead.

How did the jack-o'-lantern tradition begin? A common fable from the nineteenth century may answer this question.

The fable tells the story of a man named **Stingy Jack**. He was cheap and liked to play tricks on everyone. When he died, he was **cursed** to walk in darkness forever. He carved a turnip and put a light inside to show him the way. People in Ireland called his ghost “Jack of the Lantern,” and then “Jack-o'-lantern.”





Today, many children dress up in costumes to celebrate Halloween.

Modern Jack-o'-Lanterns

The Stingy Jack tradition later became part of a night called All Hallows' Eve. All over Europe, people lit huge fires and wore costumes to keep away ghosts. In Ireland, people carved scary faces on turnips and potatoes and placed lights inside.

Soon, others started to follow this tradition in Scotland and England. The English used beets for their jack-o'-lanterns. All Hallows' Eve later became known as Halloween.

People from these countries brought the jack-o'-lantern tradition to the United States. They soon found that pumpkins worked well as jack-o'-lanterns. By the 1920s, pumpkin carving became popular across America.



This turnip was carved into a traditional jack-o'-lantern.



Children enjoy searching through rows of pumpkins to pick out their favorite.

Today, carving jack-o'-lanterns is an important part of Halloween. Every autumn, people visit a pumpkin patch or a farm to pick the perfect pumpkin. About 1.5 billion pounds (more than 680 million kg) of pumpkins are grown in the United States each year.



A standard pumpkin carving kit includes a thin saw, a scoop, and a stencil tracer.

Carving Jack-o'-Lanterns

Pumpkins that are firm and smooth work well for jack-o'-lanterns. If the pumpkin tilts to one side, the light inside may fall over.

Some people buy carving kits, which include the tools and **designs** to make a great jack-o'-lantern. Others carve without any help from patterns.

The first step in carving a pumpkin is to cut a hole in the top to make the lid. Always have a parent help out while carving with a knife.



Next, the inside flesh and the seeds can be scooped out until the pumpkin is empty. Many people roast the seeds for a snack. Others make tasty pies, bread, or soup with the pumpkin flesh.





Step 3: Draw a design.

The next step is to draw a design on the pumpkin.

Then, it's time to carve. People can carve faces, animals, or a message. They can trace out designs or even paint to decorate the pumpkin.



Step 4: Carve!

After the pumpkin is carved, a candle or other light can be placed inside. Finally, the pumpkin lid goes back on top.

Jack-o'-Lantern Events

Many cities put on special events to show off their carved pumpkins. In Hudson Valley, New York, thousands of jack-o'-lanterns make up a big display. This **festive** event is complete with spooky sounds and music. Pumpkins lie side by side to form big snakes and dinosaurs. Visitors can walk through a dome of pumpkins all carved with twinkling stars.



The Great Jack-o'-Lantern Blaze is held in Hudson Valley, New York. It takes place in Sleepy Hollow, home to the legend of the Headless Horseman.



Professional artists and sculptors hand-carve more than five thousand pumpkins each year for the Rise of the Jack-o'-Lanterns event in Los Angeles.

A huge display in Los Angeles, California, presents pumpkin cars and dinosaurs, and pumpkin carvings of famous people. People can watch the artists carve their pumpkins at this event.



Giant Jack-o'-Lantern

An artist carves one of the largest jack-o'-lanterns ever recorded. It weighed more than 1,800 pounds (816 kg)! The record-breaking pumpkin was as heavy as a cow. The artist beat his own Guinness World Record for largest jack-o'-lantern, which he had earned five years earlier.



Keene's annual Pumpkin Festival set the world record for most lit jack-o'-lanterns many times.

Recently, a town in New Hampshire broke a world record for the most lit jack-o'-lanterns on display. The town had thirty thousand jack-o'-lanterns lit at once!

Halloween Under the Sea



Carved pumpkins are even displayed underwater. Some aquarium workers put carved pumpkins in large ocean tanks each autumn. No one knows what the fish think, but visitors enjoy the festive sight.

The Tradition Continues

Carving pumpkins into jack-o'-lanterns is a fun activity for people of all ages. Pumpkins can be carved with a spooky face or detailed art. They can even be used as part of a big display. However people carve them, jack-o'-lanterns are a sure sign that Halloween is around the corner. What kind of jack-o'-lantern would you make?



Carving a jack-o'-lantern can take time, but the end result is worth the effort.

Glossary

- carved** (*adj.*) decorated or created by cutting or etching (p. 4)
- cursed** (*v.*) called upon a supernatural power to cause trouble or harm to someone or something (p. 5)
- designs** (*n.*) patterns of lines, shapes, images, or colors (p. 9)
- festive** (*adj.*) of or relating to a celebration or holiday; cheerful (p. 12)
- stingy** (*adj.*) not liking or willing to spend, give, or share (p. 5)
- tradition** (*n.*) a belief or custom that is passed down from year to year and generation to generation (p. 4)

Words to Know

carved

cursed

designs

festive

stingy

tradition

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Connections

Writing and Art

How would you carve your jack-o'-lantern for Halloween? Draw a picture of your design and write about it.

Social Studies

Research another country's Halloween traditions. Use a Venn diagram to compare your country's Halloween traditions with the traditions of the other country.

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