

GRADES 3-6

18 PRINTABLE PAGES

ANSWER KEYS INCLUDED

HALLOWEEN HISTORY

Classroom Activity Pack



Explore how a familiar autumn celebration changed over time through reading, research, sequencing, source analysis, vocabulary, and creative writing.

- Original nonfiction reading passage + comprehension questions
- Historical timeline, then-and-now comparison, and turnip investigation
- Primary-source poster activity + fact-or-folklore challenge
- Vocabulary search, creative writing, quiz, and family activity
- Autumn-only alternative, teacher notes, and complete answer keys

Print-friendly: Designed for standard US letter paper, low-ink printing, and flexible classroom, library, or homeschool use.

Teacher guide

A flexible, source-aware mini unit for seasonal history and literacy.

GRADES 3-6

20-60 MINUTES

PRINT + GO

Learning goals

- Explain that modern Halloween developed from multiple traditions over time.
- Describe the influence of seasonal customs, migration, and community celebrations.
- Distinguish historical evidence, folklore, and present-day practice.
- Observe a documented 1936 poster and support an inference with details.
- Practice informational reading, chronology, comparison, and concise writing.

Three easy ways to use this packet

ONE CLASS PERIOD

Read page 3, complete page 4, and discuss the poster on page 9.

THREE SHORT LESSONS

Day 1: pages 3-5. Day 2: pages 6-10. Day 3: pages 11-13.

CENTERS OR HOME

Offer selected pages independently; send page 14 home for conversation.

Thoughtful classroom notes

Discuss religious observances and cultural traditions as history, not as activities students must practice. Participation in Halloween varies among families; page 15 provides a neutral autumn alternative. Day of the Dead is a distinct celebration and should not be described as another name for Halloween.

Materials: pencils, optional scissors for the timeline cards, and a device or projector if you wish to show the original Library of Congress poster collection. The page 9 poster is a clearly labeled classroom transcription, not a reproduction of the original artwork.

How Halloween changed

Read the passage. Underline one example of a tradition changing over time.

NAME _____

DATE _____

A SEASON OF CHANGE

Long ago, communities in Ireland marked the shift from autumn toward winter around the beginning of November. The Gaelic festival known as Samhain was connected with the changing season, gatherings, and stories. Over many centuries, people in different places added their own customs. Modern Halloween did not come from just one ancient celebration.

A NAME WITH A HISTORY

Christian observances also influenced the calendar. November 1 became known as All Saints' Day, or All Hallows' Day. The evening before it was All Hallows' Eve. Over time, that name changed into Halloween. Seasonal customs, religious observances, and local folklore existed alongside one another and continued to change.

TRADITIONS CROSS AN OCEAN

During the nineteenth century, Irish and Scottish immigrants carried familiar customs to North America. Those traditions mixed with other autumn celebrations. In Ireland, people had carved turnips and other root vegetables into lanterns. In North America, large pumpkins were plentiful and easier to hollow out. The glowing pumpkin became a new version of an older lantern tradition.

FROM COMMUNITY PARTIES TO CANDY

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, communities held Halloween parties, parades, and costume events. Some events offered alternatives to damaging pranks. A 1936 poster preserved by the Library of Congress advertises a Halloween roller-skating carnival and costume prizes. Trick-or-treating became more common during the twentieth century, especially after World War II.

AN UNFINISHED STORY

Today, Halloween may include costumes, decorations, games, pumpkin carving, parties, or trick-or-treating. Families celebrate differently, and some do not celebrate at all. The holiday continues to change as communities share ideas and create new traditions. Its history is best understood as many connected stories, not one perfectly straight line.

BIG IDEA: Traditions can travel, combine, and change when people move, meet, and create new ways to celebrate.

Read like a historian

Answer in complete sentences. Return to the passage when you need evidence.

