

The Celtic Roots of Halloween

Halloween has been celebrated, in some form, for over 2000 years. It became part of the Christian tradition when the Romans invaded regions such as the north of France, England and Wales, where the ancient Celts lived.

In the calendar of the ancient Celts, November the first was the beginning of the new year. It was the start of cold, dark winters, and was closely linked with the idea of death. The Celts believed that the souls of the dead were very active at this time, and in order to protect themselves from evil spirits they would dress up in terrifying costumes. The costumes were made from animal skulls and bones, as well as branches and leaves from trees.

The tradition of pumpkin carving also dates back to this celtic festival. An Irish legend tells the story of Jack, who made a deal with the devil - but couldn't keep his part of the bargain! He couldn't get into heaven, and couldn't get into hell, and so was condemned to wandering the earth - with a lamp made out of a turnip. People used to make turnip lamps to scare away the ghost of Jack and other evil spirits. When Irish people arrived in the USA, they brought their traditions with them - but started to use pumpkins to make the lamps, because they were easier to find and carve.

Many children now go "trick or treating" with friends in their local neighbourhood: they dress up in frightening costumes to visit friends and neighbours with the aim of receiving sweets and chocolates. The origins of this tradition are surprising: poor people used to go door to door, visiting wealthy neighbours and praying for the dead in exchange for bread, cakes and fruit.

These customs were all incorporated into the traditions of the catholic church in the seventh century, when the pope created the festivals of "all saints day" and "all souls day".

True or False:

1. Halloween was created when the Romans invaded regions in which the ancient Celts lived. F
2. The Celts didn't celebrate new year on January the first. T
3. The Celts believed that the souls of dead people came back at their new year. T
4. The Celts used natural materials to make their costumes. T
5. The devil wouldn't let Jack into hell. T
6. Jack was condemned to walk the earth with a lamp made from a pumpkin. F
7. Poor people used to offer prayers in order to obtain food. T
8. The pope created new festivals in the seventeenth century. F

Fill the gaps (1-3 words)

1. The lands of the ancient Celts were _____ by the Romans.
2. The celts had to try to survive very _____.
3. Celts tried to _____ by dressing up in terrifying costumes.
4. Some vegetables can be easier to _____ into lamps than others.
5. Nowadays children get _____ from neighbours.

1. invaded
2. cold, dark winters
3. protect themselves
4. carve/make
5. sweets and chocolates

