EPIC The Irish Emigration Museum

QUIZZES!
PUZZLES!
GAMES!
AND MORE

Learn about Halloween and how it originated in Ireland

HALLOWEEN Spooktacular

Design a turnip and conduct a spellcasting!

A HISTORY OF... Halloween

Halloween is a world-wide phenomenon. A festival that celebrates the changing of the seasons and remembering the dead, many places claim to be the birthplace of Halloween. However, it is thought that Halloween originated in Ireland.

THE CELTS

Halloween might have begun as an old Celtic festival called Samhain. The Celts, thought to be from Western Europe, immigrated to Ireland sometime between 700 and 100 BC. They brought with them pagan beliefs and customs, centred around celebrating the cycles of nature through prayer and festivities. One such celebration to develop out of this is Samhain.

ORIGINS

Two counties in Ireland lay claim to being the birthplace of Halloween – Derry and Meath. While it is difficult to pinpoint the exact origin of this tradition, there is some evidence that around October 31st, a great fire was lit on Tlachtga, the Hill of the Ward in Meath by Celtic priests, called Druids.

BELIEFS

Essentially, Samhain was a new year's party. It marked the end of the 'pastoral cycle', a time when all the crops were harvested and livestock were brought in from the fields in preparation for winter. The Celts believed that this transitionary period meant that veil between this world and the world of the dead grew thin, and that departed spirits could return to visit.

FAIRIES

As the veil was thinner, fairies (known by the Celts as the Tuatha Dé Danann) were also thought to appear, and if you were born on Halloween, you were said to be able to see them! One of these fairies was the pooka. An Irish word for goblin or spirit, the pooka could shapeshift into animals such as horses and hares. Neither good nor bad, they demanded payment from the Celts in a share of the harvest every November 1st, otherwise they would cause mischief.

A HISTORY OF... Halloween

In Ireland turnips were carved at Halloween

TRADITIONS AND SUPERSTITIONS

On Samhain the Celts practiced a number of traditions or rituals to celebrate the new year and to protect them from the returning ghosts, including:

- extinguishing old flames and fires to make a break with the old year
- ceremonially lighting bonfires to welcome in the new
- carving turnips, which they filled with a flame from the newly lit fire, to carry home for luck
- dressing up in animal skin costumes to confuse the returned spirits
- leaving out gifts and offerings of food and drink to appease the spirits
- engaging in fortune telling using food items such as apples

CHRISTIANITY

Sometime around the 5th century AD, Christianity begun to spread across Ireland and the church started to adopt traditional pagan festivals. In the 8th century, the celebration of Samhain became All Hallows Eve (31st October) and All Saints day (1st November). This enabled the survival of many Celtic traditions. For example, the tradition of dressing up became 'souling', where Christian children would go door to door in costume to ask for soul cakes to pray for their neighbours. Christians also began baking symbols such as a ring (marriage), and a medallion of the Virgin Mary (priesthood), into Barmbrack bread loafs in order to tell fortunes.

EMIGRATION

As the Irish began to emigrate, they took these customs with them and adapted them to suit their new home countries. One example is the tradition of carving pumpkins. When the Irish moved to the USA, they discovered pumpkins were both easier to find and carve than turnips, and so they adopted them into their rituals.

AROUND THE WORLD

Nowadays, a lot of countries celebrate their own version of Halloween in unique ways. From Dia de los Muertos in Mexico, where altars are built and decorated with sugar skulls to honour the dead, to the Hungry Ghost Festival in China, where children avoid water and swimming for fear of floating ghosts, to the Kawasaki Halloween Parade in Japan, which has around 4,000 participants!

SAMHAIN TRIVIA... wordsearch quiz

Answer the questions below and discover the words in the word search to see how much you've learnt about the origins of Halloween.

1. The festival originally celebrated by the ancient Celts
2. Halloween traditionally celebrated the end of what cycle
3. The original vegetable carved by the Celts
4. Ancient Celtic priests
5. The hill where the lighting of Halloween bonfires supposedly originated
6. The name of the mischievous fairy spirit associated with Halloween
7. The bread/ cake used for fortune telling
8. The place where the tradition of carving pumpkins originated
9. Children avoid the water and doing what activity during the Hungry Ghost festival
10. This type of skull is associated with the Dia de los Muertos or 'Day of the Dead' festival

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

Answers:
samhain
Pastoral
Turnips
Druids
Tlachtga
Pooka
Barmbrack
USA
Swimming
Sugar skull

BRAM STOKER FACT FILE

NAME
Abraham Stoker

ALIAS
Bram Stoker

DATE OF BIRTH
8th November, 1847

PLACE OF BIRTH
Clontarf, Dublin, Ireland

MUSEUM LOCATION
Storytelling Gallery

FAMILY

Bram was born 'Abraham Stoker' in Clontarf, Dublin, in 1847. His parents were Abraham Stoker of Dublin, a civil servant, and Charlotte Mathilda Blake Thornley of Sligo, a writer and charity worker. He was the third of seven children. Raised as a Christian, his family were very active in the church.

