Halloween

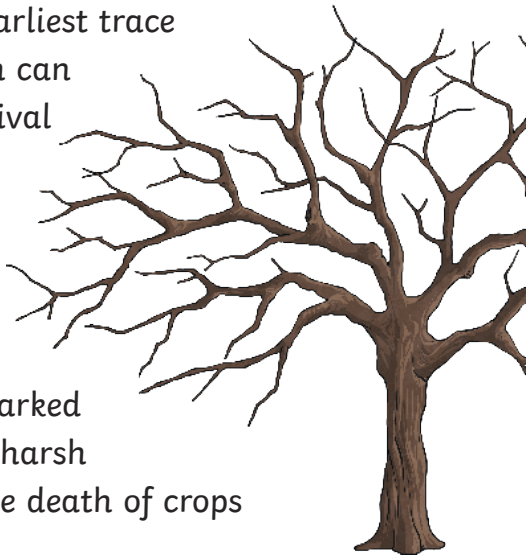
Celebrated each year on 31st October, many people think of costumes, scary movies and trick-or-treating when Halloween is mentioned. However, the history of Halloween could go back thousands of years and what we see on 31st October today is quite different from what would have been seen centuries ago.

Did You Know...?

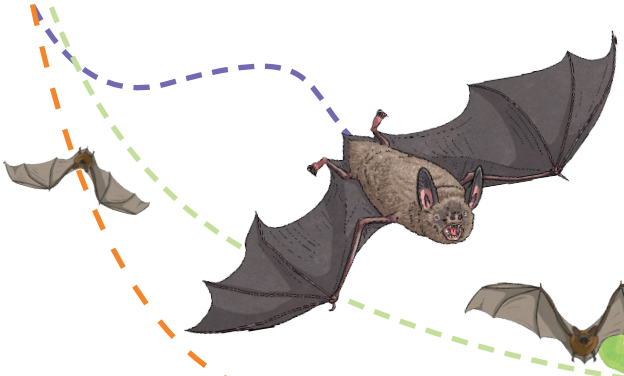
The word 'Halloween' was not seen in books until around the 18th century. It is thought that it is a shortened and changed form of 'All Hallows' Eve'. This is the name for the evening before the Christian celebration of All Hallows' Day, which is on 1st November.

Celtic Beginnings

Despite the name that we use now, it is widely believed that the earliest trace of what we call Halloween can be seen in the ancient festival of Samhain. Samhain means 'summer's end' and it is a festival that was first written about in the 9th century. For the ancient **Celts**, Samhain marked the beginning of the cold, harsh winter that often led to the death of crops and people.



In countries above the **equator**, Samhain is usually on 1st November. However, celebrations often begin after the sun has set on the night of 31st October. At this time, **Pagans** believe that the barriers between the physical world and the spirit world break down. The ancient Celts thought that those who had died during the previous year would be able to return to visit their homes.



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Some people believe that the ancient Celts were frightened by the idea of evil spirits roaming the Earth so they would light bonfires on hilltops to scare the ghosts away. It is also thought that they would sometimes wear masks or costumes so that ghosts would be unable to recognise them. Furthermore, vegetables, such as turnips or swedes, would be carved with spooky faces and left outside of the home to scare away any spirits that got too close.

There were also lots of mythical monsters spoken about on Samhain. Pookas were shape-shifting goblins, the Dullahan was the Headless Horseman and Lady Gwyn would roam the Earth looking for lost travellers while dressed all in white.

All of these things show that the costumes, monsters and carved vegetables of modern-day Halloween can also be seen when we study Samhain.

Glossary

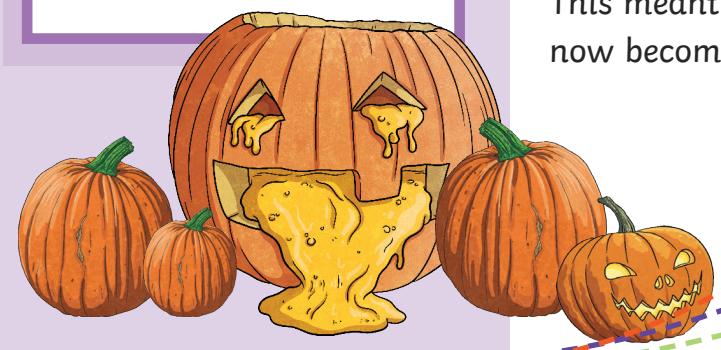
Celts: People who lived in Europe in the time before the Romans.

equator: The invisible line drawn exactly halfway between Earth's two poles, dividing the Earth into equal halves.

