

# Halloween

## Reading Comprehension

**Directions:** Read the passage carefully. Then answer the questions that follow. Select the best answer for each multiple-choice question and provide complete written responses for the short-answer questions using evidence from the text.



Halloween is a holiday celebrated around the world annually on October 31. Dressing in costumes and trick-or-treating are common traditions, but celebrations vary from country to country. In Mexico, Halloween precedes the more widely celebrated Día de los Muertos holiday, which occurs on November 1 and 2. Halloween is growing in popularity in England. However, in the past, Guy Fawkes Day, celebrated on November 5, overshadowed Halloween traditions. Guy Fawkes Day, also known as Bonfire Night, commemorates the failed assassination attempt on King James I in 1605. Halloween is

newer to countries such as Japan, while other countries, such as Italy, celebrate it as a religious holiday. In Italy, the festival of Ognissanti honors all of the saints of the Catholic church. Regardless of where it is celebrated, Halloween is an evolving holiday steeped in history.

The modern-day holiday of Halloween originated over 2000 years ago from the Celts. The Celtic people lived in England and Ireland from around 600 BCE (Before Common Era) to 43 CE (Common Era). The Celts believed in many gods and celebrated them year-round with different festivals. The four key festivals of the Celtic year were Imbolc (February), Bealtaine (May), Lughnasa (August), and Samhain (November).

On November 1, Celtic tribes would gather to celebrate, eat food, and play games. Samhain marked the beginning of the Celtic new year and of the winter period. The Celts believed that during the Samhain festival, the souls of the dead returned to visit their homes. Those who had died during the year were believed to journey to the afterlife. To celebrate, people lit bonfires and wore masks and costumes to frighten away evil spirits or to avoid being recognized by any ghosts present.



**Sensitive Resource Disclaimer:** We recommend that you review this resource and the accompanying content carefully before sharing it with learners. Some topics and imagery may be sensitive, controversial, or upsetting, and we advise you to be mindful of your learners' individual needs and to provide appropriate support. If learners conduct further research, we recommend guiding them to specific, age-appropriate resources to ensure their safety and well-being.



The arrival of Christianity among the Celtic people transformed Celtic festivals into Christian celebrations in an effort to eradicate Paganism. The Catholic Church's arrival in Ireland brought the celebration of 'All Saints' Day' on November 1. All Saints' Day was also known as All Hallows' Day. The night before (October 31) was known as All Hallows' Eve. Eventually, the festival of Samhain and All Hallows' Eve merged to become Halloween.

The celebration of Halloween was mostly forbidden in the newly established American colonies and did not arrive until the late 19th century, when large numbers of immigrants, particularly Irish immigrants, traveled to America and brought their customs with them. The holiday was considered a time to celebrate the harvest by telling ghost stories, singing, and dancing. These customs developed over the years and have shaped how Halloween is celebrated today. One particular custom has become the ultimate symbol of Halloween: the pumpkin.

The carving of a pumpkin, or jack-o'-lantern, is a popular activity on Halloween. While this tradition is common in the United States, it originated from an Irish myth. In Ireland, people inspired by the myth of Stingy Jack made their own lanterns using turnips and potatoes. These would then be placed outside homes to ward off evil spirits. Irish immigrants to the U.S. continued this tradition until discovering that carving a pumpkin allowed for a larger, more colorful jack-o'-lantern.

Another Halloween tradition with ancient origins is the act of trick-or-treating. The specific origins of the tradition are unknown, but history points to a range of potential origins. During the Celtic festival of Samhain, people would wear masks and dress in costumes to ward off evil spirits. They would also prepare food to leave outside to appease the visiting spirits. Over time, some people began traveling from door to door dressed in costumes and performing in exchange for food and drink. Another possible origin of trick-or-treating is the tradition of 'guising,' which originated in Scotland and Ireland. This tradition involved children going from door to door in costume and being gifted food or coins. Over time, the tradition evolved, and the term 'trick-or-treat' became popular in North America in the early 1900s.





1. Which statement best expresses the central idea of the passage?
  - A. Halloween is a modern American holiday that primarily focuses on carving pumpkins and trick-or-treating.
  - B. Halloween traditions have evolved over thousands of years from ancient Celtic festivals and religious customs.
  - C. The Celtic festival of Samhain was created solely to frighten away evil spirits and ghosts.
  - D. Irish immigrants brought the tradition of jack-o'-lanterns to the United States in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.
2. According to the text, which group of immigrants was primarily responsible for bringing Halloween customs to the United States in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century?
  - A. English
  - B. Irish
  - C. Scottish
  - D. Mexican
3. Which ancient Celtic festival originally marked the beginning of the new year and the winter period?
  - A. Bealtaine
  - B. Imbolc
  - C. Lughnasa
  - D. Samhain
4. Read the following sentence from the passage: "The arrival of Christianity among the Celtic people transformed Celtic festivals into Christian celebrations in an effort to eradicate Paganism." As used in the text, what does the word eradicate mean?
  - A. eliminate
  - B. promote
  - C. disguise
  - D. worship