NAME _____

DATE _____

- 1

What seasonal change was associated with Samhain in Ireland?
- 2

Where does the name Halloween come from?
- 3

How did immigrants help change or spread Halloween traditions?
- 4

Why were pumpkins a useful replacement for carved turnips?
- 5

What does the 1936 carnival poster tell us about some community celebrations?
- 6

Why is it inaccurate to say modern Halloween came from only one tradition?

TEXT EVIDENCE: Circle one sentence in your answers that could be supported directly by the reading passage.

Build a history timeline

Number the events from 1 to 6, from earliest to latest. Cut apart the cards if your teacher prefers.

NAME _____ DATE _____

WRITE YOUR EVENT ORDER

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

6 _____

Event cards - place these in order

A**AFTER WORLD WAR II**

Trick-or-treating becomes more widespread in North American neighborhoods.

B**LONG AGO IN IRELAND**

Gaelic communities mark the autumn-to-winter season around Samhain.

C**1936**

A New York poster advertises a Halloween roller-skating carnival and costume prizes.

D**NINETEENTH CENTURY**

Irish and Scottish immigrants bring seasonal traditions to North America.

E**OVER LATER CENTURIES**

All Hallows' Eve becomes part of the story behind the name Halloween.

F**LATE 1800S AND EARLY 1900S**

Community parties and organized autumn events become increasingly popular.

HISTORIAN'S NOTE: A timeline simplifies a complicated history. Traditions can overlap and do not always begin or end on one exact date.

Halloween: then and now

Compare older traditions with modern practices. Use details from the reading or your own observations.

NAME _____

DATE _____

EARLIER TRADITIONS	MODERN PRACTICES
Lanterns _____ _____	Lanterns _____ _____
Clothing and disguises _____ _____	Clothing and disguises _____ _____
Community activities _____ _____	Community activities _____ _____
Foods and treats _____ _____	Foods and treats _____ _____

Think about change

- 1

Which tradition seems to have changed the most? Explain your choice.

- 2

What is one idea that connects the past and the present?

From turnips to pumpkins

Investigate how an older Irish lantern tradition changed after it reached North America.

NAME _____

DATE _____



The National Museum of Ireland documents a carved turnip lantern connected with County Donegal. A teacher gave an example to the museum in 1943 and described it as the kind used locally around 1900. Candles lit the carved faces. In North America, people increasingly used pumpkins instead. Pumpkins were larger, readily available, and easier to carve.



Compare the evidence

QUESTION	TURNIP	PUMPKIN
Where was it used?		
What was carved?		
Why was it practical?		
What stayed the same?		

- 1

What does the museum object help historians learn?
- 2

Why is the switch from turnips to pumpkins an example of cultural adaptation?

Match the Halloween symbols

Write the letter of the best description beside each symbol. Then explain how a symbol gets its meaning.

NAME _____

DATE _____

SYMBOL	DESCRIPTION
_____ 1. Pumpkin lantern	A A nighttime animal sometimes linked with spooky stories.
_____ 2. Costume	B A root vegetable used for some older Irish lanterns.
_____ 3. Bat	C A gathering that can bring neighbors together.
_____ 4. Ghost story	D A modern North American version of an older carved lantern.
_____ 5. Autumn harvest	E A tale or legend that may be meaningful without being proven history.
_____ 6. Community parade	F Clothing or a disguise used for celebrations and imaginative play.
_____ 7. Turnip lantern	G Food collected or shared during many modern trick-or-treat visits.
_____ 8. Candy	H The seasonal gathering of crops before winter.

A symbol is not a scientific fact

Real bats are animals, not monsters. Black cats are ordinary cats. People give these animals spooky meanings through stories, art, and popular culture.

- 1

 Choose one Halloween symbol. Explain how its meaning comes from stories, history, or celebration.
- _____
- _____

Investigate a 1936 poster

Examine words from a real historical source. Separate what the source shows from what you infer.

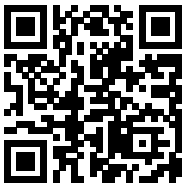
NAME _____

DATE _____

HALLOWEEN ROLLER
SKATING CARNIVAL

Bring your skates
Prizes will be awarded for costumes

Martin Weitzman | Federal Art Project | New York, 1936
Classroom transcription; this is not the original poster artwork.



