

# Halloween History

**America's favorite holiday has kooky traditions—and spooky beginnings.**

BY ALEXIS BURLING

**E**very year on Halloween, millions of children prepare to ring their neighbors' doorbells and scream, "Trick or Treat!" Hannah Montana outfits and Batman costumes are bought by the truckload. Blow Pops, bite-size Hershey bars, and plastic orange pumpkins fly off supermarket shelves. And there's always a stampede to get the last tube of fake blood at the local drugstore. Halloween is known for its fun and games. But when the holiday began, it was a much more serious—and truly spooky—occasion.

Two thousand years ago in the area that is now Ireland, Wales, and Scotland, natives called Celts observed the end of the farming season and the beginning of a new year on November 1. The night before, they also celebrated Samhain (pronounced sow-in) or "Hallow E'en." During this eerie time, people believed the boundary between the deceased and the living dissolved. And the ghosts of the dead haunted the Earth.

So the Celts organized huge festivals to protect themselves. They built roaring bonfires and sacrificed animals to their gods. They put on masks and dressed up in elaborate costumes made from animal hides to ward away evil. And they cooked gigantic feasts to bring about a prosperous new year.

Over the next few centuries, other cultures



developed their own Halloween traditions, many of which continue to this day. In England, poor citizens went door-to-door begging for "soul cakes"—food they used to **appease** lost spirits. In Mexico and Latin America, people decorated their homes, lit candles, and built altars to their dead relatives. In Spain, they tidied grave sites and left candy on tombstones.

As European immigrants came to America in the 1700s, they brought their Halloween customs with them. They also formed new ones to commemorate their surroundings. Colonial festivities featured ghost stories and fortune-telling. Children joined their parents in carving jack-o'-lanterns and bobbing for apples.

Today, Halloween is just as popular as ever. In 2007, 73 percent of Americans celebrated the holiday. One billion pounds of pumpkins were grown nationwide. And a whopping \$1,983,000,000 was spent on Halloween candy alone. While many people disagree on whether ghosts and witches actually exist, they do see eye to eye on one thing: It's certainly fun to dress up as one! ●

# No-Sweat BUBBLE TEST

Read the article on page 30. Then fill in the circle next to the best answer for each question below. Next time you take a real bubble test, you'll be a pro!

1. What group of people had the earliest Halloween celebrations?
  - A. Celts
  - B. Americans
  - C. European immigrants
  - D. Mexicans
  
2. What does the word “commemorate” mean in the fifth paragraph?
  - A. to make fun of
  - B. to try to forget
  - C. to honor or pay respect to
  - D. to laugh about
  
3. The Celts, English, and Spanish all used food in their Halloween traditions. Why did they do this?
  - A. to store goods for the winter
  - B. to protect themselves by offering something to spirits
  - C. to get rid of leftovers
  - D. to scare spirits away with bad odors
  
4. What did Celts do during Samhain?
  - A. They dressed up to ward off evil.
  - B. They sacrificed animals to their gods.
  - C. They cooked large feasts.
  - D. all of the above
  
5. What is the main idea of this article?
  - A. Halloween is a scary time.
  - B. Candy makers love Halloween because people purchase so much candy.
  - C. Halloween has changed over the years, but it remains a celebration in many cultures.
  - D. Dressing up has always been the most important part of Halloween.
  
6. Why did the author write this story?
  - A. to predict what the best Halloween costumes will be in 2008
  - B. to explain the origin and evolution of a popular holiday
  - C. to tell a frightening ghost story
  - D. to prove that spirits are real

## Critical Thinking

Answer the following questions on a separate piece of paper.

Explain your answers using information and details from the article.

1. How did Halloween rituals differ around the world?
2. What are some popular Halloween customs today, and how are they similar to past traditions?