



## History



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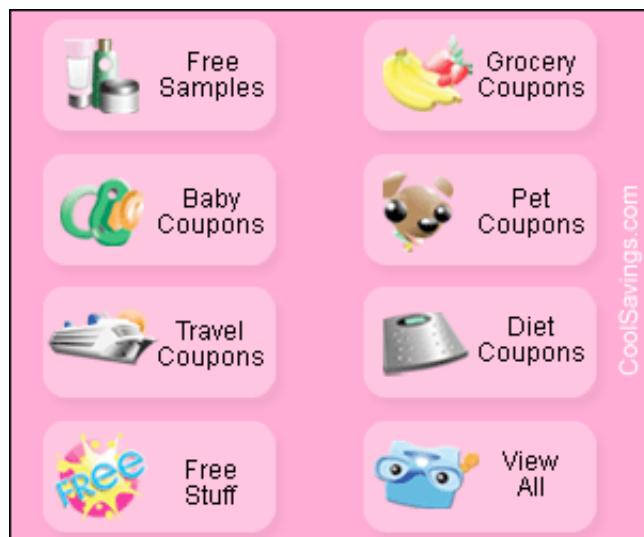
From trick-or-treating to carving jack-o-lanterns, Halloween is filled with superstition and folklore.

What child doesn't love Halloween? It is a time when everyone—adults and children alike—get to play dress up, eat candy, and enjoy spooky tales of ghosts and goblins. But many trick-or-treaters of all ages don't know where this holiday comes from and what it's really all about.

Intrigued? If your interest is piqued, read on to learn some of the real history behind Halloween as well as find some tips and activities that are great for explaining this spooky time of year to your kids.

### The Origins of Halloween

Before the kids of the neighborhood went door to door and orange and black streamers lined front porches, people celebrated the closing of the harvest. In fact, Ancient European practices that venerated the changing of the seasons are the basis for our modern-day Halloween, says Jeanine Head Miller, Curator of the Henry Ford Museum. This harvest-time celebration was called *Samhain* (pronounced "Sow-in") and originated with the Celts. "The Celts of Northern Europe experienced unknown forces of nature such as shortened days and weakened sunlight during their winter months," says Miller.



October 31 marks the Celtic New Year, and it was believed that on this day the barrier between the physical world and the spirit world was very thin, allowing all sorts of unwanted spirits to roam the earth. To ward off potential threats to their families, "the Celts would practice such traditions as offering food and drink . . . [and] dress[ing] in disguise as unwanted spirits," in hopes they'd deceive the unearthly beings, says Miller.

As time progressed and Christianity spread throughout Europe, the various holidays were modified to fit the Christian calendar. October 31 was then referred to as "All Hallow's Eve" because it was the eve of All Saints' Day.

As the Celtic people immigrated to America and throughout the world, they brought with them their folk customs and beliefs. Now, carving pumpkins to ward off spirits, dressing up in disguise, and trick-or-treating are done in good fun and have been adapted to a completely secular day.

### Common Traditions and Symbols Associated with Halloween

Now that you know a bit of the origins of this frightful fest, it's time to bone up on some of the traditions practiced with this fall holiday.

- **Pumpkin Carving:** Irish immigrants originally used hollowed-out turnips as lanterns, says Miller, but

upon coming to America, they adopted the use of pumpkins because they were more readily accessible. So pumpkins, transformed into jack-o-lanterns (carved with scary faces to ward off troublesome spirits), soon became harbingers of fall and the harvest.

- **Bobbing for Apples:** Although not a recommended activity for small children, bobbing for apples is a fun game where kids take turns dunking their heads in a bucket of water to try and grab an apple with their mouths. This tradition has been linked to Samhain celebrations and could possibly have ties to Pomona, the Roman goddess of Orchards, says Matt Cherry, Executive Director of the Institute for Humanist Studies.
- **Dressing Up:** For ages people have dressed up to reenact their past, ward off spirits, and for pure fun. The Celts in particular may have dressed up to disguise themselves from the spirits roaming the earth on Samhain.
- **Trick-or-Treat:** What once began as a way to keep the evil spirits at bay by placing food and drink outside of one's home, turned into a silly way to get free treats! Rather than real spirits tormenting the people, mischievous folk would dress up like the spirits and threaten harm unless given food.

### Teaching Little Ones

The real story behind Halloween may be too frightening for youngsters, especially the part about the dead walking the earth! But it is possible to let your children in on this culturally important information without scaring the daylights out of them.

One good way to explain this interesting history, according to Miller, is to tell your kids that Halloween was brought to America by people from foreign countries. While relocating their homes to the United States, the immigrants brought many traditions from their homelands, one of which was celebrating the changing seasons by dressing up, eating, and decorating with harvest-time items such as pumpkins and scarecrows.

### Spooky Fun

Want to teach your kids the real story behind Halloween and make it fun? Try these fun and educational crafts.

- **Pumpkin Carving:** Don't forget to let your younger children join in the fun! Adults should take care of the actual carving, but young children will love scooping out the pulp (and eating the roasted seeds). Kids of all ages like to get messy! There are many pre-made designs for pumpkin carving, but you can also let your kids come up with a scary face for you to cut out. Take this time to tell your kids about jack-o-lanterns and where they come from.
- **Worms in Dirt:** This is a fun treat to make that's super tasty! To make it, you'll need chocolate cookies, chocolate pudding, gummy worms, and some paper cups.

Dump the pudding into a bowl. Take the chocolate cookies and crunch them up until they're crumbs. Next, combine the cookie crumbs with the pudding until the mixture is evenly lumpy. Pour your "dirt" mixture into the cups, hiding some worms in it as you do so. Talk with your children about Halloween and its connection to all things that go bump in the night.

- **Halloween Masks:** Gather up some construction paper, paper plates, scissors, and glue sticks. Have each child design his or her own Halloween mask by drawing a scary face on the paper plate. Decorate the plate with cut-outs from the construction paper such as eyes, a mouth, and scary fangs. Next, glue these shapes onto the paper plate face. Voila! A mask for some frightening fun.
- **Scary Scarecrow:** This activity is more involved, and you'll need a broom handle and a piece of two-by-four lumber to start. First, pound one end of the lumber into the ground where you want to set up your scarecrow. Then, nail the broom handle or smaller piece of lumber sideways to form a "T" for your scarecrow's arms.

Once you have your scarecrow's "skeleton," it is time to decorate! Have your children help find old clothes with which to dress your scarecrow. Stuff the clothing with newspapers and tie off the ends of the shirt and pants with string. Next, stuff a dark paper bag with paper and tie it to the top of the wooden frame for your scarecrow's head and face. Draw on a big eyes, nose, and mouth, and add a straw hat and you'll have the ultimate scarecrow this Halloween!

Happy Halloween!

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