The History of Halloween

Where did Halloween come from?

In the beginning, Halloween was a harvest festival. The Celts (who lived in Ireland, the United Kingdom and France) marked the end of the summer and the beginning of winter with this harvest festival. They called the festival Samhain (sow-in) and this translated to 'the end of summer'. 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 built huge fires, and burned crops and animals as sacrifices. They wore costumes and enjoyed fortune telling.

Where did the name Halloween come from?

When the Celts eventually became Christian, they started to call the first day of November 'All Saints' Day'. 'All Saints' Day' was also called 'All-hallows', which was an old English word. People began to call the night before the first of November 'All-hallows Eve' and this eventually became Halloween.

Why do people dress in costumes at Halloween?

People believed that ghosts walked the streets on Halloween night and they felt scared about meeting them. They began to wear masks to fool the ghosts into believing that they were other spirits. Soon, people started to wear costumes and fancy dress to go with the masks.

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Questions

1. At what time of year did the festival of Samhain take place?

2. Name two traditions the Celts used to celebrate Samhain?

3. What do the words 'All-hallows' mean?

4. Who first decided to make jack-o'-lanterns from pumpkins?

5. What did people do to stop spirits from entering their homes at Halloween?

6. What did the tradition you wrote about in question five eventually turn into? (Hint: People love doing this nowadays at Halloween.)

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