

Hallowe'en:

Guidance from Cambridgeshire SACRE

INTRODUCTION

Every year a few schools express concerns about Hallowe'en. This guidance has been produced by SACRE in response. The document gives an overview of the whole school issues, then outlines some examples of possible approaches to Hallowe'en through RE lessons and collective worship. It is hoped these will be of assistance to schools by providing an opportunity to contribute to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, in addition to meeting the concerns of some parents.

This guidance includes material for both primary and secondary phases together. The acknowledged differences required in the approaches to this topic between phases are reflected in the illustrative material for RE and collective worship. However the context and some of the issues are common to both.

Why is Hallowe'en an issue?

1. The growth in its popularity, shown especially in its raised commercial profile, makes Hallowe'en hard to ignore. Shops are selling more and more products connected with Hallowe'en themes. This aspect of Hallowe'en is prominent in North America and seems likely continue to grow in the United Kingdom.
2. There is an increase in concern from parents, some of whom have feelings of unease about Hallowe'en. This has implications for teachers and schools, and in the light of these SACRE wishes to offer background information and guidance. Parents from some Christian traditions see it as the celebration of forces of darkness, whilst others are worried about their children taking part in activities which have considerable potential for anti-social behaviour. Many other parents and community members see the celebration of Hallowe'en as 'harmless fun'. This diversity may create tensions for schools attempting to develop a whole school approach.
3. There may be child protection implications involved when young children are allowed to participate in 'trick or treat' activities.
4. Children participating in 'trick or treat' activities do not always distinguish between having fun and causing damage or harm to others.

Is Hallowe'en an RE issue?

5. It is a feature of children's annual cycle and therefore a good place for RE to connect with their experience.
6. It is the Christian festival 'All Hallows Eve'.

7. It is an example of how pre-Christian traditions were adopted and absorbed by early Christians.

Is it only an RE issue?

8. No! Hallowe'en may be incorporated into other subject areas, such as English and Food Technology. It is important that all staff are aware of the issues and that there is an overview of what is being taught where, both to prevent duplication and to avoid patchy distortion.
9. Hallowe'en provides an opportunity to discuss and raise awareness amongst children and young people about respect for privacy and property. Such work may also encourage their ability to empathise with others in the wider community. As Hallowe'en connects to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and citizenship themes, it is a whole school issue.

Other practical dimensions.

10. Schools may be approached for the use of their premises for events that are in some way related to Hallowe'en.
 - These may include a variety of events such as celebrations of All Saints, with a Christian focus, or Hallowe'en fancy dress discos.
 - Some schools, particularly church schools, find a tension between encouraging 'harmless fun' and respecting the views of some groups of Christians.
 - Schools may wish to consider use of school premises for such events in the light of their own lettings policy, the ethos of the school, and the degree of inclusiveness of the planned event.
 - Schools may feel that despite some reservations it would be preferable to host a supervised, fun-filled event on their own premises, in order to help to promote child safety, community security and parental peace of mind.
 - Individual schools may wish to consult with school meals managers as to the appropriateness of otherwise of having Hallowe'en-themed meals.

HALLOWE'EN: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND MODERN CONTEXT

1. Celtic roots

Some of the roots of Hallowe'en lie in the pre-Christian Celtic festival of Samhain, which was linked to the autumnal equinox and the pattern of the agricultural year. Crops harvested in the autumn feature in some of the Hallowe'en customs practised today such as apple-bobbing and eating toffee apples.

The Celtic New Year began on 1st November; the night before belonged neither to the past nor to the present and was a time when spirits were believed to have the power to move into the human world. Rituals which one existed to appease or frighten such spirits are reflected today in customs such as placing candles inside pumpkins carved as heads.

It was also a time when the recently departed were honoured. At the New Year feast a place would be left empty for a spirit guest, and food and drink set out as an offering.

The festival was later incorporated into the Christian celebrations of All Saints and All Souls. The emphasis changed to that of remembering both the sainted dead, and all souls departed. The diverse nature of its origins accounts for the disparate aspects of popular celebrations of Hallowe'en alongside the specifically Christian practices which are seen today.

2. The Christian dimension

What are 'All Saints' and 'All Souls'? All Saints, November 1st, celebrates all Christian saints, known and unknown. All Souls (or All Hallows) Day commemorates the souls of the faithful departed on November 2nd. Therefore it follows that the night preceding All Saints, 31st October, All Hallows Eve' is the night preceding All Saints. 'Hallowe'en is an abbreviation of 'All Hallows Eve'.

