



Halloween

Tidbits!

Everything you need to know about this
spooky season



What is Halloween?

Halloween comes every year on October 31st so we can celebrate the spooky season, but what exactly is it? Is it defined by pumpkins and candy corn? Or is it maybe the fun of dressing up in costumes and getting candy from people? Well... all of it! Few people realize that Halloween goes far back to an ancient society known as the Celts that lived in Ireland and Scotland. Surely they didn't go around asking for candy, so how can that be true?



Halloween's Origins

Long before these traditions started, the Celts practiced a holiday called Samhain (s-ow-in) over 2,000 years ago. On October 31st, the Celts celebrated the end of the year. This was a major holiday for them. It was important that they properly began a new year and participated in celebrations that ensured the new year would be a good one. This helped the Celts ease their worries about living in a chaotic world.



Art by John Anster Fitzgerald

Halloween's Origins

During Samhain, when the old and new year mingled, it was also believed that the Otherworld mixed with the living realm. Samhain was not only meant to celebrate the end of a year, but it was also a time to reconnect with spirits of the dead. During this short time, Celts honored their dead ancestors and feared the spirits that were unwelcome.

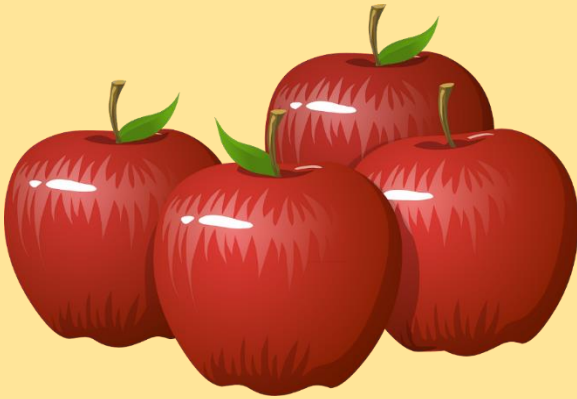


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Historians aren't too sure if the Celts feared the dead or welcomed them

Halloween's Origins

When Romans took over Celtic lands, beliefs and traditions from both cultures mixed together. Feralia was a Roman holiday in late October dedicated to the dead. The Festival of Pomona (the Roman goddess of the harvest) also took place around this time. It is believed that Feralia and the Festival of Pomona merged with Samhain and created a holiday with traits from each original holiday.



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Pomona's symbol was an apple

Halloween's Origins

All Martyrs Day was a Christian holiday meant to honor all their martyrs, people who died for their religion. The holiday expanded to include saints as well. The date was moved from May 31st to November 2nd. This holiday was renamed All Souls' Day to honor all dead souls. Samhain eventually became history and All Souls' Day became the new autumn holiday. The celebration of All Saints Day during this time was called All-Hallowmas which derives from the Middle English word for All Saints' Day, Alholowmesse. The night before All Saint's Day became known as All-Hallows Eve. This name was shortened to Halloween over the years.



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Halloween wasn't celebrated in America much until Irish immigrants came to the country

Jack-o-lanterns

These pumpkins started with a man named Stingy Jack. The story goes that he was drinking with the Devil but refused to pay. He told the Devil to turn into a coin so he could pay for the drinks, but Jack put the coin in his pocket next to a cross, so the Devil couldn't escape! When Jack did let him go, he told the Devil to leave him alone for a year and not to claim his soul if he died. Once the year was over, Jack tricked the Devil to climb a tree to get some fruit. He then carved a cross onto the tree trapping the Devil again! He could not come down until he promised Jack he would leave him alone for 10 years. When Jack died, God didn't want such a sinner in heaven. The Devil was still mad at Jack plus he had made a promise to not take Jack's soul. Jack had to wander Earth with nothing but a burning coal in a hollow turnip.



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Geas (gay-sh) is an Irish word for a strong promise that must never be broken

Jack-o-lanterns

Originally jack-o-lanterns were made with turnips, beats and potatoes! Once the pumpkin was discovered in America, they became more popular.



How to carve a pumpkin!

1. Get a nice pumpkin
2. Cut a hole at the top or bottom
3. Take out all the goop. Save it to make some yummy food!
4. Trace the face you want on the pumpkin with a pencil
5. Use your carving tool to carve where you traced your lines
6. Push out the parts you just carved

Spooky tip: Place an electronic candle inside your pumpkin so you don't have to worry about fire!

Safety tip: Always ask permission to use sharp tools!! If you can't use sharp tools, paint your design onto the pumpkin.

Trick-or-Treating

The wonderful tradition of getting candy from people is a hallmark of Halloween. All the way back when Samhain was around, offerings were left out for the spirits that would wander the world of the living. Some people would take

advantage of this by dressing up like spirits and asking people for offering. If the person refused, a trick would be pulled on them.



