Halloween History and Traditions

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The Celts

- Present Day Ireland and England
- 5th Century BC (about 2500 years ago)
Samhain

• End of Summer Festival
  – Summer officially ended on Oct. 31
  – Samhain (sow-en)

• Believed dead spirits came back to life to find a body
  – Made houses dark, wore costumes to fool spirits

• Relit fires
Roman Influence

• Feralia
  – Late October
  – Roman celebration honoring the dead

• Pomona
  – Roman goddess of fruit and trees
  – Symbol is apple
  • Origin of bobbing for apples?
Christianity and Halloween

• Christianity introduced to England and Ireland around 200 AD
  – Replaced Samhain with own holidays
    • All Hallows Eve
      – Merged Celtic tradition with Christian ideas
• Pope Boniface IV set Nov. 1 as All Saint’s Day – or “All Hallows”
• Previous night known as “All Hallows Eve”
• Nov. 2 is “All Souls Day”
Colonial America

- Halloween more prevalent in the Southern Colonies
- Harvest festival
  - Eating, drinking, fortune telling, ghost stories
- Irish immigration of 1840s sparked growth of Halloween
Halloween Symbols

• Jack O’Lanterns
  – Irish folk tale of Jack and the Devil
  – Use turnips in Ireland
  – Pumpkins more available in US

• Costumes
  – From Samhain festival
Trick Or Treating

• “Souling”
• Medieval tradition
• Medieval belief in Purgatory
• Beggars say prayers for departed family members
Witches: Different is Bad

• Anyone who was thought of as different could be accused
  – Especially people who might offer a challenge to authority
  – Hundreds of thousands were punished

• Symbols
  – Broom, cauldron (pot), Cat
    • Items associated with the household and women
  – Ugliness
    • Evil is ugly
Witch Trials

• 15th – 18th Century
• Church declared witchcraft a heresy in 1320
• Tens of thousands were victimized.
Testing for Witches

- Skin doesn’t bleed when poked
- Accusations of neighbors
- Sink in water
- Birthmarks
- Confession under torture
- Guide: Malleus Maleficarum
  - The Hammer of Witches
- The key is that the accusation alone made you guilty.
Punishing Witches

- Torture
- Burning at stake (if no confession)
- Hanging (if confessed)
- Pressing

Four English women are hung for witchcraft.
Witch Hunts

- People accuse people, who accuse other people, etc.
- Punishment without evidence
- Chain reaction
Salem Witchcraft Trials

- 1692, Massachusetts
- 3 girls accuse neighbors, servant
- Hundreds accused, 20 executed
- May have had roots in disputes between 2 parts of Salem
The McCarthy Hearings

• 1950s
• People accused of being communists
• Chain reaction of accusations
• Arthur Miller’s “Crucible”
Vampires

• Story is present in many cultures
  – Has to do with the idea that blood is life
  – Usually involves women sucking the blood of children
• Vampyr = Hungarian word for spirit who feasts on the living
Vampires: Sources of the Legend

• Accidental Burials
• Mysterious Deaths
• Bubonic Plague
• Lack of scientific knowledge
• Blamed last person who died for village problems
• Porphyria
Vampire Lore

• Burn Vampire To Kill it
  – Burning body also destroyed any germs
• Stake through heart
  – Heart is source of blood, and thus life
• Garlic
  – Smell covered stench of black plague
• Silver
  – Rare metal, considered magical and pure
• Not appearing in mirrors
  – Mirrors were backed with silver
Real Vampires?

• Fritz Harmon
  – Germany, 1924
  – Killed 27 boys with bites to the neck; turned them into sausage

• George High
  – 1949, England
  – Drank blood of 98 victims

• Geoffrey Dahmer
  – Modern day cannibal
  – Drank victim’s blood
  – Caught 1992
Elizabeth Bathory

- 1560 – 1614
- Hungarian
- Afraid of growing old
- Thought blood would revitalize her
- Caught by brother, the king of Hungary
- Walled up in her own tower
Vlad Tepes

