

# The History of Halloween

## The Origin of Halloween

Like many other holidays, Halloween has evolved throughout history. Over 2000 years ago, the Celts lived in Ireland and Northern France. This time of year signified the end of the summer and the beginning of winter and was celebrated with a harvest festival. They believed that the festival would make their gods happy so they would protect them and their crops during the long, hard winter that was to come. They also celebrated New Year's Day on 1<sup>st</sup> November. They believed that the night before the New Year (31<sup>st</sup> October) was a time when the living and the dead came together on earth.



## How Halloween Got its Name

Over one thousand years ago, the Christian church named 1<sup>st</sup> November 'All Saints' Day', also called 'All Hallows', which was a traditional English term. This was a holy day to commemorate the saints and other people who died for their religion. The night before All Hallows was named Hallows' Eve. Many years later, the name was changed to Halloween.

## Dressing up on Halloween

During this time, the Europeans also believed that the spirits of the dead would walk among the living on earth. They were worried that the evil spirits would cause problems, hurt or even kill them. To address this concern, on that night people wore costumes of ghosts or other wicked creatures. They believed that if they dressed in frightening costumes, their disguise would confuse the spirits and they would think they were also dead and not hurt them.

## How Trick-or-Treating Began



Many years ago, people were extremely superstitious. They were not only afraid of meeting ghosts on Halloween night. They were also terrified that ghosts or spirits would come into their homes. They began leaving bowls of food outside their doors to deter the ghosts from entering. Over time, people began to get less fearful of the ghosts and started eating the nice treats themselves. Some people say that this was the start of trick or treating.

### How Halloween Was Brought to Australia

The tradition of Halloween was brought to Australia by the immigrating Europeans. Some of these changed slightly. For example, on Halloween in Europe, some people would carry lanterns made from turnips. In America, pumpkins were more common than turnips. Americans began putting candles inside them and using them as lanterns. That is why you see jack-o'-lanterns today. Jack-o'-lanterns have evolved from being a lantern used in America to a popular Halloween decoration around the world, including Australia.



### Halloween Traditions in Australia

Halloween is no longer considered a religious holiday. It is primarily a celebration for both children and adults. The most common Halloween tradition is to dress up in costumes like people did a thousand years ago. Instead of only wearing frightening costumes, it is now just as common to see people dressed in other costumes. Australian children sometimes attend a Halloween disco or party at school, dressed in costumes. Another popular Halloween tradition is to go trick-or-treating. This is when children go from house-to-house. They knock on the door and say, "Trick or treat!" The person who answers the door gives the children a treat to eat. Some neighbourhoods come together to decorate their front lawns with a spooky theme to get into the Halloween spirit.

# Questions

1. Where did the Celts live?

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2. What was All Saints' Day also known as?

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3. How did the Europeans ward off evil spirits?

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4. Define the word 'superstitious'.

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5. Describe the origins of trick or treating.

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6. Why did the Americans use pumpkins for lanterns and not turnips?

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7. Do you think Halloween was enjoyable for the Europeans?

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8. List ways in which Halloween is celebrated today.

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9. Do you enjoy Halloween? Why or why not?

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