

History of Halloween

By ReadWorks



Makayla gently placed her black witch's hat on top of her black curls as she looked at herself in the mirror. Her mom had painted her skin green and outlined her eyes in purple paint. She wore tall, black boots underneath a long, purple dress. It was October 31st, and she was ready for trick-or-treating on Halloween night.

"Makayyyyla!" her mom called out from downstairs.

Makayla's two friends, Colden and Porter, had arrived. Colden stood in the doorway, his costume blowing in the wind. A white sheet hung over his head, and his eyes peered out from two cut-out holes.

Porter decided to dress like his favorite superhero, Batman. A black mask covered his face and a long cape trailed behind him. They carried plastic pumpkin bowls to collect candy later in the evening.

The two boys greeted Makayla with equal levels of excitement. "Hi, Makayla!" Colden said.

"You ready to go trick-or-treating?" Porter asked.

She nodded her head and ran to grab her coat.

"Let's go, everyone!" her mom called out, and they all marched out the front door.

All around them, children and parents walked from door to door in colorful costumes. Carved Jack-o-lanterns sat in front of houses, candles shimmering inside the orange pumpkins. A breeze blew past Makayla and her friends, making her shiver. The weather had just started to get colder.

Makayla remembered her class earlier that day, when her teacher talked about the origins of Halloween. Mrs. Narula told Makayla and her classmates that the holiday started with an ancient festival called Samhain, 2,000 years ago in Ireland. The word Samhain means “summer’s end” in Gaelic, a language spoken in Ireland and Scotland. Mrs. Narula looked at different documents from the American Folklife Center to find out about Halloween’s history. She found that the festival celebrated the end of summer and the beginning of winter—a time to gather crops to prepare for the colder months.

The Celtic people who celebrated this festival also believed it was the time when all the souls who had died that year traveled to the next world. To keep the dead spirits away, people lit bonfires. For ceremonies, some dressed in animal furs to disguise themselves so that the dead spirits would not be able to recognize them. Mrs. Narula said this is one reason why we might still dress up in costumes today. Later, the festival of Samhain was replaced with All Souls’ Day, a Christian holiday that honored the dead. People celebrated with bonfires and parades. They also dressed up in costumes as saints, angels, and devils.

Porter reached up and pressed the doorbell at the house across the street.

Diiiiing-dong.

A big, green Frankenstein pulled open the door, holding a big bowl of wrapped treats. Makayla and her friends gasped, and then laughed when they realized it was just Mr. Clock dressed up.

“Trick-or-treat!” the three sang with big smiles.

As Mr. Clock sprinkled candy into their baskets, Makayla thought of Mrs. Narula again.

“In the 1800s, many people from Ireland and Scotland came to the United States to start a new life,” the teacher told her students earlier that day. “Even though their ancestors had their own trick-or-treating traditions, they started their own in their new country.”

Mrs. Narula had read an article by Benjamin Radford, a man who researches science and history. He wrote that teenagers in those communities started to play pranks during Halloween celebrations. Adults tried to stop the pranks by giving children candy instead. And the tradition still remains today with children all around the world dressing up for candy!

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

1. At the beginning of the passage, what is Makayla getting ready to do?
 - A) open Christmas presents
 - B) go trick-or-treating on Halloween
 - C) go on an Easter egg hunt
 - D) eat Thanksgiving dinner

2. Throughout the story, Makayla remembers information Mrs. Narula taught in class. What does this information describe?
 - A) the history of Halloween
 - B) the history of Ireland and Scotland
 - C) the way different holidays are researched
 - D) the importance of wearing costumes

3. Halloween traditions have changed over time. What evidence from the passage supports this conclusion?
 - A) Trick-or-treating began before Irish immigrants came to America.
 - B) People dressed up as angels or saints during All Saints' Day.
 - C) Samhain celebrated the end of summer and beginning of winter.
 - D) Playing pranks was not always a part of Halloween celebrations.

4. Based on the passage, what conclusion can you make about the development of Halloween?
 - A) Halloween has become a more serious holiday.
 - B) Halloween is now more focused on preparing for winter.
 - C) Halloween has become a more lighthearted holiday.
 - D) Halloween is now more focused on bonfire rituals.

5. What is this passage mostly about?
 - A) the history of Halloween
 - B) the ancient people who celebrated Samhain
 - C) research at the American Folklife Center
 - D) how the tradition of trick-or-treating began

6. Read the following sentences: “Makayla remembered her class earlier that day, when her teacher talked about the **origins** of Halloween. Mrs. Narula told Makayla and her classmates that the holiday started with an ancient festival called Samhain, 2,000 years ago in Ireland.”

As used in this sentence, what does the word “**origin**” most nearly mean?

- A) the celebration
- B) the length
- C) the end
- D) the start

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

_____ the celebration of Halloween has changed over time, it has also kept some traditions from ancient festivals.

- A) Meanwhile
- B) Although
- C) Therefore
- D) For instance

8. Halloween started as an ancient festival. What was it called?

9. What is one reason why we might dress up in costumes on Halloween today?

10. Explain how Halloween has both changed and kept traditions from the past. Support your answer using information from the passage.

Teacher Guide & Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 920

1. **B** *go trick-or-treating on Halloween*
2. **A** *the history of Halloween*
3. **D** *Playing pranks was not always a part of Halloween celebrations.*
4. **C** *Halloween has become a more lighthearted holiday.*
5. **A** *the history of Halloween*
6. **D** *the start*
7. **B** *Although*
8. **Suggested answer:** *It was called Samhain.*
9. **Suggested answer:** *We might dress up in costumes on Halloween because of the ancient Samhain ritual where people dressed in animal furs to disguise themselves so that the dead spirits would not be able to recognize them.*
10. **Suggested answer:** *Answers may vary and should be supported by the passage. e.g. Halloween has changed because it began as a festival called Samhain ("summer's end"), which celebrated the end of summer and beginning of winter; it is now focused around trick-or-treating and dressing in costumes. Halloween has kept traditions from the past. During Samhain, people dressed in animal furs to disguise themselves so that the dead spirits would not be able to recognize them, and for All Saints' Day, people dressed as angels or saints. People still dress in costumes for Halloween today.*