WRITING

Writing seemed to run in Bram's family. His mother wrote; his oldest brother, Sir Thornley Stoker, grew up to be a medical writer; and his supposed distant cousin, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, wrote the Sherlock Holmes books. Bram grew up to be a writer and author too, writing 12 novels in total. However, he is probably best known for his famous book Dracula, a tale about a vampire from Romania.

GHOST STORIES

There are many theories as to why Bram wrote a tale about a vampire. Bram was sick a lot as a child, so he spent a lot of time in bed until he was about seven years old. It gave him a lot of time to think and imagine. At the time 'Dark Romanticism' – gothic spooky tales – were popular, and his mother would tell him ghost stories. Other theories include that Bram was inspired by the mummies in the crypts of St. Michan's Church in Dublin (which can still be seen today), and that he heard stories concerning vampires and the ruler Vlad Dracula, who was said to impale his victims on wooden stakes, coming out of Eastern Europe.

STUDIES

Bram attended Trinity College Dublin, where he became interested in philosophy, art, writing and theatre. Working as a civil servant, he was hired as a part-time theatre critic for the Dublin Evening Mail. This paper was co-owned by Sheridan Le Fanu, who wrote one of the earliest vampire stories, Carmilla.

BRAM STOKER... Fact File

THE LYCEUM THEATRE

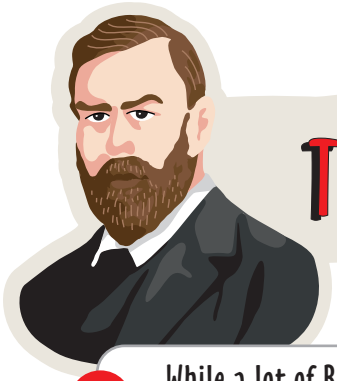
In December 1876, Bram wrote a glowing review of actor Henry Irving's play Hamlet at the Theatre Royal in Dublin. Henry invited him to dinner, and they became friends. In 1878, Bram married Florence Balcombe, who had previously dated another famous Irish author, Oscar Wilde. Irving invited the Stokers to London, and Bram became a manager at his Lyceum Theatre. He worked there for 27 years, and wrote many stories on the side in his spare time, including Dracula in 1897. Some people even believe that the infamous count is based off of Irving!

DRACULA

Bram wrote Dracula on trips to Cruden Bay in Scotland, and the nearby Slains Castle may have provided some of the inspiration for Castle Dracula. Written in the form of an 'epistolary' novel, which means a collection of diary entries, letters, telegrams, and newspaper cut-outs, the book establishes some of the most well-known vampire traits, including: physical strength, shape-shifting, and hypnotic abilities; control of nocturnal animals (such as bats); biting people to turn them into vampires; fear of running water, garlic, crucifixes and holy water; death by sunlight; and the need to be invited into a human home.

LATER LIFE

While working at the Lyceum, Bram also travelled the world. He particularly loved America, and visited the White House twice. However, he never visited Transylvania or Eastern Europe, the setting for Dracula. He remained living in London for the rest of his life, dying in 1912.



THE BRAM STOKER TRIVIA quiz

1. While a lot of Bram Stoker's Dracula was based in Transylvania, he never actually visited! Where did he spend most of his life?

2. Bram Stoker is related to another famous author. Name them and the character they created.

3. Name the theatre that Bram Stoker managed for 27 years.

4. Transylvania is located in modern day Romania. Mark Romania on the map, and using whatever materials are available to you, research and note down three facts about it.

   1.

   2.

   3.

5. Vampires are beings of folklore, myth or legend. Draw and name another mythical creature associated with Halloween in the box provided.

Answers: 1) London 2) Arthur Conan Doyle, Sherlock Holmes 3) The Lyceum Theatre

HOW TO... HOST YOUR OWN SAMHAIN FESTIVAL

This year Halloween may look a little bit different, so it's the perfect opportunity to celebrate its ancient Irish origins! Create your very own mini-Samhain festival with these fun filled activities. Don't forget to ask a grown-up for help.

CREATE A SAMHAIN ALTAR

The Celtic calendar celebrated the seasons, and Samhain was no different, hailing the end of summer, or harvest season, and the beginning of winter.

