

## Introduction

Download the LearnEnglish Themes podcast. You'll find more information on this page:  
<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-podcasts-themes.htm>

This support pack contains the following materials:

- The article that you can listen to in the podcast
- An optional comprehension activity based on the article
- Links to other activities on the LearnEnglish website on this theme (Hallowe'en).

## Read the article

Hallowe'en is a popular festival in many countries all over the world, and every year it seems to get bigger. It's getting dark earlier and it's starting to get cold. Christmas is still a long way away. We need something to cheer us up and take our minds off the fact that winter is nearly here. Find out some more about the traditional festival of Hallowe'en.

### The origins of the name

The festival of Hallowe'en has its roots in Celtic and Roman traditions. Over 2,000 years ago the Celts in Britain, Ireland and parts of France celebrated Samhain to mark the beginning of winter. When the Romans invaded, they merged this with Feralia, their celebration of the passing of the dead. As Christianity spread, the Church tried to replace these pagan feasts with official Church holy days. One of these was November 1. It was called All Saints Day, or "All Hallows", and October 31 was known as "All Hallows' Eve", and then Hallowe'en.

### Hallowe'en traditions

In the past there was a tradition called "souling". Poor people went around houses asking for food. In exchange, they promised to say prayers for the dead. People no longer go souling, but the habit has been transformed into a modern Hallowe'en game for children in America, who dress up as ghosts, witches and monsters and go around

people's houses, asking for sweets. This game is called "Trick or Treat".

### Witches

Hallowe'en wouldn't be fun without witches. Witches have always been part of popular folklore. Shakespeare's play "Macbeth" opens with three witches. A witch was someone - usually a woman - who had special powers and had dealings with the devil. The American town, Salem, in the state of Massachusetts, is famous for the "witchcraft trials", which took place there in 1692.

### Pumpkins

The pumpkin has become a symbol of Hallowe'en. People empty a pumpkin, cut a face into the side, and put a candle inside to make a lamp. It's known as a Jack O' Lantern, from an Irish legend about a man called Jack, who made a deal with the devil.

### Animals

Black cats, frogs, mice and spiders are just some of the animals associated with Hallowe'en. Generally, the more unpleasant the animal, the stronger the Hallowe'en connection. Nocturnal animals like bats are particular favourites, and if, as is the case with vampire bats, they like drinking blood, they are high on the Hallowe'en list.

**After reading****Exercise 1**

For each of the 7 questions below decide if it is True or False.

1. Hallowe'en is liked by many people.
2. The Celts celebrated Samhain at the end of autumn.
3. The Church thought pagan feasts were holy days.
4. Only poor people play 'Trick or Treat'.
5. Witches are a modern invention.
6. Jack O'Lantern was another name for the devil.
7. Animals that live at night are popular symbols of Hallowe'en.

[www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish](http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish)

**More activities on this topic**

You'll find links to all the following activities connected to the theme of Hallowe'en at:

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-central-themes-halloween.htm>

- **Word game: Hallowe'en.** Match words related to Hallowe'en to their meanings.
- **Spelloween:** Test your spelling with this spooky game.
- **Story: King of the Pumpkins:** A young boy and his cat go in search of the King of the Pumpkins, to try and find out what - if anything - is true about his mother's stories.
- **Trivia:** Everything you (n)ever wanted to know about Hallowe'en.
- There is also a cartoon and carefully selected external links.

**Answers to comprehension activity:** 1. True (T); 2. T; 3. False (F); 4. F; 5. F; 6. F; 7. T