

Ghosts, Black Cats and Jack-o'-Lanterns!

Comprehension Questions **Answers**

1. Where did the tradition of Halloween come from?

The tradition probably came from the Celtic people of Ireland and Scotland. They celebrated Samhain at the same time of year. In this celebration, they believed that the recently dead returned to earth and wore masks to scare or confuse them.

2. Where might the traditional view of a ghost as white and misty come from?

Anthropologists believe that the image we have of a ghost as transparent and wispy probably comes from the belief that the condensed air that can be seen when we breathe out in cold temperatures was actually the spirit. People therefore concluded that this was the part of the person that escaped when the individual died.

3. Those accused of witchcraft were often wise-women or **midwives**.

4. When was the book *Malleus Maleficarum* published? Who wrote it?

The book was published in 1486. It was written by two German monks.

5. What two animals are mentioned as witches' familiars in the article? What was a familiar?

A familiar is an animal friend of a witch. Many believed that this was an animal given to the witch by the devil and that the witch could possibly turn herself into this animal at will.

6. Where might the tradition of the pointed black hat as a witch's hat come from?

The traditional image of the black hat may come from the peasant costume of the Welsh. Adopted in the 1840s, this costume included a very particular tall, flat-topped black silk hat. The point may have been added to the witch's hat as a symbol of the connection to the devil (like a devil's horn). Before the Victorian period images of witches in tall, pointed hats are very rare (Goya's painting *Witches' Flight* being one example).

7. Who was the Cat Sith?

This creature was a black cat-like fairy who visited homes in Ireland. It was believed that leaving a saucer of milk for it ensured prosperity.

8. Originally, what were Jack-o'-Lanterns made from?

Jack-o'-Lanterns in Britain were originally made from turnips, beets and mangle-wurzels.

9. Why is orange probably associated with Halloween?

Orange has long been associated with the changing of the seasons and the changing colour of the leaves. It represents the harvest and the fruits of the season and so became a natural colour for Halloween. Once people began carving the orange pumpkin, this became even more effective as a choice.

10. What is sanguivoriphobia?

This is the fear of vampires.

Extension:

Research one of the other creatures associated with Halloween. You might choose vampires, werewolves or zombies, for example. Create a fact file about the creature you have chosen.

Students might use the attached fact file for this. They might research one of many supernatural creatures associated with Halloween or they might choose to work on the colour symbolism of orange, black or purple.

Imagine that you have grown the world's largest pumpkin. What happens when you take it to the local autumn Fair?

Students might be asked to write a short story or the opening to a short story. They could also work in groups to produce a piece of drama or a radio play.

Use the 'Guinness Book of World Records' website and try to find two other records associated with Halloween. They might be about any of the traditional symbols of Halloween. You might look at Most Candy Ever Given Out, Largest Group of People in Costume or Most Pumpkin Pies Eaten at a Single Sitting!

The Guinness Book of World Records website is a mecca for strange information and ideas. After looking at the website and seeing what people receive world records for, students could come up with their own new category. Use <http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/search> to search for records. The wealth of Halloween-related events is amazing – largest pumpkin pie, oldest ghost and scariest gathering of zombies are just a few of the examples.