Pagans: People who follow the religion of Paganism.

From Paganism to Christianity

In the 4th century, Christianity began to spread across Ireland and this meant that many people started to leave ancient Pagan rituals behind. It was at this time that Pope Gregory created the celebrations of All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day as a way to respect and remember the dead. These new festivals fell at the same time as Samhain so the two holidays began to merge together. This meant that they started to change into what has now become Halloween.



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Questions

1. When was the word 'Halloween' first seen in books? Tick one.

   ◯ 4th century

   ◯ 9th century

   ◯ 18th century

   ◯ 31st October

2. **Pookas were shape-shifting goblins...**
   What does the word 'shape-shifting' mean? Tick one.

   ◯ something that has no shape

   ◯ something that can change shape

   ◯ something with a fixed shape

   ◯ something with a square shape

3. What is 'Halloween' thought to be the shortened version of?

   _____

4. Find and copy the meaning of the word **Samhain**.

   _____

5. Fill in the missing words.

   In countries above the _____, Samhain is usually on 1st _____.

6. **However, the history of Halloween could go back thousands of years...**

   Explain what the word 'could' implies in this sentence.

   _____

   _____

   _____

7. Based on what you've read, discuss where you think the tradition of carving pumpkins might have come from.

8. Predict how you think Halloween will be different in the 22nd century.

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Answers

1. When was the word 'Halloween' first seen in books? Tick one.

- ◯ 4th century
- ◯ 9th century
- ✓ **18th century**
- ◯ 31st October

2. **Pookas were shape-shifting goblins...**
   What does the word 'shape-shifting' mean? Tick one.
   - ◯ something that has no shape
   - ◯ **something that can change shape**
   - ✓ something with a fixed shape
   - ◯ something with a square shape

3. What is 'Halloween' thought to be the shortened version of?
   It is thought that 'Halloween' is a shortened and changed form of 'All Hallows' Eve'.

4. Find and copy the meaning of the word **Samhain**.
   summer's end

5. Fill in the missing words.
   In countries above the **equator**, Samhain is usually on 1st **November.**

6. **However, the history of Halloween could go back thousands of years...**
   Explain what the word 'could' implies in this sentence.
   Pupils' own responses, such as: The word 'could' implies that this might not definitely be the case and that we do not know this for certain.

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7. Based on what you've read, discuss where you think the tradition of carving pumpkins might have come from.

   Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that carving pumpkins might have come from the ancient Samhain tradition of carving vegetables like turnips or swedes and leaving them outside of the home to scare away any spirits that got too close.

8. Predict how you think Halloween will be different in the 22nd century.

   Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that we might carve different fruits and vegetables on Halloween by the 22nd century because we carve different vegetables now compared to what was used thousands of years ago.

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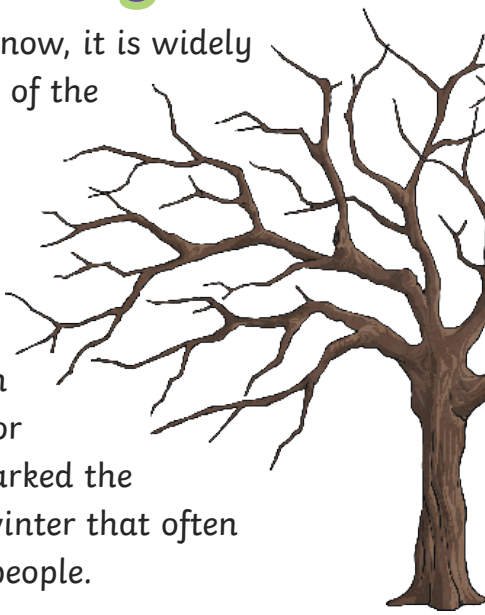
Halloween

Celebrated each year on 31st October, Halloween has now become associated with costumes, scary movies and trick-or-treating. However, the origin of Halloween has a fascinating and rich history that could go back thousands of years; yet, what we see on 31st October today is quite different from what would have been seen centuries ago.

From Paganism to Christianity

In the 4th century, Christianity began to spread across Ireland and this meant that many communities started to leave ancient Pagan rituals behind. It was at this time that Pope Gregory created the celebrations of All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day as a way to honour the dead. These new festivals

Celtic Beginnings



Despite the name that we use now, it is widely believed that the earliest trace of the celebration that we now call Halloween can be seen in the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain. Samhain, meaning 'summer's end', is a festival that was first recorded in Irish literature in the 9th century. For the ancient Celts, Samhain marked the beginning of the cold, harsh winter that often led to the death of crops and people.

