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## "American Holidays"

by Barbara Klebanow, Sara Fischer, Ph. D.



### Traditions and Customs

Halloween is a festival celebrated on October 31st. The name of the holiday means "hallowed" or "holy evening" because it happens the day before All Saints Day.

It is said that Halloween is the children's New Year's Eve. They dress up with special **costumes**, they eat too much, and stay up too late celebrating.

Children go around the neighborhood wearing make-up, and dressed in masks and colorful costumes. The most common costumes are witches, **ghosts**, skeletons, and popular TV, movie, and storybook **characters**. Some costumes are homemade; others are bought in stores. The children go door to door saying "**trick or treat.**" People give them candy, cookies, fruit, or money. Sometimes money is **collected** to help UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund).

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Homes, stores, and classrooms are decorated in the traditional Halloween colors, orange and black. Usual decorations are witches, black cats, ghosts, skeletons, and jack-o-lanterns. Jack-o-lanterns are pumpkins that are **carved** to look like faces. They are placed on doorway entrances and in windows. Horror movies and ghost stories are shown on TV on this day.

Adults and older children also celebrate Halloween with parades, festivals, and costume parties. Some people create their costumes; other people rent them. Contests are held where the best costume receives a prize. One of the party events popular with children is dunking for apples. Apples are put in tubs filled with water. People try to get the apples using only their mouths; hands cannot be used.



## Background

Halloween comes the day before "All Saints Day." Many superstitions are connected with this day. The Druids, a group of priests from Gaul and Britain, believed that ghosts, spirits, and witches came out to harm people on Halloween. It is because of this legend that people place jack-o-lanterns, and **scary** decorations

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in front of their homes to scare **evil** spirits away. The Druids also thought that cats were sacred. They believed that they were once humans who were changed into animals because they did evil things. That is why black cats are part of Halloween. It is also believed that the pumpkin symbolizes the human skull.

I. Match words and phrases with similar meanings.

- |                     |       |                                     |
|---------------------|-------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. <b>trick</b>     | _____ | a. a person in a story, novel, play |
| 2. <b>to carve</b>  | _____ | b. something harmful, bad           |
| 3. <b>character</b> | _____ | c. a gift; something nice           |
| 4. <b>collect</b>   | _____ | d. a practical joke                 |
| 5. <b>evil</b>      | _____ | e. frightening                      |
| 6. <b>holy</b>      | _____ | f. to form something by cutting     |
| 7. <b>ghost</b>     | _____ | g. sacred                           |
| 8. <b>costumes</b>  | _____ | h. to get; obtain                   |
| 9. <b>scary</b>     | _____ | i. special dress                    |
| 10. <b>treat</b>    | _____ | j. dead person's spirit             |

II. Circle the word that best completes the sentence.

- On Halloween pumpkins are (carved, costumed, scary) to look like a face.
- Some children dress like television (groups, characters, sets).
- Children dress up to look like (tricks, saints, ghosts).
- On Halloween you can see (collect, trick, scary) movies on TV.
- Halloween means (evil, holy, scary) evening.
- Children wear colorful (ghosts, characters, costumes) on Halloween.
- Some children may play (tricks, treats, carve) on Halloween.

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