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## **Mini-Unit**

### **Subtopic: Halloween (history)**

**Grade Level: 1st-2nd**

**Author: Jill Neitz**

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#### **Background:**

The history of Halloween goes back more than 2,000 years. The earliest celebrations of Halloween were among the Celtic people who lived in the areas which are now Great Britain and Northern France.

The Celts were people who worshiped the beauty of nature. They worshiped a Sun God and believed that without him, they would not live. They also worshipped Samhain who was the lord of the dead and of the cold, dark winter season. They believed that on October 31 Samhain would call together all of the dead and these souls would take on the shape of an animal. They believed that all creatures wandered the Earth on that night. This was called the Vigil of Samhain.

The Druids, which were the priests of the Celtic people, would build fires on the hilltops in belief that the large fires would help to strengthen the Sun God, and give him power enough to overcome the lord of darkness so that the sun season could continue. They believed that the fires were sacred, therefore they burned dried crops and sacrificed animals to help strengthen the Sun God. At midnight they stop worshipping the Sun God and start to worship Samhain because he will be the ruler for the next six months. This is the starting of the new year. They perform ceremonies through the night to ask the spirits to tell the future of the upcoming year. In the morning each household receives an ember from the fire, this ember is used to start fires in their own homes with the belief that it will ward off evil spirits in the new year.

The Celts continued with their ceremonies until they were conquered by the Roman Catholics. The Roman Catholics brought with them their own customs and traditions. They had established All Saints Day or All Hallows Day on November 1. This was a day in which all saints who did not have their own

declared holiday were honored. The church had hoped that by establishing this holiday, it would do away with the Vigil of Samhain and the other ceremonies and celebrations held on October 31 through November 1. But this was not so. Soon witchcraft came about, and October 31 was renamed Night of the Witch. It was believed that the devil and all of his followers (demons, witches) would come out on this night to perform unholy acts to make a mockery of the All Hallows Day celebration. These ceremonies and celebrations continued and October 31 was then called All Hallows Even. It was a night for superstitious beliefs and mystery. Through the years the name was shortened to Hallowe'en and then to Halloween.

Note from TeacherLINK webmaster: I have received emails indicating that Jill's history of Halloween is not entirely correct, specifically that the Celts were conquered by the Romans, not the Roman Catholic Church. Below, I've added a quote from the [History Channel](#) website on the history of Halloween:

**Ancient Origins:** Halloween's origins date back to the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain (pronounced sow-in).

The Celts, who lived 2,000 years ago in the area that is now Ireland, the United Kingdom, and northern France, celebrated their new year on November 1. This day marked the end of summer and the harvest and the beginning of the dark, cold winter, a time of year that was often associated with human death. Celts believed that on the night before the new year, the boundary between the worlds of the living and the dead became blurred. On the night of October 31, they celebrated Samhain, when it was believed that the ghosts of the dead returned to earth. In addition to causing trouble and damaging crops, Celts thought that the presence of the otherworldly spirits made it easier for the Druids, or Celtic priests, to make predictions about the future. For a people entirely dependent on the volatile natural world, these prophecies were an important source of comfort and direction during the long, dark winter.

To commemorate the event, Druids built huge sacred bonfires, where the people gathered to burn crops and animals as sacrifices to the Celtic deities.

During the celebration, the Celts wore costumes, typically consisting of animal heads and skins, and attempted to tell each other's fortunes. When the celebration was over, they re-lit their hearth fires, which they had extinguished earlier that evening, from the sacred bonfire to help protect them during the coming winter.

By A.D. 43, Romans had conquered the majority of Celtic territory. In the course of the four hundred years that they ruled the Celtic lands, two festivals of Roman origin were combined with the traditional Celtic celebration of Samhain.

The first was Feralia, a day in late October when the Romans traditionally commemorated the passing of the dead. The second was a day to honor Pomona, the Roman goddess of fruit and trees. The symbol of Pomona is the apple and the incorporation of this celebration into Samhain probably explains the tradition of

"bobbing" for apples that is practiced today on Halloween.

By the 800s, the influence of Christianity had spread into Celtic lands. In the seventh century, Pope Boniface IV designated November 1 All Saints' Day, a time to honor saints and martyrs. It is widely believed today that the pope was attempting to replace the Celtic festival of the dead with a related, but church-sanctioned holiday. The celebration was also called All-hallows or All-hallowmas (from Middle English Alholowmesse meaning All Saints' Day) and the night before it, the night of Samhain, began to be called All-hallows Eve and, eventually, Halloween. Even later, in A.D. 1000, the church would make November 2 All Souls' Day, a day to honor the dead. It was celebrated similarly to Samhain, with big bonfires, parades, and dressing up in costumes as saints, angels, and devils. Together, the three celebrations, the eve of All Saints', All Saints', and All Souls', were called Hallowmas.

### The Legend of Jack-O'-Lantern (Pass it on)

By

Wicke Chambers & Spring Asher

The Irish brought Jack-O'-Lantern to America. Jack was a legendary, stingy drunkard. He tricked the Devil into climbing an apple tree for a juicy apple and then quickly cut the sign of the cross into the tree trunk, preventing the Devil from coming down. Jack made the Devil swear that he wouldn't come after his soul in any way. The Devil promised. However, this did not prevent Jack from dying. When he arrived at the gates of heaven, he was turned away because he was a stingy, mean drunk. Desperate for a resting place, he went to the Devil. The Devil, true to his word, turned him away. "But where can I go?" pleaded Jack. "Back where you come from," spoke the Devil. The night was dark and the way was long, and the Devil tossed him a lighted coal from the fire of Hell. Jack, who was eating a turnip at the time, placed the coal inside and used it to light his way. Since that day, he has traveled the world over with his Jack-O'-Lantern in search of a place to rest. Irish children carved out turnips and potatoes to light the night on Halloween. When the Irish came to America in great numbers in the 1840s, they found that a pumpkin made an even better lantern, and so this "American" tradition came to be.