In countries above the **equator**, Samhain is usually on 1st November. However, celebrations often begin after the sun has set on the night of 31st October. At this time, **Pagans** believe that the barriers between the physical world and the spirit world break down. The ancient Celts thought that those who had died during the previous year would be able to return to visit their homes.

Some historians believe that celebrants would be frightened by the idea of evil spirits roaming the Earth so they would light bonfires on hilltops to scare the ghosts away. It is thought that, sometimes, they would also wear masks or other disguises so that ghosts would be unable to recognise them. Furthermore, turnips or swedes would be carved with spooky faces and left outside of the home to scare away any spirits that got too close. From this, it is clear that the costumes, ghosts and carved vegetables of modern-day Halloween can also be seen when we study Samhain.

fell at the same time as the ancient celebrations of Samhain. It was at this point that the two holidays began to merge and they started to be transformed into what has now become Halloween.

Glossary

equator: The invisible line drawn exactly halfway between Earth's two poles, dividing the Earth into equal halves.

Pagans: People who follow the religion of Paganism.

Samhain Monsters

The theme of monsters and ghouls that we see on Halloween today was also present during ancient Samhain celebrations. Here are some notable monsters from Irish mythology:

Pookas

'Pooka' comes from the old Irish word 'púca' which means 'goblin'. A Pooka is believed to be a shape-shifter that can look like anything that it chooses to. Pookas can speak like a human and they are rumoured to cause mischief when they appear.

The Dullahan

The Dullahan is also often referred to as the Headless Horseman and he is a notorious and sinister character. The Dullahan can be seen riding a magnificent,black horse while draped in flowing, black robes. The Dullahan carries his own head in his hands and he holds it high so that he can see over great distances.

Lady Gywn

Often headless and seen with a black pig, Lady Gwyn is said to wander the Earth while dressed all in white. Seen as an evil spirit, it is believed that Lady Gwyn seeks to lure lost travellers to their doom.

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Questions

1. … **it is widely believed that the earliest trace of the celebration that we now call Halloween…**

   Which of these words could be used as a synonym for 'trace' in this phrase? Tick one.

   - ◯ draw
   - ◯ evidence
   - ◯ neglect
   - ◯ party

2. Number the words from 1-5 to show the order that they first appear in the text. The first one has been done for you.

	Christianity
	Pagans
1	Halloween
	Celtic
	Samhain

3. Look at the section called **Celtic Beginnings**.
   Find and copy one word which means 'someone who celebrates something'.

   _____

4. In which century was Samhain first recorded in Irish literature?

   _____

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5. List **two** vegetables that would be carved with spooky faces on Samhain.
   - _____
   - _____

6. Explain why you think two religious festivals ended up merging and transforming to become what is now Halloween.

_____

_____

_____

7. Choose one creature mentioned in the **Samhain Monsters** section and discuss how it is similar to a modern-day Halloween creature.

_____

_____

_____

8. Comment on which celebration you think was most scary: traditional Samhain or modern-day Halloween. Explain your answer.

_____

_____

_____

9. Summarise how modern-day Halloween may have come to be using 30 words or fewer.

_____

_____

_____

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Answers

1. … **it is widely believed that the earliest trace of the celebration that we now call Halloween…**

   Which of these words could be used as a synonym for 'trace' in this phrase? Tick one.

   ◯ draw
   ☑ **evidence**
   ◯ neglect
   ◯ party

2. Number the words from 1-5 to show the order that they first appear in the text. The first one has been done for you.

5	Christianity
4	Pagans
1	Halloween
2	Celtic
3	Samhain

3. Look at the section called **Celtic Beginnings**.

   Find and copy one word which means 'someone who celebrates something'.

   celebrant

4. In which century was Samhain first recorded in Irish literature?

   Samhain was first recorded in Irish literature in the 9th century.

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5. List **two** vegetables that would be carved with spooky faces on Samhain.
   - **turnips**
   - **swedes**

6. Explain why you think two religious festivals ended up merging and transforming to become what is now Halloween.
   Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that the two religious festivals of Samhain and All Saints' Day ended up merging into one because they happened on the same day among the same group of people and they both had a focus on death so it would have been hard to keep track of which traditions belonged to which celebration.

7. Choose one creature mentioned in the **Samhain Monsters** section and discuss how it is similar to a modern-day Halloween creature.
   Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that the Dullahan is similar to the modern-day Headless Horseman that we still talk about on Halloween because they have a similar appearance and are both sinister characters.

8. Comment on which celebration you think was most scary: traditional Samhain or modern-day Halloween. Explain your answer.
   Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that traditional Samhain would have been the most scary because many people genuinely believed that ghosts or spirits would find their homes whereas many people think that this is just pretend nowadays.