Scan or click to explore the original Library of Congress collection.

- 1

OBSERVE: What type of event is being advertised?

- 2

OBSERVE: What two activities or features are mentioned?

- 3

REFLECT: What does this source suggest about Halloween celebrations in 1936?

- 4

QUESTION: What important detail would you still want to find out?

- 5

EVIDENCE: Explain why the poster does not show that everyone celebrated in the same way.

Fact, folklore, or tradition?

Classify each statement: E = evidence-based history; F = folklore or belief; T = modern tradition.

NAME _____

DATE _____

E - evidence: supported by a source or documented object. **F - folklore:** a story, belief, or supernatural claim. **T - tradition:** something people commonly do today.

- 1

A 1936 poster advertised a Halloween roller-skating carnival.
- 2

A wandering spirit named Jack still carries a lantern through the night.
- 3

Many families carve pumpkins in October.
- 4

The National Museum of Ireland documents a turnip-lantern tradition.
- 5

A bat has magical powers because it flies after dark.
- 6

Some children wear costumes and visit neighbors for treats.
- 7

Irish and Scottish immigrants brought customs to North America.
- 8

A ghost returns to every home on the evening of October 31.
- 9

Communities may organize parades, festivals, or autumn parties.
- 10

A 1936 poster proves that every person in New York celebrated Halloween.

CHALLENGE: One statement makes a claim that the source cannot prove. Mark it **X** instead of E, F, or T. Explain your reasoning below.

Halloween history word hunt

Find ten vocabulary words. Words may run across, down, or diagonally.

NAME

DATE

M	Y	S	A	M	B	F	O	L	K	L	O	R	E
I	U	A	P	U	M	P	K	I	N	V	C	B	J
G	C	M	W	H	Q	P	X	Q	T	E	O	L	H
R	R	H	T	U	R	N	I	P	R	V	S	B	E
A	Y	A	F	V	G	S	R	L	A	I	T	X	M
T	G	I	U	E	I	Y	I	H	D	D	U	Z	M
I	H	N	N	Q	C	J	A	J	I	E	M	R	V
O	V	I	O	V	E	R	S	G	T	N	E	J	C
N	Y	B	I	N	V	F	K	X	I	C	M	U	W
O	K	O	L	E	L	S	K	R	O	E	T	L	W
G	W	A	S	G	W	E	J	J	N	X	S	G	J
O	N	T	E	R	H	A	L	L	O	W	E	E	N
G	B	K	U	V	I	H	S	W	S	E	E	B	M
C	B	M	Z	M	M	J	B	S	A	J	X	O	M

WORD BANK

- ☐ HALLOWEEN
- ☐ TRADITION
- ☐ HARVEST
- ☐ PUMPKIN
- ☐ TURNIP
- ☐ COSTUME
- ☐ FOLKLORE
- ☐ EVIDENCE
- ☐ MIGRATION
- ☐ SAMHAIN

WORD WORK: Choose one word and explain how it connects to Halloween history.

Design a community celebration

Imagine you are planning an inclusive autumn gathering in 1936. Use historical details and creativity.

NAME _____ DATE _____

YOUR CHALLENGE: Your town wants a safe, welcoming event that gives neighbors something enjoyable to do. Plan an activity inspired by the 1936 carnival, local harvest traditions, or costume gatherings. Include a choice for people who do not celebrate Halloween.

EVENT NAME

LOCATION + WHO IS INVITED

THREE ACTIVITIES OR FEATURES

ONE HISTORICAL DETAIL THAT INSPIRED YOUR PLAN

A WELCOMING OPTION FOR PEOPLE WHO PREFER AN AUTUMN EVENT

Write your invitation

In three or four sentences, invite your community and explain why your event would be welcoming and enjoyable.

