

The History of Halloween

A Reading A-Z Level X Leveled Book
Word Count: 1,422

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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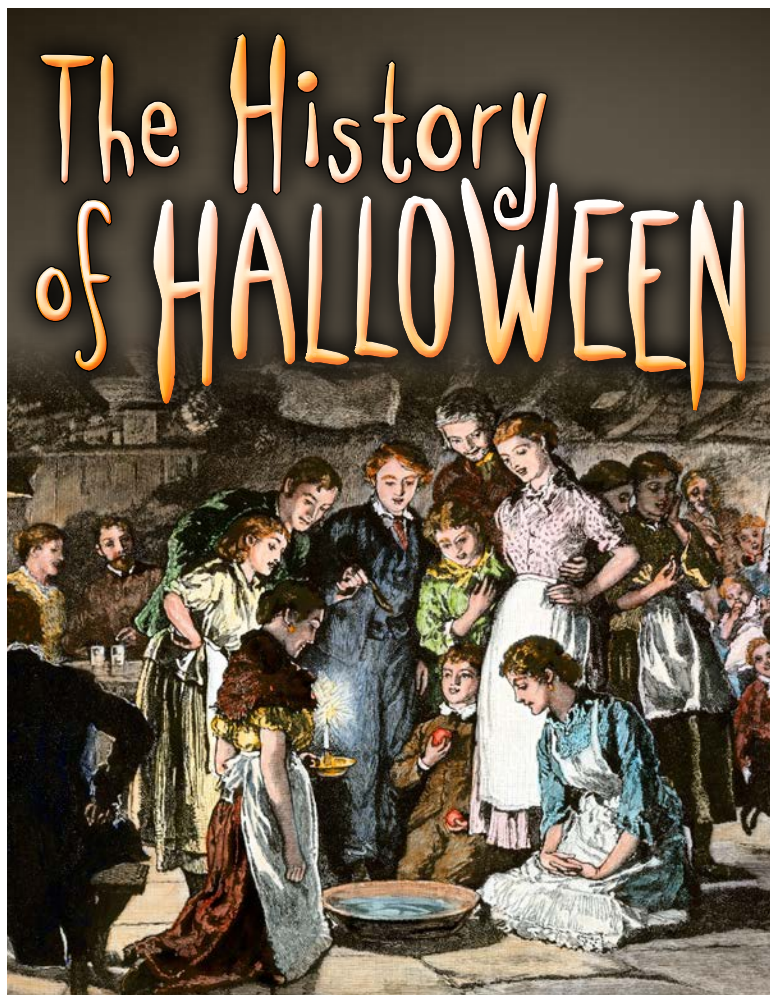
LEVELED BOOK • X

The History of HALLOWEEN



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Focus Question

How has the celebration of Halloween changed throughout the years?

Words to Know

Celtic	pranks
consumers	predictions
immigrants	Puritans
malicious	supernatural
medieval	tradition
merchandise	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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Correlation

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A Fun and Scary Holiday

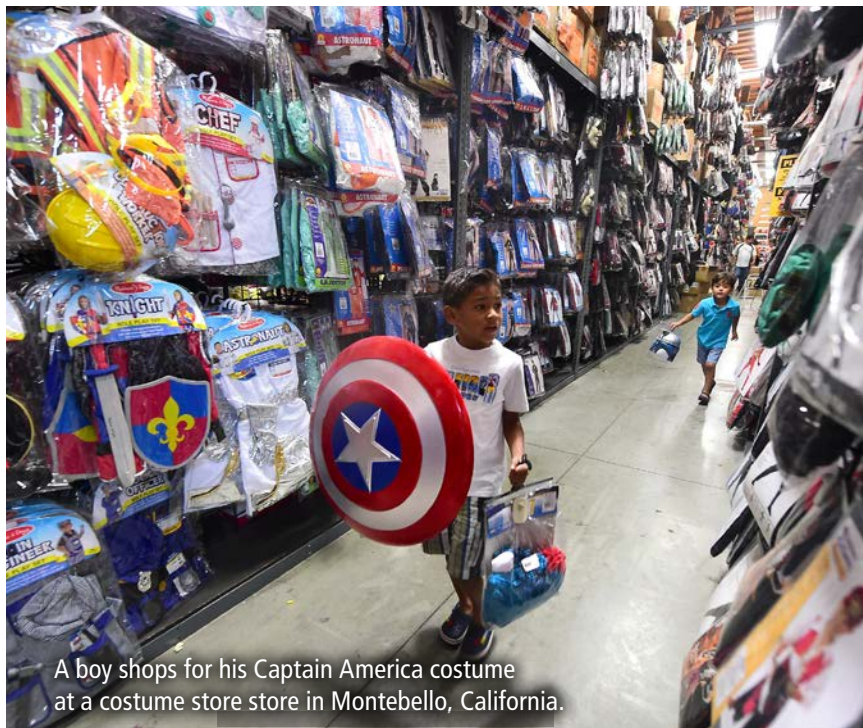
Halloween is a colorful—and delicious—holiday celebrated mostly in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Ireland, where it first began. On October 31, people dress up in all kinds of costumes, creepy music oozes from Halloween parties and haunted houses, and trick-or-treaters pour into the streets, looking for candy. Monsters, ghosts, superheroes, and princesses of all ages celebrate together.