What is a saint? The Biblical understanding of the word 'saint' means 'a believer' in the Christian tradition. The word is variously used to refer to:

- People who are canonised or beatified because of their exemplary Christian faith in action. The Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches venerate saints and invoke saints in prayer.
- The word 'saint' also refers to those who are close to God (holiness) and accessible to worshippers. The definition suggests a very special person, in some ways unique and different from an ordinary believer.
- In colloquial language the word 'saint' is used to refer to someone who devotes themselves to others or to a specific cause in a selfless and dedicated way.

Remembering the dead. Within the Christian tradition a wide variety of practices exists for the remembering of the dead, often expressed on All Saints Eve, e.g. lighting candles in the cemetery, prayers for the dead, flowers placed by the graveside. There is often a heightened sense of being in communion with the dear departed. The traditions are culturally influenced and expressed variously across the different denominations.

3. Hallowe'en today

Good and evil. At one level, the modern celebration of Hallowe'en can be seen as a playing out of the struggle between good and evil. This can be elsewhere in popular culture e.g. fairy stories, children's fiction, television drama and film plots.

The modern Hallowe'en provides an opportunity to explore the balance between fun and frivolity as against reflection and seriousness. This has a parallel for example in Mardi Gras/Pancake Day and Ash Wednesday in Christian cultures.

Witches. Pupils may ask questions about witches and witchcraft in connection with Hallowe'en; the following section gives some background information.

1. *Are they real?* There is a variety of beliefs about this.

- Some Christian traditions would argue that witchcraft is dangerous and involved in the manifestation of evil. In the light of this, some parents may prefer their children not to read books about witchcraft (e.g. the Harry Potter series) or to take part in Hallowe'en activities.
- Other Christians believe that there is no personification of evil which can be invoked by witchcraft.
- Wiccans consider themselves to be 'white witches' and to be perpetuating an 'old religion' focused on rituals based on the seasons and nature.
- Many non-believers simply view the idea of witches as a medieval idea which is outdated and archaic.

2. *How were witches treated in the past, and why?*

There has been a long history of persecution, some of it for religious reasons, and some born out of fear. Witches or those perceived to be witches have been treated as scapegoats for the ills of their communities.

Some of this persecution has been highly institutionalised (e.g. the Inquisition). Sometimes it has been more of a local issue (e.g. the witches of Warboys). Classes might be asked to consider who might be the modern equivalent – who are the persecuted people of today? The idea is reflected in phrases such as 'conducting a witch-hunt'.

HALLOWE'EN: SOME EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES

Key Stage 1 RE

Example 1. 'People to Remember'

The Non-statutory Guidance to the RE Agreed Syllabus for KS1 includes a unit on **People to Remember**. Work on the saints is already suggested for this unit, and St Francis, St Margaret of Scotland, St. Bernadette of Lourdes and the Virgin Mary are given as possible examples. If this unit (or part of the unit) is taught at Hallowe'en, the work can be linked with the Christian festivals of All Saints (November 1st) and All Souls (November 2nd), to which Hallowe'en is technically the preceding evening.

Schools might like to consider the following variations to the unit list when selecting their saint(s):

- Patron saints of countries (St George – England) or professions (St Luke – doctors)
- Saints in place names in their own locality (St Ives, St Martin's Walk)
- The saint to whom their local parish church is dedicated, or saints depicted in the church building (this could be tied in to a church visit)
- Saints with special symbols, such as the cross keys and St Peter
- Sayings and rhymes about saints e.g. 'Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, bless the bed that I lie on...'
- Hymns and prayers written by saints which are used in school e.g. St Francis
- St Etheldreda, saint of the Diocese of Ely (materials available from Ely Cathedral), or other famous local names, such as St Edmund from Bury St Edmunds
- Modern 'saints' (Mother Teresa)

Learning experiences could include:

- Hearing/reading the story of the chosen saint
- Talking about different ideas of what a person so special that they are called a saint
- Investigating stories of saints and their symbols found in local church buildings
- Talking about beliefs affecting behaviour and common human themes such as fear or bravery as appropriate to the story of the chosen saint (empathy)
- Looking for art connected with the chosen saint
- Finding out how local churches celebrate All Saints Day (if they do) and asking local Christians what they think about Hallowe'en as an 'All Saints Eve Party'

Key Stage 1 RE and History

Example 2: 'November is Remembering Time'

In the first fortnight of November there are four 'remembering days', and all with religious links of some kind: All Saints (November 11th), All Souls (November 2nd), Guy Fawkes (November 5th), Remembrance Day (November 11th and nearest Sunday). It is likely that the event which will make most impression upon KS1 pupils is the firework display on Bonfire Night. Pupils may know little of the reason behind the celebration (and the religious links of historical anti-Roman Catholic feeling are not helpful ones to pursue here from an RE perspective), but it will contribute to their understanding of anniversaries as 'remembering times'. Even the sight of the falling leaves in autumn is a sign to remember the summer that is gone.

