

HALLOWEEN HISTORY

Dressing up in costumes. Trick-or-treating. Carving pumpkins. These traditions are part of Halloween, a holiday known for fun and games. But did you know that Halloween has roots in a much more serious—and spooky—occasion?

—Natalie Smith

Words to Know

traditions (truh-dish-uhns) *noun, plural.* customs, ideas, or beliefs handed down from one generation to the next

supernatural (soo-pur-nah-chur-uhl) *adjective.* relating to something outside of nature or beyond the visible world, such as a spirit

How did Halloween get started?

The origin of Halloween dates back at least 2,000 years to a festival called Samhain (pronounced **sow-in**). People known as the Celts (kelts) celebrated it to mark the end of the harvest season. They lived where Ireland, Scotland, and Wales are today.

Samhain began on November 1, but the celebrations began the night before, on October 31. Families gathered for big feasts—and scary stories.

“It was a time to tell **supernatural** stories about creatures in the dark,” says Halloween expert Lesley Bannatyne.

The Celts appeared to believe that the spirits of the dead roamed the Earth during Samhain.

According to some legends, the Celts left food out for the spirits. But other tales say the Celts roamed the streets dressed as the dead, making loud noises to scare the spirits away.

Lands of the Celts



2 Why is it called Halloween?

Over the centuries, Samhain changed as Christianity expanded across the Celts' lands. The Roman Catholic church established the holidays All Hallows' Day (*hallowed* means holy) and All Souls' Day. These holidays were observed during the Celts' Samhain celebrations. All Hallows' Day took place on November 1. October 31 became known as All Hallows' Eve. That's where the name "Halloween" came from.



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Why do we carve jack-o'-lanterns?

No one's sure how this tradition started in America, but there are lots of ideas about it. Here's one: The Irish and Scottish used to make lanterns for Samhain by placing candles in hollowed-out turnips. When they moved to America, they used pumpkins, which were more plentiful than turnips.

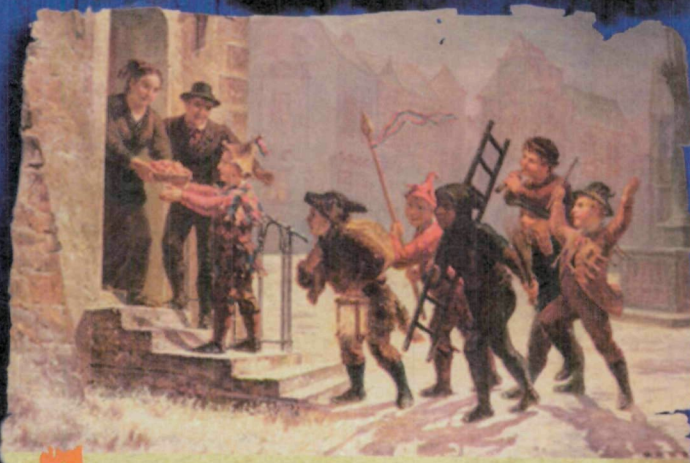
3 When did Americans start celebrating Halloween?

Many of the European immigrants who came to the United States in the 1700s brought their Halloween customs with them. The holiday really took off when a surge of Irish immigrants came to the U.S. in the mid-1800s.

"Whole towns would dress up and have parades and big parties," says Bannatyne.

Today Halloween is one of the most popular holidays in the U.S. About 70 percent of Americans celebrate it.

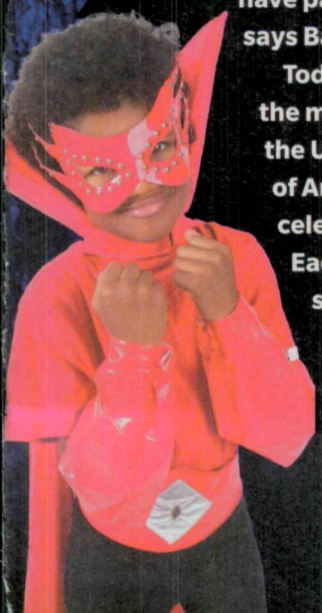
Each year, they spend billions of dollars on costumes, candy, and decorations.



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Why do people trick-or-treat?

Trick-or-treating has been linked to several ancient traditions. One took place on All Hallows' Day in England. Poor people would dress in costumes and knock on the doors of the rich. They would ask for food and money. "Trick-or-treating is just about the only [trace] we have of that mass begging that happened" centuries ago in Europe, says Bannatyne.



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