

Halloween, Then and Now

The Halloween customs observed on October 31 had their beginnings long, long ago. They came from the beliefs of the druids — priests of ancient Gaul and Britain. The druids believed that witches, demons, and spirits of the dead roamed the earth on the eve of November 1. Bonfires were lit to drive the bad spirits away. To protect themselves further from the mean tricks of the bad spirits, the druids offered them good things to eat. They also disguised themselves. That way the spirits would think the druids belonged to their own evil company. Surely the spirits would not harm members of their own group! Or so the druids thought. Thus we celebrate Halloween by playing "trick or treat," dressing up in costumes, and wearing masks.

Autumn leaves, cornstalks, apples, and nuts are a big part of the Halloween season. And they are reminders of the druids' autumn festival in honor of the harvest.

Much later the Roman Catholic Church set aside the first day of November to honor all the saints who had no special days of their own. Saints were known as the hallowed, or holy, ones. Their special day was known as All Saints' or All Hallows' Day. The night before was called All Hallows' Even. All Hallows' Even was shortened to Halloween.

Decorating for Halloween

Jack-o'-Lanterns

Part of the fun of Halloween is in preparing for it. One of the traditional decorations of this season is the jack-o'-lantern. The children in Britain and many other countries make their jack-o'-lanterns from turnips. But the pumpkin is traditional in the United States and Canada. An older child or an adult will need to carve out the top and face of the jack-o'-lantern. But children of all ages can help design the face and scoop out the seeds and pulp inside. After the seeds are washed and air-dried, they can be used to make seed pictures. Or they can be made into a tasty snack. This is done by coating them with cooking oil and roasting them in a 350°F (175°C) oven for about an hour. Just add salt and they will be ready to enjoy.

Your jack-o'-lantern can be lighted from the inside with a small flashlight or a candle. Great caution should be used around jack-o'-lanterns with candles in them. And they must be kept where they won't fall over and out of the reach of very small children.

You might want to make an entire jack-o'-lantern figure to put on your porch for the Halloween season. Stuff an old pair of pants and a shirt with crumpled newspaper. Tuck the shirttails into the pants and safety pin them together. Pin old work gloves stuffed with paper to the shirt cuffs and tuck the cuffs of the pants into an old pair of boots. Set your figure in a chair on your porch. Rest the jack-o'-lantern head on its shoulders or, for a real surprise, on its lap. This jack-o'-lantern should not be lighted with a candle because the old clothes might catch on fire.

Party Decorations

If you are having a party for Halloween, you will certainly want to decorate at least one room in your house for it. Even if you are not having a Halloween party, it is fun to make some Halloween decorations to place around your house for the season.

Pumpkins of all sizes can be made from large and small plain paper bags. For each pumpkin, just stuff a bag with crumpled newspaper and twist the top into a stem. Paint the stem green and the rest of the bag orange. To turn the pumpkins into jack-o'-lanterns, add faces cut from black paper or drawn with a black crayon.

You can also hang pictures around the room of ghosts, witches, and other scary characters you have drawn or cut out of magazines.

You can decorate your windows with Halloween characters by using permanent markers to draw or trace Halloween pictures on see-through plastic wrap. The side of the plastic wrap not drawn on will stick to the windows. And the drawings will appear to have been made on the windows themselves. Best of all, the plastic is easily removed when Halloween is over. Keeping the lights in the room very low will help to give it a spooky feeling.

Halloween Games

If you are having a Halloween party or just looking for something to do with a group of your friends, you might want to play Halloween games. Dunking for apples is a Halloween favorite. The object of the game is to try to get an apple out of a water-filled basin using only your teeth. A drier version of this game can be played by hanging apples or doughnuts from the ceiling on strings. Then try to catch them with your teeth.

Contests for carving or drawing faces on pumpkins are popular. Or you might want to have a contest to see who can design the scariest paper bag mask. Think of your favorite traditional party games and try to turn them into Halloween games. For example, "Pin the Tail on the Donkey" could become "Pin the Nose on the Ghost." "Drop the Clothespins in the Bottle" could become "Drop the Clothespins in the Pumpkin."

Halloween Safety

Before you go out trick-or-treating, review the rules of Halloween safety. This is a good idea whether you are accompanied by an adult or old enough to go out with just your friends. Remember to be very careful when crossing streets. It is probably going to be very dark. Masks and other costume parts may make it harder to see oncoming traffic. Carry a flashlight with you and keep it on so that drivers can see you. Try stapling a disposable aluminum pie pan to your trick-or-treat bag. It makes an excellent reflector and will help drivers notice you.

Finally, never eat one single treat until it has been brought home and inspected by an adult. This is especially important when you have been trick-or-treating at the houses of people you do not know. It is a very sad fact that

harmful substances and objects have been discovered in Halloween candy. Because of this, more and more people have decided to give small prizes such as pencils, rings, or stickers rather than something to eat.

Trick-or-Treat for Others

Often boys and girls go out on Halloween not only to trick-or-treat but to try to help other children less fortunate than themselves. In 1950 a Sunday-school class in one small American community gave up their treats of candy and apples. Instead they asked for pennies, nickels, and dimes to give the United Nations Children's Fund. This example has been followed by other boys and girls around the country ever since.

Communities in the United States wishing to join in the movement can get the materials they need from the United States Committee for UNICEF, 331 East 38th Street, New York, New York, 10016. Boys and girls in costume ring their neighbors' doorbells as usual on October 31. But they carry special containers that show they are taking part in the work of UNICEF. The money collected helps needy children all over the world. These trick-or-treaters get their real satisfaction on Halloween from the joy of helping others.

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