

From Samhain to Candy Corn: A Journey Through Halloween's History

Subject: History, Cultural Studies

Grade Level: 7th-8th Grade (Designed for a 13-year-old)

Time Allotment: 90 minutes

Materials Needed

- Computer or tablet with internet access
 - Notebook or journal and a pen/pencil
 - Art supplies (paper, colored pencils, markers)
 - Optional: A pumpkin, turnip, or potato and carving tools for a hands-on extension
 - Optional: Printer for templates
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Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, Ruby will be able to:

- Analyze the historical origins of at least three modern Halloween traditions (e.g., jack-o'-lanterns, costumes, trick-or-treating).
 - Explain how the Celtic festival of Samhain influenced the development of Halloween.
 - Synthesize historical information to create an original piece (a comic strip, an event plan, or a story) that explains the evolution of a Halloween tradition.
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Lesson Activities

Part 1: The Hook - Modern Halloween Brainstorm (10 minutes)

1. **Think-Pair-Share (with the teacher):** Start with a fun, quick discussion. Ask Ruby: "When you think of Halloween, what are the first five things that pop into your head?" (e.g., Candy, costumes, horror movies, pumpkins, ghosts).
2. **Guiding Question:** Write down her answers. Then, pose the central question for our investigation: "Have you ever wondered *why* we do these specific, sometimes strange, things on this one night of the year? Why pumpkins? Why costumes? Today, you're going to be a history detective and find out."

Part 2: The Investigation - Traveling Back in Time (30 minutes)

Ruby's mission is to gather clues about the origins of modern Halloween traditions. She will explore the following resources to understand the key historical periods. Encourage her to take brief notes in her

journal for each era, focusing on customs, beliefs, and key terms.

1. **Clue #1: The Ancient Celts and Samhain.**

- **Watch:** "The Origins of Halloween" from National Geographic (a short, engaging 4-minute video).
- **Read:** [History.com's "History of Halloween" article](#) (Focus on the first section, "Ancient Origins of Halloween").
- **Detective Notes:** What was Samhain? Why did the Celts wear costumes and light bonfires? What was the significance of the barrier between the living and the dead?

2. **Clue #2: The Romans and Christian Influence.**

- **Read:** Continue with the History.com article, focusing on the sections about Roman conquest and the Christian church's influence ("All Saints' Day").
- **Detective Notes:** How did Roman festivals blend with Celtic ones? What were "All Saints' Day" and "All Souls' Day," and how did their timing influence the holiday we know today? (Hint: "All-hallows Eve").

3. **Clue #3: Halloween Comes to America.**

- **Read:** Skim the rest of the History.com article, focusing on how Irish and Scottish immigrants brought the traditions to America and how they changed.
- **Detective Notes:** What were "play parties"? How did trick-or-treating evolve from older customs? Why did we switch from carving turnips to carving pumpkins?

Part 3: The Creative Synthesis - Show What You Know (40 minutes)

Now that Ruby has gathered all the historical clues, it's time for her to present her findings in a creative way. She can choose **one** of the following projects to complete. The goal is to show the *evolution* of a tradition, not just list facts.

• **Project Option A: The "Tradition Transformation" Comic Strip**

Create a 4-6 panel comic strip that tells the story of one Halloween tradition. For example:

- **Panel 1:** An ancient Celt carving a scary face into a turnip to ward off spirits.
- **Panel 2:** An early American child discovering the much larger and easier-to-carve pumpkin.
- **Panel 3:** A family in the 1950s carving a classic triangle-eyed jack-o'-lantern.
- **Panel 4:** A modern-day artist carving an incredibly detailed and elaborate design into a prize-winning pumpkin.

• **Project Option B: The "Time-Traveler's Halloween Party" Plan**

Design a plan for the ultimate historically-accurate Halloween party. Create a one-page flyer or plan that includes:

- **Event Title:** Something creative like "A Samhain SoirÃ©e" or "An All-Hallows Eve Evolution."
- **Activities Section:** List 3 activities for the party, but for each one, include a short "Did You Know?" blurb explaining its historical origin. (e.g., "Bobbing for Apples: This game may have originated from a Roman festival honoring Pomona, the goddess of fruit trees!").
- **Dress Code:** Explain the origin of wearing costumes (to confuse spirits during Samhain).

• **Project Option C: A Ghost's Point of View**

Write a short story (about 300-500 words) from the perspective of a Celtic spirit that visits the living world on Samhain. The spirit returns to the modern world on October 31st and is confused but intrigued by how its ancient traditions have changed into modern-day Halloween. What does it

recognize? What is completely new and strange?

Part 4: Debrief and Reflection (10 minutes)

1. **Share and Tell:** Ruby presents her finished project and explains her creative choices.
 2. **Reflection Questions:**
 - What was the most surprising or interesting fact you discovered today?
 - Looking at how much Halloween has changed, what do you think it might look like 100 years from now?
 - Why do you think it's important for humans to have traditions and holidays like this?
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Assessment

Learning will be assessed through the completion of the creative project. A successful project will:

- Clearly connect a modern tradition to its historical roots.
 - Incorporate at least three specific historical facts or details learned during the investigation.
 - Demonstrate thoughtful engagement and creativity in the chosen format (comic, plan, or story).
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Extension & Deeper Dives

If time permits or Ruby is eager for more:

- **Hands-On History:** Try carving a turnip or a potato! This gives a real sense of why early jack-o'-lanterns looked the way they did and why pumpkins were such a welcome substitute.
- **Global Halloween:** Research how Halloween (or similar holidays for honoring the dead, like Dãa de los Muertos) is celebrated in another country. How are they similar and different?
- **Literary Connection:** Read Ray Bradbury's classic novel "The Halloween Tree," which explores the historical origins of the holiday in a fictional adventure.