Halloween history check

Choose the best answer. Then complete the short-response question.

NAME _____

DATE _____

1. Which statement best describes the history of modern Halloween?

- ☐ A. It developed unchanged from a single ancient event.
- ☐ B. It developed through several traditions over time.
- ☐ C. It began with the invention of wrapped candy.

2. What did some people in Ireland carve into lanterns?

- ☐ A. Turnips and other root vegetables
- ☐ B. Watermelons
- ☐ C. Plastic pumpkins

3. Why is the 1936 carnival poster useful to historians?

- ☐ A. It proves that ghosts exist.
- ☐ B. It proves all families celebrated identically.
- ☐ C. It documents an organized Halloween event.

4. Which is an example of folklore?

- ☐ A. A museum record describing a historical object
- ☐ B. A story about a wandering supernatural figure
- ☐ C. A dated poster advertising a carnival

5. How did immigration influence Halloween in North America?

- ☐ A. Immigrants brought customs that mixed with other traditions.
- ☐ B. Immigration prevented traditions from changing.
- ☐ C. It made all communities celebrate in the same way.

6. Which statement is most accurate?

- ☐ A. Every family celebrates Halloween.
- ☐ B. Halloween and Day of the Dead are the same holiday.
- ☐ C. Families and communities celebrate in different ways.

Short response

Explain one way a Halloween tradition changed over time. Include a specific detail from the packet.

Traditions at home

Ask a trusted adult about an autumn tradition, memory, or community activity. Halloween participation is optional.

NAME _____ DATE _____

START HERE: A tradition is something people share or repeat over time. It might include a family meal, a seasonal walk, an autumn festival, a favorite story, or a neighborhood gathering. It does not have to be related to Halloween.

- 1

Who did you talk with, and what autumn tradition did you discuss?
- 2

How did this tradition begin, if the person knows?
- 3

Has it changed since your adult was younger? How?
- 4

What details or memories make the tradition meaningful?
- 5

How could the tradition welcome someone new?

REMEMBER: Family stories are valuable. One person's memory tells us about that person's experience, not necessarily what everyone did.

Autumn traditions around us

A celebration-neutral alternative focused on seasonal change, community, and historical thinking.

NAME

DATE

Autumn brings shorter days, changing weather, and harvests in many places. Communities respond in different ways. Some organize food drives, outdoor walks, farmers markets, library events, harvest festivals, or neighborhood gatherings. These activities change as communities welcome new people and share new ideas.



Notice seasonal change

- 1

What changes in nature or weather do you notice during autumn?
- 2

Name one seasonal activity that people with different traditions could enjoy together.
- 3

How might a community event change as new families move to the area?

Plan a welcoming autumn gathering

PLACE

ONE ACTIVITY

HOW EVERYONE CAN PARTICIPATE

THINKING PROMPT: Why is it helpful to remember that not everyone celebrates the same holidays?

Answer key: pages 4-8

Suggested responses are flexible when supported by the reading or a credible source.

Page 4 - Reading comprehension

1. The change from autumn toward winter. **2.** All Hallows' Eve, the evening before All Hallows' Day. **3.** Irish and Scottish immigrants carried customs to North America, where they mixed with other traditions. **4.** Pumpkins were plentiful, larger, and easier to hollow or carve. **5.** Some communities organized public events with activities and costume prizes. **6.** Seasonal customs, Christian observances, folklore, migration, community events, and modern culture all contributed.

Page 5 - Timeline sequence

Correct order: B, E, D, F, C, A. Samhain-related seasonal customs come first; All Hallows' Eve enters the history over later centuries; nineteenth-century migration follows; late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century community events come next; the dated carnival poster is from 1936; widespread postwar trick-or-treating comes later. Accept discussion about overlapping historical developments.

Page 6 - Then and now

Examples include turnip lanterns versus pumpkin lanterns; older forms of guising versus modern costumes; seasonal gatherings versus neighborhood parades or parties; and shared seasonal food versus packaged treats. Students should identify both change and continuity. Responses will vary.