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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 most popular in the United States, where the holiday plays an enormous role in both culture and business. Halloween is featured in Hollywood movies and popular songs. Halloween means big business for American stores since millions of people buy Halloween candy, costumes, and **merchandise** every year.

The Halloween holiday celebrated today is part of an ancient **tradition**. It began with the **Celtic** (KEL-tik) peoples who lived in Great Britain, Ireland, and northern France about two thousand years ago.



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

The Celts: Samhain

The Celts celebrated a harvest festival called Samhain (SOW-in) each fall. Samhain had some things in common with our New Year's celebrations as well as the modern Halloween. According to the Celtic calendar, October 31 was the final day of the year. The Samhain celebration on October 31 was a way to say farewell to the old year, close the harvest season, and get ready for winter.

The Celtic Samhain festival also had a **supernatural** side. According to Celtic tradition, on the eve of Samhain, the doorways between the world of the living and the world of the dead were open. As a result, the spirits of people who had died during the previous year could cross over to the **underworld**. The Celts believed the dead could appear and communicate with the living during this period. To help the dead on their journey, Celts lit bonfires and sacrificed crops and animals. It was 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 the old Samhain festival 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, came to be called All Hallows Eve, which was later shortened to Halloween.

Hundreds of years later, many of the older Celtic traditions remained in this new holiday—especially the belief in supernatural activity on the night of October 31. The Halloween traditions we know today are influenced by the Celts, the Catholic Church, and legends from **medieval** Europe.



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

Costumes and Trick-or-Treating

The tradition of dressing up in costumes has changed many times over the centuries. Halloween costumes probably began with the Celts, who dressed up like animals at the Samhain bonfires. In medieval England, the costumes took a new twist as people began to dress like supernatural beings in the hope of frightening them away. Many people paraded through towns wearing fairy, witch, and ghost costumes.

This practice was called *mumming*, and people often gave mummers food and drink. This custom echoed the Celtic practice of making sacrifices at Samhain; it was believed that such offerings helped satisfy the spirits so they would go away without making trouble. Today this tradition is known as trick-or-treating. Adults give candy to children, who, if they get a treat, will hopefully move along without performing any **malicious** tricks.



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

Jack-o'-Lanterns

Many people create jack-o'-lanterns each year at Halloween. Jack-o'-lanterns are made by carving faces or designs into a pumpkin, then placing a candle or other light inside the pumpkin to light up the carving. Jack-o'-lanterns are a newer Halloween tradition, one of the few that did not originate with the Celtic Samhain. Jack-o'-lanterns come from an Irish legend about a man named Stingy Jack.

Stingy Jack wasn't just stingy—he was cruel, too, and liked to play mischievous tricks on his friends. When Jack died, his spirit was forced to roam in the darkness as punishment for his unpleasant personality. To light his way, he carved a hollow in a turnip and placed a candle inside. Because of this, the Irish referred to him as “Jack-of-the-lantern” and, later, “Jack-o'-lantern.”



The legend of Stingy Jack started one big Halloween tradition.



Some people still carve turnips for Halloween.

People in Ireland and England used to put candles and coals into turnips, beets, and potatoes, carving scary faces into them to imitate Stingy Jack's terrifying face (or to frighten him away). Irish people moved to North America in huge numbers in the 1800s and brought the jack-o'-lantern tradition with them.

The tradition of using pumpkins in jack-o'-lanterns, however, began in the United States. An American newspaper story and a poem, published separately in 1846, both mentioned people carving faces into pumpkins and placing a candle inside. The rest is history. Pumpkins make excellent jack-o'-lanterns: they are large enough to be carved in all kinds of elaborate designs, and they are plentiful in the fall. Today, creating and displaying jack-o'-lanterns is a beloved Halloween tradition for many families.

