

Spooky Stories: Unmasking the History of Halloween!

Get ready to travel back in time and discover the surprising story behind one of your favorite holidays - Halloween! We'll uncover ancient festivals, hidden histories, and how traditions like costumes and trick-or-treating began.

Let's Get Started: What Do You Know?

Before we dig in, what's your favorite part of Halloween? (Discuss: Costumes, candy, spooky decorations, parties?) Why do you think we celebrate it?

Activity 1: The Celts and Samhain (Over 2,000 Years Ago!)

Imagine living long, long ago in Ireland and Scotland. The people there were called the Celts. Around the end of October, they celebrated a festival called **Samhain** (pronounced 'SAH-win').

- **Why?** Samhain marked the end of summer and the harvest, and the beginning of the dark, cold winter. This time of year was often associated with death.
- **What did they believe?** The Celts believed that on the night before their new year (November 1st), the boundary between the worlds of the living and the dead became blurred. They thought ghosts of the dead returned to earth.
- **What did they do?** They lit huge bonfires to ward off evil spirits and sometimes wore costumes (often animal heads and skins) to disguise themselves from ghosts. They also left out food to appease the spirits.

Think: How is Samhain similar to or different from our Halloween?

Activity 2: Romans and Christians Join In

Later, the Roman Empire conquered Celtic lands. They had their own festivals in late October to honor the dead and the Roman goddess of fruit and trees, Pomona. Some Roman traditions likely blended with the Celtic celebration of Samhain.

Even later, Christianity spread. The Church created holidays around the same time: **All Saints' Day** on November 1st (to honor saints) and **All Souls' Day** on November 2nd (to remember the dead). The evening before All Saints' Day became known as **All Hallows' Eve** (Hallow means holy or saintly). Eventually, 'All Hallows' Eve' was shortened to 'Halloween'!

Some old traditions continued but were blended with the new holidays. People still dressed up, but sometimes as saints, angels, or devils. The tradition of 'souling' began, where poor people would visit houses and pray for the souls of dead relatives in exchange for 'soul cakes' (like small cookies).

Think: Can you see how the name 'Halloween' came about?

Activity 3: Halloween Travels to America

Halloween wasn't a big holiday in early America because of strict religious beliefs in some areas. However, in the 1800s, many immigrants, especially from Ireland and Scotland, came to America. They

brought their Halloween traditions with them!

- They shared stories of ghosts and mischief.
- Traditions like 'guising' (dressing up and going door-to-door for food or money, sometimes performing a trick or song) became popular. This eventually turned into our 'trick-or-treating'!
- Carving pumpkins (originally turnips in Ireland/Scotland) became common.

Over time, Halloween in America became less about ghosts and religion, and more about community celebrations, parties, costumes, and treats for children.

Think: How did trick-or-treating start?

Activity 4: Halloween Timeline Craft

Let's put it all together! Take a long strip of paper and fold it accordion-style into 4 sections. Label the sections:

1. Ancient Celts: Samhain
2. Roman/Christian Influence
3. Halloween Comes to America
4. Halloween Today

In each section, draw or write key things about Halloween during that time (e.g., Section 1: Bonfire, costumes; Section 2: All Hallows' Eve, soul cakes; Section 3: Immigrants, guising, pumpkins; Section 4: Trick-or-treating, parties, candy).

Share your timeline and explain each section!

Wrap Up: Spooky Summary

Wow! Halloween has a long and mixed history.

- Where did Halloween traditions originally come from? (Celtic festival of Samhain)
- What does 'Halloween' mean? (All Hallows' Eve)
- How did trick-or-treating likely start? (From 'souling' and 'guising')
- How is Halloween today different from Samhain long ago? (Focus shifted from spirits/religion to community fun/candy)

Great job exploring the history of Halloween!

Optional Extension:

Research how Halloween (or similar autumn/harvest festivals) is celebrated in another country today.