

Your Shortcut to... Halloween

It started two thousand years ago ... today, Americans spend half a BILLION dollars just on costumes for their pets ... and every year, more Australians get into it. This is your Squiz Kids Shortcut to Halloween—the podcast where we dive into the who, what, when, where, why and how of the big news stories. I'm Amanda Bower.

And I'm Bryce Corbett.

More than a quarter of all Australians celebrate Halloween, and we're guessing many of them are kids! It's hard to resist a holiday that involves getting free lollies.

Today, we'll take you through WHERE Halloween comes from, WHY people dress up, and WHAT the traditions of pumpkin carving, apple bobbing, and haunted houses are all about.

Listen carefully - there's a Squiz at the end!

So Bryce, I've heard a lot of people complain that they don't want Halloween to be celebrated in Australia, because it's a sign of us becoming too Americanised. But Halloween didn't start out as an American holiday - not by a long shot!

So where is it from?

Well, we need to get into our time machine... (pause for FX) and head back 2,000 years to ancient Ireland, Scotland, and the Isle of Man. Right about this time of year, the ancient Celtic people who lived there would celebrate the end of summer, the end of the harvest, and the beginning of winter, with a festival called Samhain. (SOW-iñ)

I always thought that was pronounced SAM-HAIN... that's how it's written, S-A-M-H-A-I-N.

It's a tricky one! Everyone give it a go... SOW-iñ. (pause) Samhain marked the beginning of the cold, dark time of year, and the ancient Celts believed that on the night between October 31 - the end of summer - and November 1 - the beginning of winter, ghosts would come and visit. They would light big bonfires, dress up in costumes, and told each other's fortunes.

Aha! So how did we get from SOW-in to Halloween?

Okay, so in the first century, the Romans conquered the Celts. By the 9th century, Christianity had spread across the Roman empire and started taking over the old Celtic traditions. And in the 10th Century, the Church created All Souls Day, known back then

as All-Hallows. All Hallows Day was on November 1, and featured bonfires, people dressing up as angels and devils and saints...

Kind of sounds like it was copying Samhain.

Most historians agree that the church came up with All-Hallows Day as a Christian replacement for Samhain. And then the night before was All Hallows Eve, which became known as Halloween.

So it really started in Ireland and Scotland!

Yep, and don't forget the Isle of Mann. It was only when Irish immigrants flooded into America in the 1800s that it became so popular there. But it definitely didn't start as an American holiday.

Now, when I think about Halloween in America, I think about the fact that people spend BILLIONS of dollars every year on costumes. WHY is dressing up so important on Halloween?

Remember that the ancient Celts lit huge bonfires and wore costumes for Samhain?

Sure do

Well, they dressed up in animal skins. They would sacrifice animals and some of the crops they'd just harvested to their gods, in the hopes of having a safe winter and a good harvest the next year. But as the Christian influence spread, people became afraid of the ghosts that were said to be roaming on All Hallows Eve, and they dressed up as a way to disguise and protect themselves from the ghosts.

Right

Starting in around the 16th century, people began to do something called "mumming and guising" in Scotland and Ireland.

Guising sounds a lot like disguising...

That's exactly right! And, mumming means performing. Groups of people would wear disguises, or costumes, and then go from house to house performing songs or poems, in exchange for rewards of food.

Aha! Mumming and guising sounds like trick-or-treating!

Geez you're smart. That's right! In fact, there are records from the 19th century in Scotland of young people dressed up and threatening to do mischief unless they got a reward. I'm not sure if toilet papering houses was something done in the 1800s, but it's definitely how that whole trick-or-treat thing started.

So Halloween costumes didn't start in America, either?

Definitely not. But just as most things in America are bigger than anywhere else, they have definitely made it into a THING. Americans spend the equivalent of \$4.4 BILLION dollars on costumes EVERY YEAR. And half a billion on costumes for their pets. (Pause)

Wow! Squiz-E the newshound isn't sure what to make of that.

Now that I've learned about the history of Halloween and costumes, WHAT can you tell us about some other Halloween traditions?

Bryce, there's so much to choose from! Apple bobbing, haunted houses, pumpkin carving...

Haunted houses!

Alright, the first haunted house that existed to make money was in England, and it opened in 1915. Its scary stuff is pretty tame by today's standards, but going through a maze of rocking floors in the dark, with air blasts from below and vibrating walls, was pretty spooky back then. (pause for scream) Over in America, haunted houses started to appear in the 1930s, but they really got popular when the Disneyland Haunted Mansion opened in 1969.

Okay, after visiting a haunted house, I'd like to carve a pumpkin. Is that an older tradition than spooky houses?

Sure is... although the original version is actually carving a turnip! Carved pumpkins are often called Jack-O'-Lanterns, and there's an old Irish legend about man called Stingy Jack, who did a very bad deal with the devil and was doomed to roam the Earth, with only a hollowed turnip to light his way.

So the turnip was Jack's lantern, and he was Jack of the Lantern... Jack-o'-lantern.

Nailed it. Hollowing and carving pumpkins instead means that you can roast pumpkin seeds, and make pumpkin scones and pumpkin soup. Much yummiier than a turnip version.

Speaking of yummy, tell me quickly about the tradition of apple bobbing.

Remember how the Romans conquered the Celts? Well, the Romans had a late summer festival to honour their goddess of fruit, Pomona. Young unmarried people would try to bite into an apple floating in water or hanging from a string on a line, and the first to successfully munch into the fruit was supposed to be the next to get married. That festival became incorporated into Samhain, and stayed with us for Halloween... although it has nothing to do with marriage anymore!

Still a lot of fun, though... especially when you're faceplanting into a bucket of water.
(pause for FX)

That's for sure, Bryce. Halloween IS a lot of fun.

"This is the part of the podcast where you get to test how well you've been listening...

Question 1 What do we call mumming and guising today? (Trick or Treating)"

Question 2 What was the name of the ancient Celtic holiday that eventually became Halloween? (Samhain... thanks for pronouncing it properly)

Question 3 What do Americans spend half a billion dollars on each year? (Pet costumes. It's over 4 billion on the human ones.

That's all we have time for today. Thanks for joining us as we explored the who, what, how, where, when, and why of Halloween.

Now get out there, and have a most excellent day!

And, if you celebrate it, a most excellent Halloween. Over and out.