Page 7 - Turnip investigation

Where: turnips in Ireland; pumpkins increasingly in North America. **What:** both were vegetables carved into lanterns.

Practicality: local vegetables were used; pumpkins were larger and easier to carve. **Continuity:** carved faces, light, and seasonal celebration. The museum object provides evidence of a documented turnip-lantern practice; adaptation occurred when people used a different locally available vegetable.

Page 8 - Symbol matching

1-D pumpkin lantern; **2-F** costume; **3-A** bat; **4-E** ghost story; **5-H** autumn harvest; **6-C** community parade; **7-B** turnip lantern; **8-G** candy. Remind students that an animal's symbolic meaning is created by people and does not describe its real biological behavior.

ASSESSMENT TIP: Reward reasoning, accurate use of evidence, and respect for differences in family traditions.

Answer key: pages 9-15

Use these examples as a guide, and accept other well-supported responses.

Page 9 - Primary-source poster

1. A Halloween roller-skating carnival. **2.** Skating and costume prizes. **3.** Some New York community celebrations included organized recreation and costumes in 1936. **4.** Reasonable questions include the exact date, location, admission price, organizers, and who could attend. **5.** One poster documents one event; it does not describe every person, family, or community.

Page 10 - Evidence, folklore, tradition

1-E; 2-F; 3-T; 4-E; 5-F; 6-T; 7-E; 8-F; 9-T; 10-X. Number 10 is unsupported because evidence for one organized event does not prove that every New Yorker celebrated. If a student reasonably notes that a modern practice can also be documented, discuss why the worksheet asks for the best category in context.

Page 11 - Word-search starting positions

HALLOWEEN: row 12, column 6, across

HARVEST: row 6, column 9, diagonal down-left

TURNIP: row 4, column 4, across

FOLKLORE: row 1, column 7, across

MIGRATION: row 1, column 1, down

TRADITION: row 3, column 10, down

PUMPKIN: row 2, column 4, across

COSTUME: row 2, column 12, down

EVIDENCE: row 3, column 11, down

SAMHAIN: row 1, column 3, down

Pages 12 and 14-15 - Open-ended work

Answers vary. Look for a historically appropriate community activity, a clear connection to a source or reading, an inclusive option, and respectful recognition that family customs differ. The autumn-only activity does not require any participation in or discussion of Halloween celebrations.

Page 13 - Multiple-choice check

1-B; 2-A; 3-C; 4-B; 5-A; 6-C. For the written response, students might explain the shift from carved turnips to pumpkins, the growth of organized community celebrations, or changes in costumes and trick-or-treating. Strong answers include a specific detail from the packet.

KEY DISTINCTION: Evidence can document a belief or story without proving that a supernatural claim is true.

Sources + classroom resources

Clean, clickable links for educators who want to verify the history or extend the lesson.

Historical sources

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS - AUTUMN AND HALLOWEEN

Free-to-use historical collection, including the documented 1936 Halloween skating posters.

[VISIT](#)

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS - SOURCE ANALYSIS TOOLS

Teacher guides and printable tools for observing, reflecting, and questioning primary sources.

[VISIT](#)

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF IRELAND - GHOST TURNIP

Museum record documenting a County Donegal turnip-lantern tradition and a 1943 donation.

[VISIT](#)

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF IRELAND - SAMHAIN CUSTOMS

Background on Irish seasonal traditions associated with Halloween and Samhain.

[VISIT](#)

Continue exploring on Halloween Haunt

- History of Halloween
- Halloween Pumpkin History and Symbolism
- Halloween Activities for Kids
- The Legend Behind the Jack-o'-Lantern
- Black Halloween Animals and Spooky Symbols
- Halloween Games for Kids and Classrooms

SHARING + USE: Free for personal, classroom, library, and homeschool use. Please share the original Halloween Haunt resource rather than selling or republishing this packet. Historical poster wording is presented as a labeled classroom transcription; it is not the original artwork.