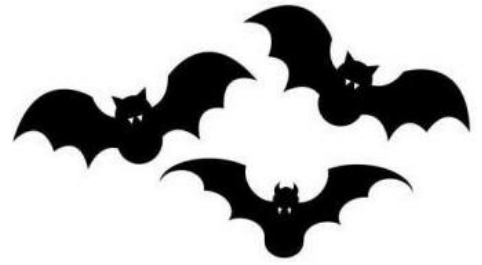


Name: _____



Halloween

Beginnings: The Celts

Halloween started over 2000 years ago. Back then, an ancient people called the Celts lived in what are now Britain and Ireland.



November 1st was an important holiday for the Celts. It marked the end of the harvest season and the beginning of winter.

To celebrate they held a huge festival that began on the night of October 31. The festival was called Samhain, meaning "end of summer." During Samhain, the Celts would dress up in animal skins and sacrifice crops and animals to their gods.

The Celts believed that the ghosts of the dead, along with fairies, goblins and other supernatural creatures, roamed the earth during Samhain. These creatures could cause lots of trouble. So to keep them away, the Celts lit gigantic bonfires. They also brought food to the edge of town and left it there, hoping that the creatures would eat the food and move on.



The Romans

During the 1st century C.E. (1000 years ago), the Romans conquered Britain. The Romans combined Samhain with two of their own holidays. One of these was the feast of Feralia which honored the dead. The other was the festival of Pomona, the Roman goddess of fruit. The symbol of Pomona was the apple. So some historians believe that the tradition of bobbing for apples began with her festival.

Christians

In the 4th and 5th centuries, the people of Britain and Ireland became Christians. The Christians celebrated November 1st as a day of remembrance for all Christian saints. It was called All Saints Day or All Hallows' Day. October 31st was All Hallows' Eve, the evening before All Hallows Day, which was shortened to Halloween.



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But All Saints Day didn't completely replace Samhain. In many places the old Celtic and Roman holidays were still celebrated along with the new Christian ones.

By the 12th century, the old Celtic custom of leaving food out for the dead had changed into the practice of 'souling'. Beggars would go from door to door and offer to pray for the souls of peoples dead relatives. In return they were given 'soul cakes' or other treats. This may be how the modern practice of trick-or-treating got started.

The Irish

In Ireland, people began dressing up like ghosts and goblins in order to fool the creatures that roamed the earth on Halloween. They also began carving scary faces onto gourds and turnips. They would put candles inside and place them in their windows, or by their doors, to keep these creatures away. This is where the custom of carving jack-o-lanterns comes from.



When people from Ireland came to the United States, they brought their Halloween traditions with them. These traditions caught on. Kids across the country have been carving pumpkins and trick-or-treating ever since.

Questions

1. This essay is what's called an informational text (writing). The purpose of an informational text is to give information (to tell about something) or to explain something. What is the purpose of this essay?
2. The **topic** (or subject) of an informational text is what the author is writing about. The topic of this essay is Halloween.

The **main idea** of an informational text is the most important thing that the author wants to tell you about the topic—the point he or she wants to make. What is the main idea of this essay?

