



LOW HANGING FRUIT

When the Veil Between Worlds Frays: Global Traditions Honoring the Dead

By Allison Floyd

Halloween. All Hallows Eve. Samhain. The Feasts of All Saints and All Souls. El Día de los Muertos. Known by many names, there are many traditions across cultures worldwide celebrating and welcoming the souls of the dearly departed who, it is held in some traditions, descend on the world when the veil between this life and what lies beyond is thinnest—widely believed (it seems) to be in late October and early November.

Halloween is believed to be the descendent of the pre-Christian festival Samhain (pronounced “Sah-wen”) celebrated by the Celts (Santino, 2003). Samhain was a day of feasting and bonfires that commemorated the first day of a new year that began on November 1st. It was believed that the spirits of people who had died within the past twelve months were granted admission to the Great Beyond during Samhain, a time of transit for these restless souls. Food and drink was left out for them. Additionally, mumming—traveling from home to home, wearing costumes and performing—became part of the festivities. After the widespread adoption of Christianity, November 1st became the Feast of All Saints, or All Hallows. The Eve of All Hallows, Hallow Evening, eventually became Halloween (Santino, 2004). And the fun continues today.

El Día de los Muertos, or the Day of the Dead, is a Mexican celebration of deceased loved ones wherein altars are made and favorite foods and drink are offered in their honor. In the Catholic church, November 1st commemorates saints and martyrs, and November 2nd commemorates the dearly departed. Popular belief holds that the souls of deceased children return on the evening of October 31st, and those of adults return the following evening (Pilcher, 2003).

However you celebrate this spooky season (if at all), it can serve as a fascinating research project exploring the rituals and traditions of cultures worldwide. Armed with library and LiLi resources, of course!

Pilcher, J. M. (2003). Day of The Dead. In S. H. Katz (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Food and Culture* (Vol. 1, pp. 505-506). New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons. Retrieved from https://link-gale-com.lili.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/CX3403400174/GVRL?u=idaho_a&sid=GVRL&xid=5263fcb5

Santino, J. (2003). Halloween. In S. H. Katz (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Food and Culture* (Vol. 2, pp. 167-169). New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons. Retrieved from https://link-gale-com.lili.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/CX3403400306/GVRL?u=idaho_a&sid=GVRL&xid=8e85b9f6

Santino, J. (2004). Halloween. In G. S. Cross (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Recreation and Leisure in America* (Vol. 1, pp. 423-425). Detroit, MI: Charles Scribner's Sons. Retrieved from https://link-gale-com.lili.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/CX3434800121/GVRL?u=idaho_a&sid=GVRL&xid=b59d7e3e

LINKS TO MORE LEARNING



From Black Cats to Movies to Matchmaking...

Discover the origins of our Halloween traditions and superstitions, along with some more obscure and obsolete traditions.

https://www.history.com/topics/halloween/history-of-halloween#section_11

Traditions from Around the World

A collection of short descriptions of ways the dearly departed are celebrated in different countries and different faiths. This is not an exhaustive list—maybe students can find more traditions that are not mentioned here.

<http://mentalfloss.com/article/506197/12-halloween-traditions-around-world>

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS



Literary Calaveras

While calaveras de azucar (sugar skulls) are a delicious and fun project, they may not be the best fit for the classroom. Enter the lesser-known literary calaveras!

Learn about them and see examples here:

<https://www.thinkmakeshareblog.com/literary-calaveras/>

DIGITAL TOOLS



The Gale Encyclopedia of the Unusual and Unexplained

What could be more perfect for the month celebrating all things spooky than this compendium of magic, witchcraft, the supernatural, and other mysterious phenomena?

Research everything from ghosts and phantoms to urban legends. Find it on lili.org by searching under the Full Resource Index.

<http://lili.org/>