Traditions of the Past

A number of Halloween traditions popular in the past are less well known today. Interestingly, several of these traditions are related to the Celtic custom of fortune-telling at Samhain, which survived in different forms for centuries. For example, sometimes people played games on Halloween night to predict who they might marry. A girl might look into a mirror while holding a candle to see the face of her future husband. Even the classic Halloween party game of bobbing for apples began as a form of fortune-telling. In this game, players attempt to remove an apple from a tub of water using only their mouths. The first person to get an apple out of the tub was supposed to be the first to marry thereafter. Today, fortune-telling has dropped out of many Halloween games, but people might meet a fortune-teller at a Halloween party or haunted house.



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

Halloween Today

The modern Halloween celebration is a fairly recent invention, though it is often mixed with ancient traditions like that of the Samhain bonfire. 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; the **Puritans**, for example, considered Halloween a silly waste of time at best and discouraged people from celebrating it.

The holiday became much more popular when huge numbers of Irish **immigrants** came to the United States in the 1800s, bringing their traditions with them. With the immigrants came jack-o'-lanterns and mumming, and gradually more Americans began to celebrate Halloween. Unfortunately, though, as Halloween celebrations became more popular, **pranks** and vandalism became common on Halloween night. By the 1930s, the pranks had become a major problem. Some city governments addressed the issue by trying to remake Halloween into a family holiday, organizing trick-or-treating events and encouraging children to participate. The initial trick-or-treaters in the 1930s and 1940s received cookies and fruit as well as toys and even pocket change.

Candy became a popular offering as trick-or-treating became more widespread in the 1950s. However, the tiny, individually wrapped Halloween candy bars common today didn't appear until the 1970s. Although the treats have changed over the years, kids' enthusiasm hasn't. In the United States alone, more than 41 million children between the ages of five and fourteen went trick-or-treating in 2014.



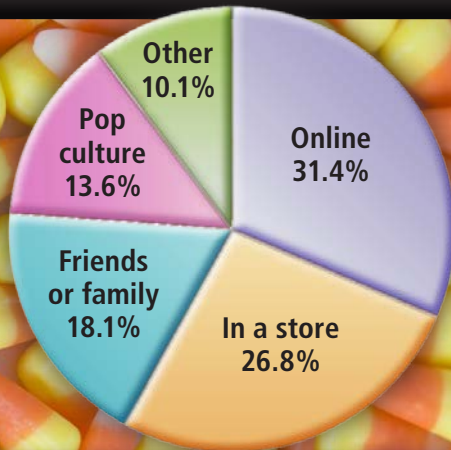
Children trick-or-treat at an organized event in Moonachie, New Jersey.

Celebrating in a Crowd

Halloween's popularity is on the rise. Especially in the United States and Canada, the number of people who celebrate Halloween each year is growing. Some cities are organizing community trick-or-treating events at malls, churches, and community centers. These events help kids pile up lots of candy in a short amount of time, and they also help to keep trick-or-treaters safe from street traffic.

The crowds aren't made up of kids alone; adults are celebrating Halloween in increasing numbers, too. In 2015, **consumers** actually planned to spend more on costumes for adults than on costumes for children. Many adults (especially young adults) participate in the festivities by hosting or attending Halloween parties as well as dressing in costume. Halloween is fun for kids—but adults definitely don't want to be left out.

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



A Mix of Old and New

Halloween today looks very different from the Halloween celebrations of the 1950s, the 1800s, and the Samhain festival of the ancient Celts; its traditions continue to change, mixing the old with the new.

From bonfires to chocolate bars, from coal-filled turnips to candle-lit pumpkins, Halloween is a holiday that changes with the times, providing fun and entertainment for one spooky night each year. Today, Halloween is rich with 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 exists around Halloween candy, costumes, and party supplies. A survey in 2015 found that an astonishing 93.7 percent of Halloween shoppers planned to buy Halloween candy. Consumers planned to spend \$2.1 billion on candy alone. Shoppers also planned to spend about \$28 per household on costumes, and many even planned to buy costumes for their pets. A total of 44.8 percent of people celebrating Halloween planned to decorate their yards. And 31.5 percent of consumers planned either to host a Halloween party or attend one. The average amount spent by people celebrating the holiday was \$74.34.

Source: National Retail Federation, 2015.

Glossary

Celtic (<i>adj.</i>)	of or relating to people who lived in ancient Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and western Europe (p. 5)
consumers (<i>n.</i>)	people who buy or rent goods or services and use them (p. 14)
immigrants (<i>n.</i>)	people who come to live in a new country, especially for the purpose of settling there (p. 12)
malicious (<i>adj.</i>)	hateful and harmful (p. 8)
medieval (<i>adj.</i>)	of or relating to the Middle Ages, the time period in European history from AD 500 to 1500 (p. 7)
merchandise (<i>n.</i>)	items that are bought or sold (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)
Puritans (<i>n.</i>)	members of a British Protestant religious group that opposed the Church of England and came to North America seeking religious freedom (p. 12)
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)