

Name: _____

Stingy Jack

In the spirit of Halloween, we are going to read an old Irish folktale about another clever guy who outwits the devil ... or does he?



The Legend of Jack-O'-Lantern

Carving and lighting pumpkin lanterns is a Halloween tradition. But why are they called Jack-o'-Lanterns?

The name comes from an old Irish folktale about a man named Stingy Jack.

According to the story, Stingy Jack was a lazy fellow. Lazy—but clever. People said that old Jack could outsmart anyone, even the Devil himself.

One day, Jack invited the Devil to have a drink with him. True to his name, Stingy Jack didn't want to pay for his drink. He convinced the Devil to turn himself into a gold coin so that Jack could use it to buy their drinks.

But once the Devil had turned himself into the coin, Jack decided to keep the money instead of paying for the drinks. So Jack put the coin into his pocket right next to a silver cross.

Now the cross is a religious symbol. And being around anything religious causes the Devil to lose his power. This meant that the Devil was not able to change back into his devil-self.

Jack was no fool. He knew where he was headed when he died, so he didn't want to carry things too far. He agreed to free the Devil. But first, he made the devil promise not to claim his soul (to take Jack to hell) for at least another year.

When the year was up, sure enough, the Devil came to claim Jack's soul. But Jack tricked the Devil into flying into a tree to pick an apple.

While the Devil was up in the tree, Jack carved a cross into the tree's bark so that the Devil could not get down. This time, Jack wouldn't agree to scratch out the cross (and free the Devil) until the Devil had promised that he wouldn't come after Jack's soul for yet another 10 years.

Soon after this, Jack died.

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As the legend goes, God wouldn't allow a nasty trickster like Jack into heaven. So Jack headed down to hell.

But the Devil, still upset by the tricks Jack had played on him, wouldn't let Jack into hell either. He sent Jack off into the dark night with only a burning coal to light his way.

Jack put the coal into a carved-out turnip and has been roaming the Earth with it ever since. The Irish began to refer to this ghostly figure as "Jack of the Lantern," and then, simply as "Jack O' Lantern."



People began making their own versions of Jack's lanterns by carving scary faces into turnips or potatoes and placing them into windows or near doors to frighten away Stingy Jack and other evil spirits.

When Irish immigrants came to the United States, they brought their custom of carving jack-o'-lanterns with them. They soon found that pumpkins, a fruit native to America, make perfect jack-o'-lanterns and are easier to carve than turnips or potatoes. And that is why we carve pumpkins on Halloween.

1. What does the story try to explain?

Do you find the story believable? _____ Why, or why not?

2. Why do you think that Jack agreed to free the devil? Why didn't he just keep him in his pocket as a coin?