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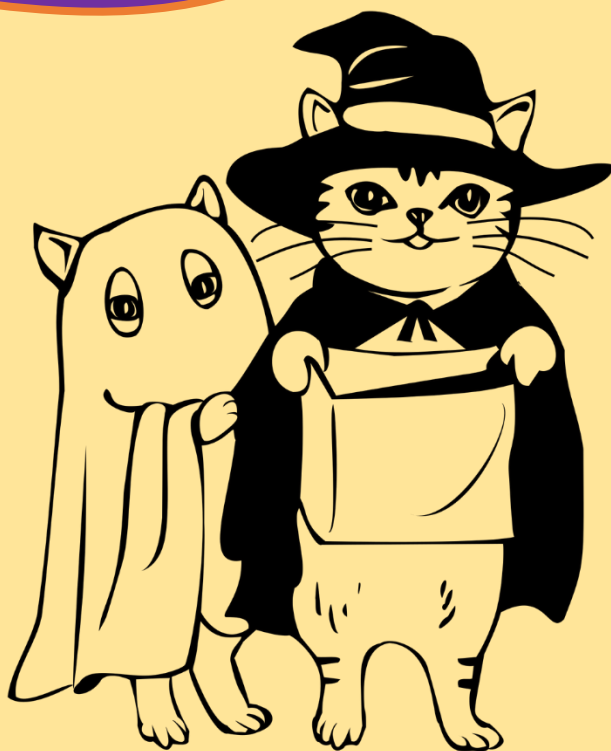
If you stack candy corn in a circle it looks like a corn on the cob!

Dressing up in Costumes

This can be traced back to Samhain as well. Some of the spirits that wandered the living world were considered dangerous and scary. In order to get the spirits to go away, the Celts would dress up to trick the spirits into thinking they were also spirits. They also dressed up to scare away the unwanted spirits.

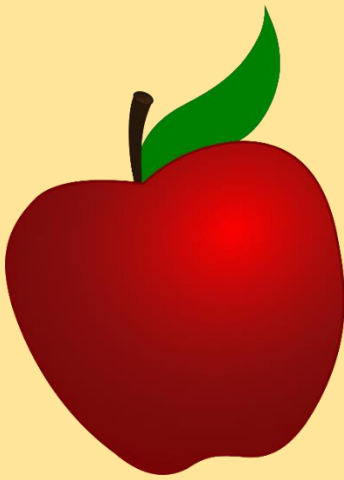
Important Note!

It is important to be smart with your costume. If you want to dress up as someone from another culture, be respectful! Don't give into stereotypes. Find out how they really dress. Learning about a new culture can be very fun! Also, try to avoid offensive things. Halloween should be safe and fun for everyone!



Bobbing for Apples

This fun game is one of the few traditions that doesn't come from Samhain. It was a game lovers played in Britain. Sometimes each apple was given a name and if the player caught it, that name was meant to be the player's soulmate. When the game lost its popularity,



only Ireland and a few areas in England still played it. Eventually it was brought back when people grew curious about their Celtic heritage. They brought this fun game to their Halloween parties for all ages.

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It was believed that if a lady placed the apple she caught under her pillow she would dream of her true love.

Bonfires

Like most of these traditions, it comes from Samhain. Samhain was a time for religious leaders, known as druids, to predict the future and talk to the gods. Druids would light bonfires and burn food and commit animal sacrifice. These sacrifices were meant to please the gods in celebration, or in an attempt to spare themselves of the spirits' tricks.



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Some historians think that the druids even sacrificed humans! There is no solid proof so it may or may not be true.

Religion

While Samhain might not be popular anymore, it is still celebrated today. Some neo-pagans celebrate it for the same reasons the Celts did. Some traditions might differ, but the main point remains: the dead are to be honored and the fall season is to be welcomed.



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Samhain isn't only celebrated by neo-pagans. There are still Celts today!

Halloween Around the World

There are more spooky holidays than just Halloween. Cultures all over the world celebrate!

In Mexico and other Latin American countries, they celebrate the Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) from October 31st to November 2nd. It is believed that dead relatives return to the world of the living.

Gravesites are cleaned and memorials are made for the dead relative with their pictures and favorite foods. Think of it as a family reunion!



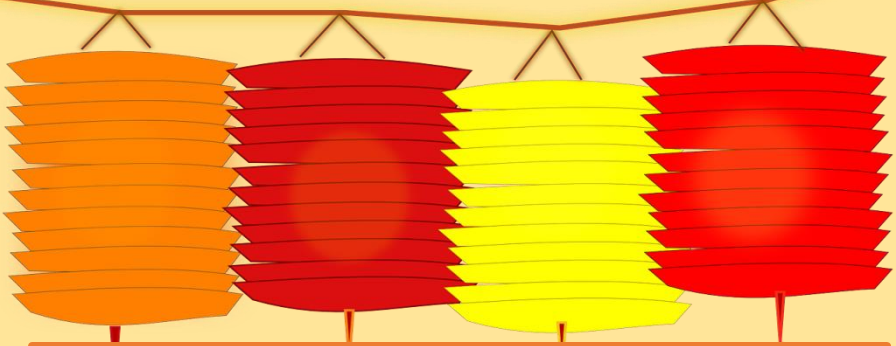
Tidbit!

Candles and incense are lit so spirits can find their way home.

Halloween Around the World

Japan has a festival called Obon. It is very similar to Dia de los Muertos. Both holidays believe dead relatives return, they clean gravesites, it lasts for three days, and memorials are created. This holiday is celebrated in August.

India has a 16 day long festival called Pitru Paksha. It tends to take place in late September and early October. Food is offered to the dead to pay them respect.



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Both Samhain and Pitru Paksha take place during astrological events. Samhain happens between the autumn equinox and the winter solstice. Pitru Pashka follows the lunar cycle.

Read More

The information in this booklet was taken from the following sources:

Books

- “Celts The History and Legacy of One of the Oldest Cultures in Europe” by Martin Dougherty
- "Halloween Origins and Traditions" Exploring Creation by Todd Elder

History.com

- “History of Halloween”
- “What is Bobbing for Apples?”
- “Halloween 2018”
- “History of the Jack-o-Lantern”
- “Halloween Around the World”

AsiaSociety.org

- “You've Heard about Halloween, but how does Asia Honor the Dead?”