Learning experiences could include:

- discussing how people remember and celebrate special events. Some important dates are remembered in many different kinds of ways e.g. Christmas with special church services, assemblies, plays, present giving, decorations, parties, special food; others are remembered in one distinctive way, such as Guy Fawkes' Night bonfires and fireworks;
- finding out what special things people do at this time to remember their friends and family who have died e.g. All Souls displays/donations of lilies in churches, special church services and prayers, Remembrance Poppies, parades, a two minute silence;
- thinking about what kind of people it is important to remember and tell stories about even after they are gone – people on the national stage or people in your own immediate family and friends. What kind of stories would you like people to tell about you?

If there are children from faiths other than Christianity, class questions will provide opportunities to draw on ways of remembering the dead in those traditions

Key Stage 1 Collective Worship

Real scary and pretend scary

Introduction

Place something such as a toy spider or toy snake in a box.

Discuss the kind of things that people are afraid of e.g. the dark.

Tell the children you have something in the box which might scare some people – give it a big build up, and then eventually allow a ‘brave volunteer’ to find out that it is a toy.

Core Story

Use a story which illustrates the fact that people are often afraid of the unknown, even although we might think they are just being silly or ‘scaredy cats’ e.g. an extract from ‘The Owl who was Afraid of the Dark’ by Jill Tomlinson.

Talk together briefly about some of the apparently scary things people may be doing to celebrate Hallowe’en and which they will be aware of in the shops or perhaps at home e.g. masks, pumpkin lanterns, ‘trick or treat’....

Discuss how some people might be scared or worried by what is going on after dark on Hallowe’en, for example how elderly people may be badly frightened by children who take the opportunity of ‘trick or treating’ to play vicious pranks or vandalise property – many people do not even like answering their doors after dark. Remind children how some of them felt in the assembly, when they thought there might *really* be something nasty inside the dark box you showed them earlier.

Think together about how some people who want to enjoy Hallowe’en celebrations could make sure that they do so without worrying or frightening others.

Reflection or Prayer

For sensible and caring behaviour over Hallowe’en so that people might not be unduly scared.

Key Stage 2 RE

Example 1. All Saints' or All Hallows Day

This would fit very appropriate into the 'Christian calendar' unit in the Cambridgeshire scheme of work, fulfilling Agreed Syllabus objectives on Christianity: 'Festivals and Fasts' 3 and 4.

- Hallowe'en is a time of opposites (good and bad, good triumphing over evil). Stories on these themes can be found in a children's Bible or the Lion Story Bible.
- A matchstick figure could be drawn on the board, then a halo added to the figure to introduce the word '**saint**'. What is a saint? Explore through questioning different understandings of the word 'saint'.
- Ask pupils if they know the names of local churches, schools, buildings or streets which are named after saints.
- Ask pupils which of their names come from saints' names.
- Explain on how this special day **all saints** are remembered.
- All Saints' Day is a celebration of Christian goodness, faithfulness and other virtues. It is a time when Christians thank God for the lives of those people who have left the world a better place than they found it.
- The word 'saint' is often used colloquially to refer to people of exemplary character and actions without reference to their faith commitment.
- Finish with an illustrative story. This could be from the Bible, for example the story of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) where indifference is contrasted with compassion, or Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1 – 10) which describes his transformation from thief to honest man. There are also many contemporary examples.

Example 2. Hallowe'en Today

- Discussion could be initiated through a thought provoking display, either in a classroom or in a well used area of the school. This would contrast a happy group of people celebrating Hallowe'en (children dressed up, adults smiling) against a more threatening gathering.
- Reference could be made to the seasonal and life cycles themes from an assembly (see following section), pointing out that childhood is but a fraction of people's lives, and leads on to adulthood, being a parent perhaps, growing old etc.
- Introduce questions such as:

Do you celebrate Hallowe'en? If so, how?

What do you think people in your area feel about trick or treat?

When trick or treaters come to your door, what do you do?

Do you approve of Hallowe'en?

- Following these questions, either a debate or a piece of drama could be planned in order to make pupils aware of other points of view, e.g. somebody alone and too frightened to turn on the lights; or someone worried about the safety of their property.

