



**Britannica
EDUCATION**

HALLOWEEN





What is Halloween?

Halloween, also called All Hallows' Eve, takes place on 31 October. It is a time when people dress up in costumes, go trick-or-treating and carve pumpkins. Several ancient festivals held in the autumn helped create the holiday that exists today.



HISTORY OF HALLOWEEN





Halloween in Ancient Times

In ancient Rome, the festival of Pomona (the goddess of fruits and gardens) occurred at about this time of year. This festival was associated with the harvest of food crops, and nuts and apples were roasted before huge bonfires as part of the celebration. However, this festival also had a spooky aspect to it because ghosts and witches were thought to be wandering the Earth.



Halloween in Ireland

Customs and superstitions gathered through the ages go into the celebration of Halloween today. The holiday has its origins in the autumn festivals of earlier times. The ancient Celts of Britain and Ireland celebrated a holiday at the beginning of November. Called Samhain (meaning "end of Summer"), the holiday marked the beginning of a new year. The Celts believed that on the last night of October spirits of the dead roamed abroad.





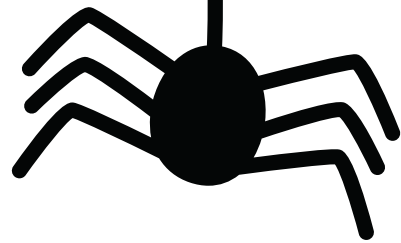

Halloween in Ancient Times

In Christianity, All Hallows' Eve was the night before All Saints Day, which was held on 1st November to honour all of the saints of the church. Gradually, Halloween became a non-religious celebration, with some of the early customs remaining.



How is Halloween celebrated now?

Today ghosts and witches are popular costumes of the children who go from house to house saying, "Trick-or-treat!" The treat, usually sweets, is given out to those dressed in costume. Shops and homes display orange and black figures of witches, bats, spiders, black cats and pumpkins. People dressed in festive or scary outfits go to fancy dress parties, where old-fashioned games like bobbing for apples in tubs of water may be a part of the fun.





How is Halloween celebrated now?

When large numbers of Irish and other immigrants went to the United States starting in the mid-19th century, they took their Halloween customs with them. In the United States children carved faces on hollowed-out pumpkins, which were native there, rather than turnips. They put lighted candles inside to make jack-o'-lanterns.





DISCUSS:



What do you associate with halloween?



Halloween Creatures



Zombie

A zombie is a legendary creature usually described as a human risen from the dead. Zombies may seem scary, but like other legendary creatures, they are not real. Lots of people dress up as zombies for Halloween or just for fun.



Ghosts

A ghost is said to be a person's spirit, which shows itself to living people. Ghosts never have been proven to be real. Ghost stories remain popular today – especially among kids at sleepovers.



Witches

Witches are common figures in old legends and folktales, especially fairy tales. Witches were once greatly feared. Today witches are mostly thought of as characters in stories or as fun symbols of Halloween.



Werewolf

A werewolf is a human who takes the shape of a wolf at night. Werewolves are legendary, not real, creatures. Nevertheless, people around the world have believed in them since ancient times.



Test your knowledge

Take our [Halloween Quiz](#) to assess your understanding of this resource.

SCAN ME

