

Webquest: Halloween

by Luke Vyner

Level: Intermediate

Target age: Teenagers / Young adults

Time needed: Up to 90 minutes

Key skills: Reading, speaking

Materials: One copy of the worksheet per student

Halloween is a holiday that is celebrated on the night of 31 October in many countries but most famously in the US. Children wear costumes and go to people's homes saying 'Trick or treat!' to ask for sweets. If the children aren't given a treat, they traditionally play a trick, although they often no longer do this. People sometimes dress up as ghosts, witches, goblins and other scary characters for Halloween. Other traditions include 'apple-bobbing' and carving out pumpkins (jack-o'-lanterns). It is also common practice to watch scary movies and tell frightening ghost stories on Halloween night.

In this creepy webquest, students will learn about the origins of Halloween, discover some of the most popular traditions practised today, learn how many countries now recognize and celebrate Halloween in their own unique ways and, finally, read and write some frightening stories!

Warning: Some of the stories in activity 4 are very gory so please read them all first to consider whether they are suitable to use with your students.

Warmer

Hand out the worksheets. Have a class discussion about Halloween. Do any of your students know about its history?

Activity 1: Halloween's history

Ask the students to go to the weblink in activity 1 and answer the comprehension questions with a partner or in small groups.

Check through the answers as a group and ask your students to discuss the questions that follow the reading comprehension. Finally, have group feedback on the discussion before moving on to activity 2.

Key:

1. Samhain
2. (big) bonfires
3. Feralia
4. to commemorate the passing of the dead
5. Christianity
6. All Saints' Day
7. mummung
8. set out gifts of food
9. the southern colonies
10. 'play parties'
11. the middle of the 19th century
12. games, fall food and costumes
13. the 1950s

Activity 2: Popular Halloween traditions

Ask your students to read about three popular Halloween traditions and answer the questions on each weblink with a partner or in small groups. Alternatively, you can ask each pair or small group to research only one section and, then, present their findings to another group.

Check through the answers as a group, and ask your students to discuss the questions that follow the reading comprehension. Finally, have group feedback on the discussion.

Jack-o'-lantern

Before beginning, pre-teach *stingy* (unwilling to give or spend; ungenerous).

Key:

1. one about a man nicknamed 'Stingy Jack'; Jack didn't want to pay for his drink so he convinced the Devil to turn himself into a coin that Jack could use to buy their drinks.
2. He kept it in his pocket next to a silver cross to prevent the devil turning back into his original form.
3. that the devil wouldn't seek revenge on Jack and, if he died, the devil would not claim his soul
4. He tricked him into climbing into a tree to pick some fruit. While he was up in the tree, Jack carved a sign of the cross into the tree's bark so that the Devil could not come down until he again promised Jack not to bother him.

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5. *Jack died.*
6. *God would not allow him into heaven, and the Devil kept his word and didn't claim his soul. He was sent off into the night.*
7. *'Jack of the Lantern' and later 'Jack O'Lantern'*
8. *carved-out turnips, beetroots and potatoes stuffed with coal, wood embers or candles; to celebrate the autumn harvest*
9. *pumpkins*

Apple-bobbing

Key:

1. *You fill a tub or a large basin with water and put apples in it.*
2. *They are less dense than water so they float.*
3. *their teeth*
4. *their arms*

Trick-or-treating

Key:

1. *treats such as candy (sweets in British English)*
2. *'Trick or treat!'*
3. *a threat to perform mischief on the homeowners or their property*
4. *the late 1920s*
5. *put up Halloween decorations outside their door*
6. *at least the sixteenth century*
7. *wearing costumes at Halloween*
8. *a 'calaverita' – a small skull made of sugar or chocolate*

Activity 3: Halloween around the world

Give one of the following countries or groups of countries to each student or pair:

- Ireland
- Scotland
- England
- Germany
- Switzerland
- Russia
- Romania
- Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Canada and the US
- Singapore
- China and Hong Kong

Japan
the Philippines

Point out the questions on their worksheet for them to consider as they research their country or countries.

Ask students to write notes. Once completed, create a class-mingling exercise, and ask students to share their findings with each other. What was the most surprising piece of information?

Activity 4: Terrifying tales

Ask the students to read the story 'Hairy Toe' from the American folklore weblink. Next, ask them to answer the questions relating to it.

Key:

1. *some roots (Roots, in this context, are vegetables that grow in the ground, like carrots and radishes.)*
2. *a hairy toe*
3. *There was good meat on the toe, which would make a tasty dinner.*
4. *a soup*
5. *'Hairy toe! Hairy toe! I want my hairy toe!'*
6. *It was getting closer (the woods – the clearing – the garden path).*
7. *the garden path*
8. *She barred the door.*
9. *in bed under the covers*
10. *She sat bolt upright in terror and shouted, 'I ATE your hairy toe!'*
11. *She disappeared.*
12. *a giant footprint pressed deep in the soil beside her house*
13. *It was missing the left big toe.*

Check through the answers as a group. Did the story terrify them?

Now, ask the students to choose another story from the American folklore website that interests them and make notes on the main events. Monitor closely to help with vocabulary questions. Once the students have completed notes on their chosen story, place them in small groups to retell their stories.

Extension

Ask students to terrify their classmates by writing their own scary story with a partner. Tell them that

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they can write a version of a real experience, a spooky legend well known in their country or a completely original story. Monitor closely, and help them with their story ideas. Encourage them to use interesting and evocative language to make their stories more exciting.

When they have completed them, ask a few pairs to read their stories to the class. Then, vote for the scariest stories!

Additional activities

- Visit onestopenglish for other Halloween-themed lessons: www.onestopenglish.com/skills/integrated-skills/themed-resources/halloween-resources.
- Ask students to create a Halloween party invitation as a poster.
- Buy some pumpkins, and get students to make their own jack-o'-lanterns in groups. They could visit this site and follow the instructions: www.bbc.co.uk/cumbria/features/halloween/pumpkin.shtml.
- Listen to scary Halloween stories: www.youtube.com/watch?v=w9TsHehltcQ.