Just like the old Irish, create an altar to celebrate the changing of the seasons. Gather all your favourite things that represent Halloween, autumn and winter and display them.

You could include things like:

- A horse or hare toy (to represent the Pooka)
- Apples (for fortune telling)
- Autumn leaves (for autumn)
- Spices such as cinnamon or ginger (for winter)
- A turnip or pumpkin (for Halloween)
- A food item such as corn, wheat or barley (for the harvest)

CONDUCT A SPELLCASTING

Samhain was the celebration of the Celtic new year, and the priests of the Celts, known as Druids, conducted all sorts of rituals to ask for fortune for the year ahead.

Taking inspiration from their traditions, don some robes and become your own spell caster by following our instructions below. You will need:

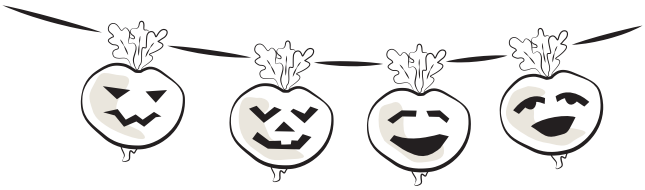
- Some colourful pens or markers
- A cauldron, pot or bowl
- A wooden or big spoon
- 3x strips of paper, cut into ribbons, per person

INSTRUCTIONS

1. On each sheet of paper, write a wish for the winter ahead. Decorate it as much as you want!
2. One by one, drop the wishes into the cauldron or bowl. As you do say: 'Wish 1, wish 2, wish 3; these wishes of mine, simply be!'
3. Get all your family to drop their wishes into the bowl and repeat the saying too.
4. Once everyone's wishes are in, take the big spoon and give the content in the bowl a mix, repeating the mantra, 'Wish 1, wish 2, wish 3; this soup of wishes, simply be!'
5. Finally knock your spoon on the side of the cauldron three times as you say 'Wish 1, wish 2, wish 3, be free; thank you for wishing with me!'
6. Then pour out your wishes and keep them somewhere safe until they come true.

TRANSFORM... A TURNIP

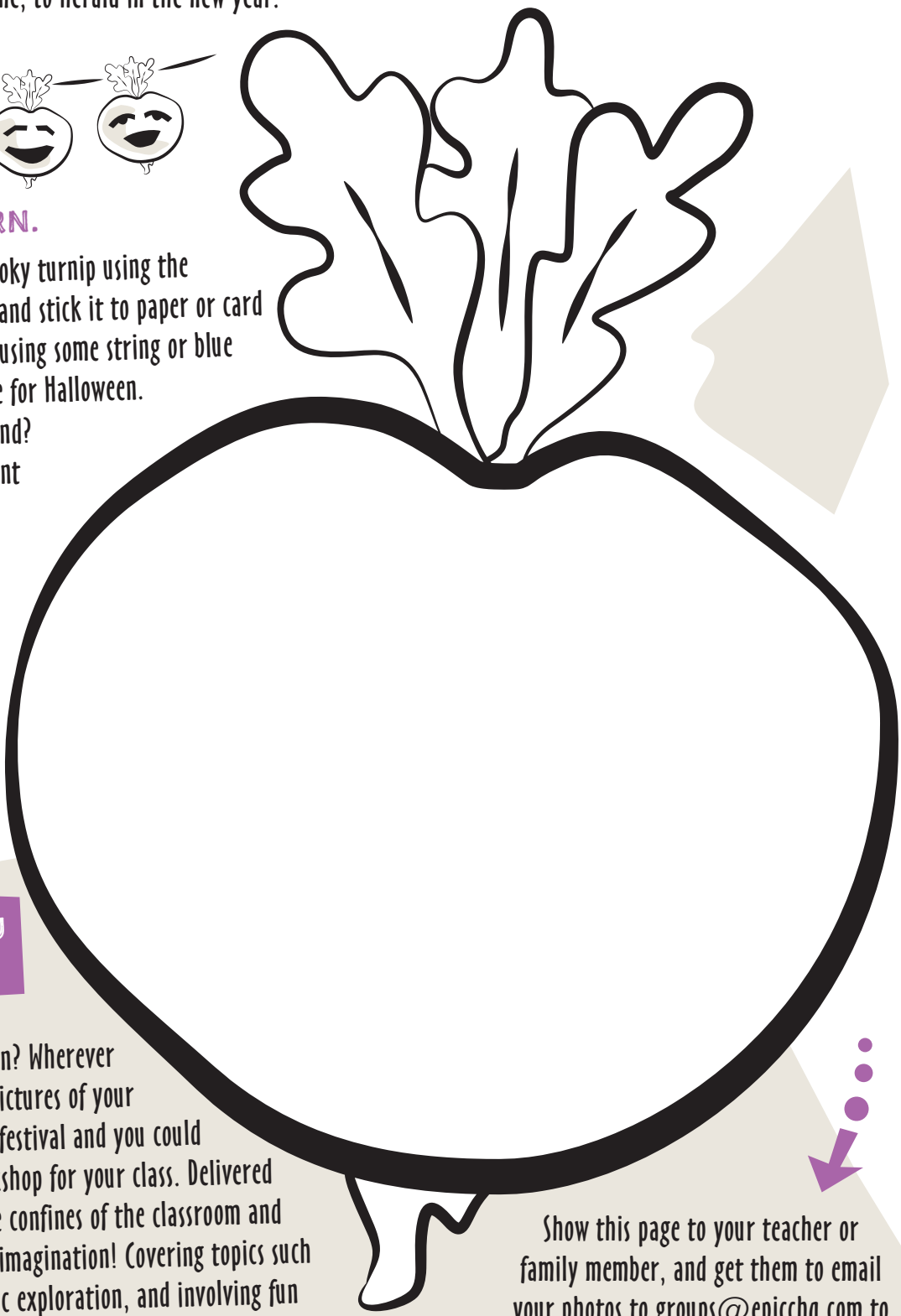
You may have carved a pumpkin, but have you ever transformed a turnip? Traditionally, the Irish celebrated the Celtic festival of Samhain by carving turnips. They would take the turnips to the bonfire lit by the Celtic druids, and use them to shelter a flame to carry home, to herald in the new year.



