

ACTIVITY 1A: THE ORIGINS OF HALLOWEEN

HALLOWEEN — Student Background Information Sheet

Halloween

Halloween, or All Hallows' Eve, started as a Celtic celebration. It began with a feast to celebrate the Eve of Winter, October 31, and the start of the Celtic New Year on November 1. The nighttime hours were viewed as a "crack-in-time" when good and evil spirits were able to visit the living. Celtic tribes would light bonfires to scare away the evil spirits.

After the Roman conquest of Great Britain and the other regions inhabited by Celtic peoples, the Roman celebration of *Pomona*, the goddess of fruit and trees, which took place on November 1, was combined with the Celtic feast. Then in the 9th century, the Roman Catholic Church designated November 1st as the "Feast of All Saints," for canonized and unknown saints, and November 2nd as the "Feast of All Souls" for those who had passed away in the faith. Over time these two days became known as "All Saints Day" and "All Souls Day" with the preceding night being referred to as "All Hallows Eve," the night when all unsaved souls came out to harass the living.

The origin of the present-day term "Trick or Treat" may be found in the Late Middle Ages when children would go "a-souling." Children would beg for sweet soul cakes in return for saying prayers for the dead — this was the treat. For those who did not offer a treat, the children would play a trick on them.

The custom of Halloween was brought to America by Scottish and Irish immigrants in the 1700s. It has evolved into a fun-loving celebration centered around children.