#### References:

Chambers, W. Asher, S. (1983). The Celebration Book of Great American Traditions. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers.

Cordello, B. (1977). Celebrations. New York: Butterick Publishing.

Hurda, D.J. (1983). Halloween. New York: Franklin Watts.

Patterson, L. (1963). Halloween. Champaign, Illinois: Garrard Publishing Company.

Shaulis, J. (1996). Battle for Halloween surfaces once again. The Herald Journal. Logan, Utah. pg. 10

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\*\* I chose to focus on only one aspect of Halloween, the jack-o'- lantern. (pumpkins)

### **Objectives:**

- \* Students will organize sequence cards appropriately.
  - \* Students will give examples of and illustrate some "Pumpkin facts".
  - \* Students will recognize that Halloween is celebrated in different countries around the world.
  - \* Students will recognize that Halloween traditions are different in different areas.
  - \* Students will recognize different uses of pumpkins.
  - \* Students will relate pumpkins to the jack-o'-lantern and Halloween.
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**Time Allotment: Approximately 4 to 5 class periods**

### **Resources Needed:**

sequence cards  
Pumpkin Pumpkin book  
map (world)  
Pumpkins (various sizes)  
scales  
measuring tapes  
recipe ingredients

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### **Procedures:**

A. Predictions. Ask the children to make predictions about what they think the inside of a pumpkin looks like.(ex. solid, liquid, slimy, etc.) Have a small pumpkin there for them to handle and look at. Write the predictions on the board. Then cut open the pumpkin and look at the inside. Check to see if any predictions were right. Discuss about what is inside the pumpkin. (ex. seeds, meat, etc.)

**B. Sequencing.** This activity shows the correct growth sequence, from a seed to a pumpkin, and finally a jack-o'-lantern. Use the cards to show the correct sequence. This can be done individually or as a group. Read the story Pumpkin Pumpkin by Jeanne Titherington. Use the cards to sequence the events in the book. Students may also retell the story using only the sequence cards. Each child should have a set of sequence cards. (see Appendix)

**C. History.** Discuss the history of the pumpkin and how they were spread throughout the world. Show the children on a world map that pumpkins originated in Northern, Central and South America. After the Americas were discovered the pumpkins were taken back to France and England. Show the travels on the map. Then have the children identify the areas on the map.

**D. Writing Experience.** Take the children to a pumpkin patch in which pumpkins are growing. Allow them to ask questions and explore. Discuss with the students the economics of growing pumpkins. Discuss that some farmers specifically grow pumpkins (fruits and vegetables) for a profit. The farmers invest time and money into growing and caring for the pumpkins which they have planted. In turn, they sell them to the public either from their own stands or to grocery stores for resale. Have the children draw a picture or write a sentence or two about what they saw. Share with the class.

**E. Mini Lecture.** Explain the different facts about pumpkins (see Appendix), (Hint: You may want to have visual aids for some of the "facts" for example, different types of pumpkins, vines, canned pumpkin). Also discuss how we use pumpkins for jack-o'-lanterns. Tell the brief history of the jack-o'-lantern. Have the children make books and illustrate them using the facts they have learned. They can design their own pumpkin covers. Have the children share and read their books.

**F. Field Trip.** Discuss with the students that Halloween is a much bigger holiday in the United States than in Europe. Although we did get the ideas and traditions from the Europeans. In England, and other European countries it is not much of a holiday. Discuss with the students about the community Halloween traditions. One of the biggest traditions in Logan, Utah is the Pumpkin Walk (in which scenes of a given theme are created by carving and painting pumpkins). Relate our local traditions to traditions in other parts of the country. In New York City they have a Halloween parade in which the people in the community dress up in silly and odd costumes and parade down the streets. Other community traditions include festivals, carnivals, and parties. Have the children attend the pumpkin walk or create their own Halloween parade.

**G. Math Application.** Give a pumpkin to each group of four or five students. Have students weigh, measure and find other facts about their pumpkins by

answering the following questions: How long is the stem of your pumpkin? How many ridges are there going around the pumpkin? What is the circumference of your pumpkin? How much does your pumpkin weigh? How many seeds are in your pumpkin? (be sure a hole is cut in the top of the pumpkin) Have each group record their answers on a class graph. Discuss the graph. You may also discuss economic prices of the pumpkins. Have the children figure out higher and lower prices per pound by weight.

**H. Hands-on.** Each child will participate in making one of the following recipes: Quick and Easy Pumpkin Pie, Pumpkin Bread, or Roasted Pumpkin Seeds. (see appendix for recipes) The children will be instructed to use correct measurements and methods. The children will then be able to taste each of the items the class has prepared. Discuss different ways to use pumpkins in celebrations (food, jack-o-lanterns, decoration, sell for profit, etc.).

**I. Open Discussion.** After all of the previous activities have been completed ask the students to respond to the following question. "What do you know about pumpkins?"

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### **Assessment:**

- \* Ability to sequence the cards of the growth of a pumpkin will be assessed.
- \* Ability to recognize specific areas where pumpkins are grown on a world map will be assessed.
- \* Created books and sharing of them will be assessed.
- \* Math responses will be assessed.
- \* Responses to discussion questions will be assessed.

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### **Appendix: Handouts**

Hill, N. (1992). Food for Thought. Greensboro, North Carolina. Carson Dellosa Publishing Company, Inc.

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