NOW IT'S YOUR TURN.

Design a gruesome, fun or spooky turnip using the template opposite. Cut it out and stick it to paper or card to make it more stable. Then using some string or blue tack, hang it up in your house for Halloween.

Why not create a turnip garland? Photocopy this template; mount each turnip on card or paper backing; design them; and then attach them together by using string. Don't forget to display them proudly in your window for all the passing spirits to see!



WIN A FREE WORKSHOP FOR YOU AND YOUR CLASS!

How do you celebrate Halloween? Wherever you are in the world, send us pictures of your Samhain or Halloween-inspired festival and you could win an exciting 'Explorers' workshop for your class. Delivered remotely over Zoom, escape the confines of the classroom and explore the world using your imagination! Covering topics such as space, pirates or Antarctic exploration, and involving fun arts and crafts activities, there's so much to discover.

Show this page to your teacher or family member, and get them to email your photos to groups@epicchq.com to be in with a chance of winning.

HALLOWEEN TODAY / RESOURCES

Want to discover more about Samhain, Halloween and all things spooky? There are many great resources and fun activities out there to explore.

And don't forget to join us virtually at EPIC The Irish Emigration Museum for our upcoming Samhain Festival, where you can learn more about the origins of Halloween through fun hands-on activities such as storytelling, turnip design and spellcasting! Head to our website epicchq.com to discover more.

Have You Seen the Dublin Vampire?
by Una Woods

For young spooks, this cute and funny picture book tells the story of the vampire of Dublin alongside famous landmarks from the city that Bram Stoker was born in.

Classic Starts: Dracula: Retold from the Bram Stoker Original
by Bram Stoker

The classic tale reimagined for children, this abridged version of Dracula is the perfect introduction for 8 – 12 year olds.

St. Michan's Church, Dublin

Follow in the footsteps of Bram Stoker with a visit to St. Michan's Church in Dublin. Buried below the church are five long vaults containing the mummified remains of many of Dublin's most influential families from 1600 to 1800. Spooky!

https://www.visitdublin.com/see-do/details/st-michan-s-church

Ancient Celtic Festivals: And How We Celebrate Them Today
by Clare Walker Leslie and Frank E. Gerace

Curious kids can discover all about the origins of Halloween and more in this illustrated book dedicated to exploring ancient Celtic celebrations. What's more, there is a fantastic range of accompanying activities, such as baking harvest corn bread! Yum!

Irish Tales of Mystery and Magic
by Eddie Lenihan

Immerse yourself in Irish mythology, retold through the words of what is perhaps Ireland's most celebrated modern-day Seanchaí (storyteller).

A World Full of Spooky Stories
by Angela McAllister (author), Madalina Andronic (illustrator)

Perfect for Halloween storytelling, globetrot without leaving your house with this beautiful illustrated collection of spooky folklore from all around the world.

The National Folklore Collection

For those looking to delve a little deeper into or learn more about how to research Irish folklore, the National Folklore Collection at UCD (University College Dublin) has a wealth of material to help you out. Check out this introductory pamphlet about Halloween for starters.

https://www.duchas.ie/download/15.10.23-halloween.pdf