

Halloween

¹October 31st is Halloween. ²American children dress up in costumes and go trick-or-treating. ³If an adult refuses to supply a treat (sweets or fruit), the children may play a trick. ⁴Typical Halloween pranks are soaping windows and writing on doors with crayons. ⁵In the United States, Halloween customs are for the amusement of children. ⁶But hundreds of years ago, masquerades and begging were performed quite seriously by adults as part of their religion.

⁷In 835 A.D., the Roman Catholic Church declared November 1st a church holiday to honor all the saints. ⁸The name Halloween is a short way to saying *All Hallow's Eve*, the night before All Saint's Day. ⁹*Hallow* means 'holy' or 'sacred'. ¹⁰But although Halloween gets its name from a Christian festival, its customs are of pagan origin. ¹¹They come from two sources: a Celtic festival in honor of the Lord of Death, and a Roman festival in honor of the Goddess of the Harvest. ¹²The Halloween colors – orange and black – suggest both ideas, harvest and death.

¹³The spooky part of Halloween comes from the Celts. ¹⁴They feared the coming of winter, associating it with death and evil spirits. ¹⁵Every year on October 31st, the last day of the Celtic year, the Celts built huge bonfires ('fire of bones') to scare away demons of evil and death. ¹⁶Supposedly, on this evening, ghosts arose from their graves and witches rode through the air on broomsticks or black cats.

¹⁷The jack-o'-lantern ('jack of the lantern') is of Celtic origin, too. ¹⁸The Celts hollowed out turnips and placed lighted candles in them to scare away evil spirits from the house. In the United States, the pumpkin is used to make a jack-o'-lantern. ¹⁹First the pumpkin is hollowed out; then holes are cut into the shell to make the eyes, nose, and mouth. ²⁰A candle is put inside, and the jack-o'-lantern is placed by the window or on the porch.

²¹The Irish, descendants of the Celts, introduced trick-or-treat. ²²Farmers would travel from house to house, requesting food for the village Halloween festival. ²³They would promise good luck to those who were generous and back luck to those who were stingy. ²⁴In the late 19th century, this custom and others were brought to the United States by Irish immigrants.

²⁵Many people have parties on Halloween, and all little children go trick-or-treating. Halloween, which began as an evening of terror, is now an occasion of great merriment. ²⁶It is certainly a favorite holiday of many Americans.