

What is Halloween?

Halloween is celebrated every year on the thirty-first of October, but where exactly does Halloween originate?

Most people think of Halloween as an American tradition, but actually, it comes from Europe. In fact, Halloween has been celebrated in Europe for about two and a half thousand years.

The first people to celebrate Halloween were the Celts. The Celts were people who originally came from central Europe, but who later settled in many different places within Europe. During the time of the Roman Empire, some Celts from central-Europe were forced to move to Britain, France and Ireland.

Halloween was the last day of their calendar year. On this day, the Celtic people believed that the spirits of the dead would visit people's homes and try to take over their bodies. Unfortunately, the Celts never wrote about their culture, so much information has been lost over the years, and we can't say for sure how some Halloween traditions originated. We know that during Halloween, the Celts tried many ways to confuse or scare the evil spirits of the dead away. We believe that they built huge bonfires, they wore fancy dress, they did practical jokes on each other, and they made lots of noise.

The custom of playing *trick or treat* is probably Christian, rather than Celtic. We know that since the ninth century AD, on November the second, which was a religious festival, poor people used to visit rich people's homes and ask for cakes. The more cakes that the poor people received, the more they would pray for the rich people's dead relatives. The modern *trick or treat* game that children play at Halloween today probably dates back to this Christian festival.

Another popular Halloween pastime is apple ducking. In the modern game, the first person to bite an apple is the winner. In the original game, the first person to bite an apple would be the first person to marry in the coming new year.

So how and when did Halloween come to America?

During the 1840s, Ireland had a potato famine. There was no food, so many people died. Those that survived and emigrated to America took their culture with them, including their Celtic tradition of Halloween. Today, Halloween is not so popular in Europe, but it is still very popular in America.

Listen. Answer the questions.

1. On which date is Halloween celebrated?
2. Where does Halloween originate? America Europe
3. For about how many years has Halloween been celebrated?
4. Where do Celts originally come from? Ireland Britain central Europe
5. Where did the Celts move to during the Roman Empire?
6. On which day of the Celtic calendar year is Halloween?
7. What did the Celts believe visited them during Halloween?
8. Why do we know so little about Celtic culture?
9. How did the Celts try to confuse or scare such spirits?
They built huge
- They wore
- They did on each other.
- They made
10. From which religion does *trick or treat* probably originate? Celtic Christian
11. From which century does *trick or treat* probably date back to? 5th B.C. 9th A.D. 19th A.D.
12. What would happen to the winner of the original apple ducking game? She would die of poison. She would marry first.
13. From which country did Halloween come to America?
14. What caused the Irish people to emigrate?
15. Where is Halloween now not so popular? Europe America

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Do you know these words?

bonfire	dead	originate
Celt / Celtic	emigrate	practical joke
century	famine	spirit
confuse	fancy dress	tradition

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