9. Summarise how modern-day Halloween may have come to be using 30 words or fewer.
   Pupils' own responses, such as: Modern-day Halloween came to be as an evolved mixture between the traditions of the ancient Celtic festival Samhain and the Christian celebration of All Saints' Day.

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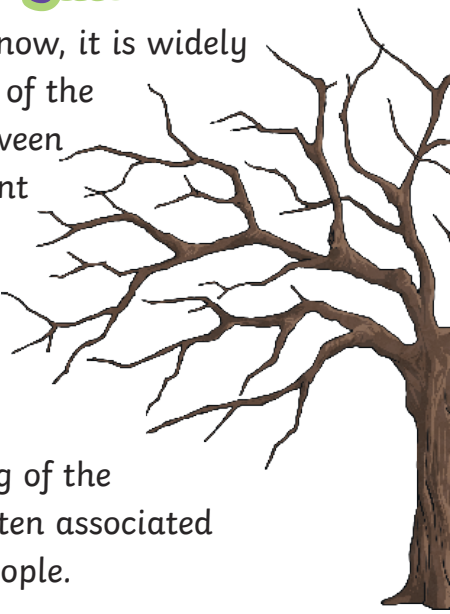
Halloween

Celebrated annually on 31st October worldwide, Halloween has now become synonymous with costumes, scary movies and trick-or-treating. However, the origin of Halloween has a fascinating and rich history that could stem from thousands of years ago and the practice that we see today is quite different from what would have been seen centuries ago.

Etymology

The word etymology refers to the study of how words came to be and how they got their meaning. Studying the etymology of the word 'Halloween' shows that it is not seen in literature until around the 18th century. It is thought that it is a contracted and altered form of 'All Hallows' Eve', which is the name for the evening before the Christian celebration of All Hallows' Day (marked on 1st November).

Celtic Origins



Despite the name that we use now, it is widely believed that the earliest trace of the celebration that we call Halloween today can be seen in the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain (meaning 'summer's end'); this festival was first recorded in Irish literature in the 9th century. For the ancient Celts, Samhain marked the beginning of the cold, harsh winter that was often associated with the death of crops and people.

In the northern hemisphere, Samhain is typically commemorated on 1st November but celebrations often begin on the evening before - after the sun has set on the night of 31st October. At this time, Pagans who observe Samhain believe that the barriers between the physical world and the spirit world break down. The ancient Celts specifically believed that those who had died during the previous year would be able to return to visit their homes or begin their journeys to the otherworld.

Some historians believe that, frightened by the prospect of evil spirits roaming the Earth, celebrants would light bonfires on hilltops to scare the ghosts away; sometimes, they would also wear masks or other disguises so that ghosts would be unable to recognise them. Furthermore, turnips or swedes would be carved with spooky faces and left outside of the home to scare away any spirits that got too close. From this, it is clear that the tradition of wearing costumes on 31st October and the night's association with ghosts and spirits can also be seen when we study Samhain.

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From Paganism to Christianity

In the 4th century, Christianity began to spread across Ireland and many communities started to leave ancient Pagan rituals behind. It was at this time that Pope Gregory created the celebrations of All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day as a way to honour the dead. Originally marked on 1st May and 2nd May respectively, these Christian festivals were later moved to 1st November and 2nd November, which coincided with the ancient celebrations of Samhain. It was at this point that the two holidays began to merge and they started to be transformed into what has now become Halloween.

Samhain Monsters

The theme of monsters and ghouls that we see on Halloween today was also present to some degree during ancient Samhain celebrations and there were some notable, mythical monsters that were particularly associated with the festival.

Pookas

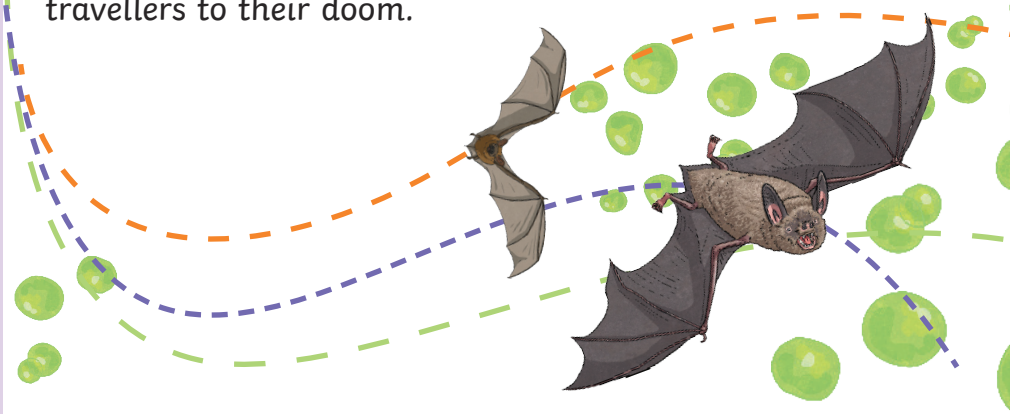
Originating from the old Irish word 'púca' which means 'goblin', a Pooka is believed to be a shape-shifter that can look like anything that it chooses to. Regardless of their form, Pookas can speak like a human and are rumoured to cause mischief when they appear.