Key Stage 2 Collective Worship

- On OHP, show a wheel to illustrate:
 - a) the cycle of life (to show people's lives follow a sequence including old age);
 - b) the year's cycle of festivals and seasons.
- Point out the relevant area of the wheel and introduce the theme of Hallowe'en via the fact that November 1st is All Saints' or All Hallows' Day.
- Autumn link. Reflect on feelings generated by the approach of winter and the slowing down of the natural world.
- Explain pagan link to Hallowe'en. In the times before Britain became a Christian country, and when everyone's lives worked in tandem with the seasons, Hallowe'en was a time for honouring ancestors, and a time for people to cheer themselves up before the onset of winter. Explain how people were frightened of what might happen in the future, and that is one of the reasons why there are many scary customs associated with Hallowe'en.
- Christians believe that the future is nothing to be afraid of because God is always there. 'If God is on our side, who can defeat us?' (Romans 8:31 – 39)
- Finish with a suitable prayer or the following 'quiet thought':

*Fear is an icy hand
My bedroom without the light
The countryside in the dark.
Being by myself in a strange place.*

*Security is a warm blanket,
It's turning on the light
Daylight creeping over the fields,
Knowing you are always there.*

Key Stage 3 RE

The festivals of the Christian year.

Aim: 'to develop further pupils' awareness of the interaction between religion and culture in Britain' (*Religious Education in Cambridgeshire: the Agreed Syllabus 1997*, p.27).

- Superimpose outline diagram showing Christian festivals over diagram of traditional agricultural cycle in the UK. Reflect that Christmas falls in the middle of winter, that Easter comes with Spring and Hallowe'en is close to the 'dead of the year'.
- Connect with symbolism e.g. Easter and new life, daffodils and Easter eggs. Celebration has religious **and** cultural aspects. At Hallowe'en, thinking about the souls departed is religious content, whilst pumpkins, apple bobbing and masks are cultural spinoffs.
- Discuss: why do pupils think Christians took over cultural festivals and made them their own, rather than have a separate calendar? (Extension: can pupils think of any examples of this happening now? For example, some Jewish families in Britain and North America have made their minor festival of Hanukkah a more significant event to provide a counterweight to the celebrations of Christmas; Sikhs as well as Hindus celebrate the festival of Diwali but retell different commemorative stories).
- Similarly, some Christian festivals have been appropriated by commercial interests, for example Mothering Sunday and St. Valentine's Day, to say nothing of Christmas. Explore the issues around the practice of making money out of religious festivals, and the tension in Christianity between religious ideals and making a living.
- Ask pupils to investigate the views and feelings of a) an evangelical Christian (perhaps through a visitor to the class, or an appropriate internet site), b) a Humanist/someone from a different Christian background etc. What advice might a parent from each background give to their children regarding Hallowe'en? How would the parent respond to the child asking a set of questions, such as, 'Can I go to the Hallowe'en disco?' 'Can I go trick or treating?' 'Why is everyone dressing up as witches for Hallowe'en?' etc.
- Write a diary entry for an old person living alone who is also a regular churchgoer. How does s/he feel as children knock on the door? What are his/her memories of Hallowe'en gone by and how does s/he feel the event has changed over the years?

Secondary phase Collective Worship

- Have a reflective start, introducing the point that pupils have grown up and their ways of celebrating Hallowe'en have changed. Reflect on that change and on the responsibilities they have now that they are older.
- The response of adults to young children having 'harmless fun' is often that it is important for children to have a safety valve, and this can be institutionalised into an annual cycle, such as the pranks encouraged before midday on April Fool's Day or in the Hindu festival of Holi. But when pupils are older and no longer young children, the impact of 'just having a laugh' on different people in the community varies enormously. How do pupils feel about the awareness that some people are scared of them?
- How then should people behave at Hallowe'en? We should have fun but it is important that **everyone** has fun. We need to think about how we trick and treat others. If someone says 'trick' this could be a verbal joke. If they offer a treat, what do pupils expect? What more do they want than fun? The word 'treat' has several meanings; pupils may hope to be given a treat, but might also think about how they treat other people.
- Consider the experience of the person at the receiving end of a 'trick' or 'harmless fun', using examples such as 'Candid camera' etc. Is Hallowe'en sometimes simply used as an excuse for mindless vandalism?
- Hallowe'en in a Christian context is about remembering and valuing people who have gone before. In many Catholic contexts, graves are visited on All Hallows Eve and candles lit, prayers said. How can people show that as well as remembering the dead, they also value the living?
- Conclude with the words of Paul in I Corinthians 13:11-12, 'When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I grew up, I set aside those childish things'.