Halloween

ON **OCTOBER 31ST,** dozens of children dressed in **costumes** knock on their neighbors' doors and yell, **"Trick or Treat"** when the door opens. **Pirates** and princesses, ghosts, and popular heroes and heroines of the day all hold bags open to catch the candy or other **goodies** that the neighbors drop in. As they give each child a **treat,** the neighbors **exclaim over** the costumes and try to guess who is under the masks.

Like some other American holidays, Halloween customs evolved from a mix of traditions. The word "Halloween" comes from the name of a holiday from the 800s AD, called All **Hallows'** Eve. This was the day and evening before All Saints' Day, a holy day that was celebrated on November 1st. The origins of Halloween go back even further, however. In ancient times, October 31st was the eve of the Celtic New Year. The Celts, who lived over 2,000 years ago, were the **ancestors** of the present-day Irish, Welsh, and Scottish people. On this day, the Celts held the festival of Samhain in honor of the Celtic lord of the dead. In the evening, Samhain allowed ghosts to walk and **mingle** with the living, or so the Celts thought. The townspeople baked food all that day, and when night came, they **dressed up** in animal heads and skins, and attended a great **bonfire,** set by their priests, the Druids. Hoping that the ghosts would leave peacefully before the new year, the people carried the food they had made to the edge of town and left it for the spirits to find. The celebration of Samhain also marked the end of the **harvest** season, and the beginning of the cold, dark time of year.

Much later, when October 31 was no longer the last day of the year, autumn festivals continued to be held, celebrating the harvest and honoring the dead. Over time, however, Halloween became a celebration mostly for children. "Ghosts" went from door to door asking for treats, or else a trick would be played on the owners of the house. When millions of Irish, British, and others from Celtic regions immigrated to the United States in the 1840s, the traditions came with them.

Today, many schools plan Halloween festivities, and some neighborhoods hold parties, often called "block parties" which are popular among young and old alike. More recently, adults have begun to celebrate Halloween, too. They dress up like historical or political figures, movie stars, or cartoon characters, and go to masquerade parties or city-sponsored street parties. In many towns and cities, costumed children and their parents gather at shopping malls early in the evening. Stores and businesses give parties, with games and treats for the children. Teenagers enjoy costume dances at their schools, and the more **outrageous** the costume the better!

PREVIOUS PAGE: Pumpkins and children in costumes are a common sight on Halloween.
ABOVE: Jack-o-lanterns are pumpkins that are carved out like faces and displayed at night with candles inside.

Certain **pranks** such as **soaping** car windows and tipping over garbage cans are expected. But partying and pranks are not the only things that Halloween **revelers** enjoy doing. Some collect money to buy food and medicine for needy children around the world. Others may sponsor a Halloween party, or donate money or costumes for needy children locally.

At Halloween parties, children play games, listen to **ghost stories,** enjoy snacks, and decorate their Halloween "trick-or-treat" bag for the evening. One traditional Halloween game is **bobbing** for apples. One child at a time has to get an apple from a tub of water without using any hands! How? By sinking his or her face into the water and biting into the apple!

Symbols of Halloween

Halloween **originated** in part as a celebration connected with evil spirits and the dead. **Witches** flying on broomsticks with black cats, ghosts, **goblins,** and **skeletons** have all **evolved** as symbols of

ABOVE: Calling out "trick or treat," children dressed in costumes knock on their neighbors' doors with bags held out for candies and other treats.

Halloween. They are popular as trick-or-treat costumes, and decorations for greeting cards and windows. Black is one of the traditional Halloween colors, probably because Halloween festivals and traditions took place at night and also marked the beginning of winter darkness. In the weeks before October 31, retail shops and school windows are decorated with **silhouettes** of witches and black cats. Some people decorate their front door with Halloween symbols or **fake** spider webs. Others create **elaborate** and scary scenes, such as **spooky graveyards,** on their front lawns.

Pumpkins are also a symbol of Halloween. Since the pumpkin is a large, orange-colored **squash,** orange has become the other traditional Halloween color. **Carving** pumpkins into **jack-o'-lanterns** is a Halloween custom dating back to Ireland. A **legend** grew up about a man named Jack who was so **stingy** that he was not allowed into heaven when he died. His spirit was **doomed** to **wander** around the countryside, holding a lantern to light his way.

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The Irish people carved scary faces out of **turnips** representing "Jack of the Lantern," or Jack-o'-lantern. When the Irish brought their customs to the United States, they carved faces on pumpkins because in the autumn, pumpkins were more plentiful than turnips. Today a jack-o'-lantern, with a candle lit and glowing inside, is placed in the window or on the front porch of a house on Halloween night to let costumed children know that there are goodies waiting if they knock on the door and say "Trick or Treat!"

Glossary

costume(s): *n.* clothes, make-up, masks and other things such as jewelry worn so as to look like or give the illusion of being like another person, from another time period, or of being like something else such as a ghost or monster

"Trick or Treat": *phrase.* an expression used by children at Halloween: "Give us a treat, or we'll play a joke on you!"

pirate(s): *n.* a robber on the sea

goody(ies): *n.* sweet food that children like to eat

treat: *n.* a reward, usually a sweet food

exclaim over: *v. phrase.* to admire openly

hallow: *v.* to make sacred or holy; to make highly respected

ancestor(s): *n.* family member who came before, such as grandparent, great-grand parent and so on.

mingle: *v.* to mix with; to join with

dress up: *v.* to wear a costume

bonfire: *n.* a large public fire, around which people may gather for a party or celebration

harvest: *adj.* referring to the time of year when crops are ripe and ready to gather

outrageous: *adj.* shocking; elaborate or wild in design

prank(s): *n.* a trick or mischievous act

soap(ing): *v.* to cover with soap

reveler(s): *n.* people who are celebrating

ghost story(-ies): *n. phrase.* a scary or frightening story about ghosts, goblins or evil spirits

bob(bing): *v.* to move up and down briefly and repeatedly

originate(d): *v.* to begin or start a practice or tradition

witch(es): *n.* a woman that is believed to have supernatural powers; some are believed to be good, but most are considered to be evil and use black magic

goblin(s): *n.* an evil or tricky spirit

skeleton(s): *n.* the bone framework of a body

evolve(d): *v.* to develop over a long period of time

silhouette(s): *n.* the shadow-like shape of something seen from the side; an outline of something or someone, filled in with black

fake: *adj.* artificial; false

elaborate: *adj.* complicated in design

spooky: *adj.* scary, frightening

graveyard: *n.* a place (cemetery) where people bury (put under the ground) their dead, or place their dead in tombs above ground

squash: *n.* a round or long vegetable belonging to the gourd family

carve(-ing): to cut a design carefully with a knife

jack-o-lantern: *n. phrase.* a pumpkin which has been carved with a scary or funny face

legend: *n.* a story passed from one generation to another

stingy: *adj.* unwilling to share

doom(ed): *v.* to judge against; condemn or send to a terrible fate or punishment

wander: *v.* to walk without a goal

turnip(s): *n.* a large root eaten as a vegetable