



Halloween in Public Schools Issues and Suggestions

Halloween has become an increasingly controversial holiday in public schools in recent years. What are the issues and what is the best way to handle them? This article by Charles Haynes of the First Amendment Center Halloween shows how activities in schools can be divisive <http://www.freedomforum.org/templates/document.asp?documentID=13283> explains the areas of conflict and offers some suggestions.



Halloween has become a religious liberty issue in public schools. Many see the costumes and spooking pranks as harmless fun, while others believe that the holiday derives from and celebrates pagan superstition and glorifies occult and satanic forces. Because Halloween is such a popular holiday with children, the schools are caught in the middle.

How can schools handle Halloween in a constructive manner?

Since the whole controversy over Halloween emerges from the First Amendment, it would be a good time to review it and the rights it protects with students. The lesson **You**

Are Free to Exercise (your religious freedoms)

<http://www.freedomforum.org/templates/document.asp?documentID=13588> will help students understand how the First Amendment applies to these types of issues.

As with other conflicts related to religion and holidays, it is best to remember the academic purpose of schools and ask how the holiday can provide a venue for curriculum and grade-level appropriate learning experiences for students. For example, classes might want to learn about the history of Halloween, compare and evaluate different interpretations of that history. Or classes might just study the origins of certain aspects of the holiday, like the idea of carving pumpkins. Schools might also examine different ways that cultures around the world have acknowledged and celebrated harvest or the transition from summer to winter.

To avoid offending students and parents with sensitivities about the holiday, be especially careful to go lightly on the witchcraft, ghost, or graveyard decorations and emphasize the harvest, or fall aspects by featuring pumpkins, leaves, and scarecrows.

Lastly, student enthusiasm for "dressing up" could become a time for more academic pursuits as they learn about and interpret characters from literature or history by dressing in costumes portraying those characters. To make it more academic, students could be asked to share orally or in writing about the achievements of their character or discuss in what manner their costume is authentic for a particular time or place.

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Web Resources

Harvest Around the World

<http://www.harvestfestivals.net/harvestfestivals.htm>

Teachers will find harvest information about practically any culture or time period that they may be studying.

Harvest Festivals in Ancient Cultures

<http://www.twilightbridge.com/hobbies/festivals/thanksgiving/harvest.htm>

Sixth grade teachers, here's the fall festival site for you.

Autumn Leaves

<http://www.underfives.co.uk/autumn.html>

Harvest time links naturally to topics on autumn — autumn walks and collecting leaves to use in artwork, especially for young children.

Why Do Fall Leaves Change Color?

<http://na.fs.fed.us/fhp/pubs/leaves/leaves.shtm>

Learn the science behind why leaves change color in the fall.

Tissue Leaf Rubbings

<http://www.atozteacherstuff.com/pages/444.shtml>

Connect harvest with visual arts and literature at this site.

Seasons

http://teacher.scholastic.com/lessonrepro/k_2theme/seasons.htm

This Scholastic page links to activities about seasons, fall leaves and harvest.

Harvest Moon Activities and Lesson Plans: A Theme Unit for the Full Moon Closest to the Autumnal Equinox

http://primary-school-lesson-plans.suite101.com/article.cfm/crosscurriculum_harvest_moon_activities

The Harvest Moon, the full moon closest to the fall equinox, becomes completely full in mid September during the next several years. Here are science, social science, and literature Harvest Moon lesson plans for young children.

Scarecrow Thematic Unit

<http://www.teachingheart.net/scarecrow.html>

Here are songs, poems and children's books with activities related to scarecrows and other harvest symbols for young children.

Harvest/Pumpkin Poems and Songs

<http://www.teachers.net/lessons/posts/202.html>

Here are a variety of poems and songs for fall.

Learning About Pumpkins

<http://www.teachingheart.net/apumpkinunit.html>

This site offers lots of ideas for using a pumpkin theme for math, science and writing.

Halloween Creative Writing Project

<http://www.atozteacherstuff.com/pages/23.shtml>

or

http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/YLP/97-98/97-98_units/97-98mini-unit/LCaravia_BookMaking/BookMaking2.html

In these activities, students write creatively about or from a pumpkin or Jack O'Lantern's point of view. They create class books.

Storyboard of "The Biggest Pumpkin Ever"

http://www.eduref.org/Virtual/Lessons/Language_Arts/Story_Telling/STT0003.html

This language arts lesson uses Steven Kroll's book The Biggest Pumpkin Ever to teach sequencing of events.

A Brief History of Halloween

http://hpr1.com/tech/article/a_brief_history_of_halloween/

This essay written by Alex Horab for the High Plains Reader provides an interesting overview history of Halloween.

History of Halloween

<http://www.theholidayspot.com/halloween/history.htm>

This article is one of many at this site pointing out the history of many different elements of Halloween from All Hallows' Eve to Jack O'Lanterns.

Origins of Halloween

<http://www.history.com/minisites/halloween/viewPage?pageId=713>

This History Channel site provides a brief overview of the history of Halloween from ancient times to modern traditions.

History of Costume by Braun & Schneider

<http://www.siue.edu/COSTUMES/history.html>

This reference is an online book with illustrations and descriptions of costumes from around the world from ancient times to the 19th c.

Hairstyle History

<http://www.costumegallery.com/hairstyles>

Here are pictures and examples of hairstyles from various eras that compliment historical era costumes.

Top 10 Historical Costumes - American History

<http://homeschooling.about.com/od/unitssubjhis/tp/costamerhist.htm>

This site shows children dressed like Ben Franklin, George Washington, etc.

English Teaching Materials for Halloween - Canterville Ghost by Oscar Wilde

<http://www.ego4u.com/en/teach-in/cultural-studies/halloween>

Here is an easy and a full version of the famous Oscar Wilde classic supported by language development activities.

The material above is available at the California Three Rs Project website

<http://ca3rsproject.org>

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