The Dullahan

Also referred to as the Headless Horseman, the Dullahan is a notorious and sinister character from Celtic mythology who is said to be the embodiment of the Celtic god Crom Dubh. Often male, the Dullahan can be seen riding a magnificent, black horse while draped in flowing, black robes. The Dullahan carries his own head in his hands and holds it high so that he can see over great distances.

Lady Gywn

Often headless and accompanied by a black pig (thought to represent the devil), Lady Gwyn is said to wander the Earth while dressed all in white. Seen as an evil spirit, it is believed that forlorn Lady Gwyn seeks to lure lost travellers to their doom.



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Questions

1. **Halloween has now become synonymous with costumes, scary movies and trick-or-treating.**

   What does the word 'synonymous' mean in this sentence? Tick one.

   - ◯ completely different from
   - ◯ associated
   - ◯ frightening
   - ◯ unfamiliar

2. What does the name **Samhain** mean? Tick one.

   - ◯ All Hallows' Eve
   - ◯ All Hallows' Day
   - ◯ summer's end
   - ◯ goblin

3. **Samhain is typically commemorated on 1st November...**

   What does the word 'typically' imply in this sentence?

   _____

4. What is meant by the word **etymology**?

   _____

5. **Celebrated annually on 31st October worldwide,...**

   How else could the author have worded this phrase?

   _____

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6. Look at the section **Celtic Origins.**

   The author has used the present tense when discussing Samhain. Explain why you think this is.

7. Discuss which mythical Samhain monster you find most frightening and explain why.

8. Using what you know from the text, propose a reason why All Saints' Day may have ended up moving from 1st May to 1st November.

9. Discuss one way that Samhain and modern-day Halloween are similar and one way that they differ.

10. Predict how the celebration of modern-day Halloween may evolve over the next century.

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Answers

1. **Halloween has now become synonymous with costumes, scary movies and trick-or-treating.**

   What does the word 'synonymous' mean in this sentence? Tick one.

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   - ◯ All Hallows' Eve
   - ◯ All Hallows' Day
   - ☑ **summer's end**
   - ◯ goblin

3. **Samhain is typically commemorated on 1st November...**

   What does the word 'typically' imply in this sentence?

   The word 'typically' implies that this is not always the case.

4. What is meant by the word **etymology**?

   The word etymology refers to the study of how words came to be and how they got their meaning.

5. **Celebrated annually on 31st October worldwide,...**

   How else could the author have worded this phrase?

   Pupils' own responses, such as: Marked around the world on 31st October each year,...

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6. Look at the section **Celtic Origins.**

   The author has used the present tense when discussing Samhain. Explain why you think this is.

   Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that the author has used the present tense when discussing Samhain because it is an ancient festival that still continues to be celebrated by some people today.

7. Discuss which mythical Samhain monster you find most frightening and explain why.

   Pupils' own responses, such as: I find the Pookas the most frightening because they can change to look like anything they want to so you may never know if you were looking at one or not.

8. Using what you know from the text, propose a reason why All Saints' Day may have ended up moving from 1st May to 1st November.

   Pupils' own responses, such as: I think that All Saints' Day may have ended up changing dates because the text says that cold, harsh winters were often associated with the death of crops and people so it would make sense to honour the dead closer to wintertime.

9. Discuss one way that Samhain and modern-day Halloween are similar and one way that they differ.

   Pupils' own responses, such as: Samhain is similar to modern-day Halloween because it involved masks, costumes and carved vegetables and those things are still seen today. However, Samhain differs from modern-day Halloween because bonfires would be lit on hilltops and we don't often see bonfires on Halloween now.

10. Predict how the celebration of modern-day Halloween may evolve over the next century.

    Pupils' own responses, such as: I predict that people will completely forget about the religious festivals that were the basis for modern-day Halloween over the next century and people will no longer recall where the concept of costumes, masks and carved vegetables came from.