- Vlad Tepes (1431-1476)
  - Romanian noble
  - Vlad the Impaler
  - Vlad, the son of the dragon (Dracula)
  - Basis of 1897 story by Bram Stoker
Man-Made Monsters

• Is Science out of Control?
• Golem
  – Jewish tale
  – Emeth – Meth
Frankenstein

- 1818 novel by 19-year-old Mary Shelley
- Frankenstein is the name of the doctor, not the monster
- Frankenstein experiments with secrets of life, tries to play God
- Consequences of playing God through science

Mary Shelley
Shelley’s Description of The Monster

His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips.
Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

- 1886 novel by Robert Louis Stevenson
- Formula brings out evil in good doctor
- Legacy: The Hulk, Two-Face

Robert L. Stevenson
Consequences of Science

- Monster movies of the 1950s and 1960s
- Godzilla
  - Result of a nuclear explosion
  - No accident that the story comes from Japan, the only country to have been hit with a nuke
- Them
  - Nuclear testing makes giant ants
Alien Invasion

• Our own technology is inadequate in the face of superior beings
• H.G. Wells’ *War of the Worlds*
• *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*
• *Aliens*
  – Vampire-like
Killer Robots

- Robota – Czech word for “worker”
- 1920 – Karel Capek’s play Rossum’s Universal Robots
- Isaac Asimov’s *Three Laws of Robotics*
- *Terminator Trilogy*
- Robots are remorseless, unemotional, inhumanly strong
- More believable than monsters
Man’s Inhumanity To Man

- Psycho killers reflect our fear of random events and disorder
  - There doesn’t appear to be any explanation
- Good girl/bad girl element
  - Jack the Ripper only killed “Bad” girls
  - Michael Meyers pursues the good girl but can’t catch her
- Fear of those without “our” morals
- Fear of not being safe anywhere
- Serial killers are real, therefore really scary
Jack The Ripper

- Original Serial Killer
- London, 1889
- Murdered 6 (as many as 15?) underclass women
- Never caught
- Name comes from confession letter
Lizzie Borden

- Lizzie Borden
- August 4, 1892
- 32 year old accused of murdering her rich parents with axe
- Used her inheritance to hire a good lawyer and got off
- Trial was a major media event
Ed Gein

• 1906 – 1984
• Killed dozens in Plainfield, Wisconsin
• Later basis for “Psycho”, “Silence of the Lambs”, “Texas Chainsaw Massacre.”
werewolves

- Were-creatures present in many cultures
- Wolf is greatly feared in Europe
- Old English: weri + wolf
- Norse: var + wulf
- Norse may have spread legend with berserker
Werewolves of France

• More than 20,000 held in France in the 1500s and 1600s.

• Beast of Gevaudan
  – 1764
  – Series of well-documented attacks by a mysterious wolf-like beast
  – Apparently killed by a hermit
Hollywood Influence

• 1941 Universal movie *The Wolf Man* starring Lon Chaney
  – Silver bullets
  – Being bitten
  – Pentagrams
  – Gypsy fortune tellers

• *Even a man who is kind at heart and says his prayers at night might become a wolf when the wolfbane blooms and the moon shines full and bright*
Explanations

- Porphyria
- Ergot Mold
- Hypertrichosis (see photo)
- Clinical Lycanthropy
The Mummy

• Long fascination with Egypt
• Victorian era fad
  – Public mummy unwappings
  – Egyptian tours
  – Egyptian artifacts
• Louisa May Alcott
  – *Little Women*
  – *Lost In a Pyramid: The Mummy’s Curse*
King Tut’s Tomb

• Howard Carter discovers Tut’s tomb in 1922
• Expedition’s sponsor dies of infection.
• Death rate of expedition no higher than expected.
Zombies

- Legend originates in Haiti
- West African slaves on sugar plantations
- Traditionally are a dead person brought to life by a houngan
- Explanations
  - Catatonic schizophrenia
  - Toxic drugs
Modern Zombies

• Night of Living Dead (1968)
  – Zombies created by nuclear spill
• 28 Days Later
  – Zombies created by germ
• Biological contamination and nuclear radiation are modern fears
El Dia De Los Muertos

• Mexican All Souls celebration
• Cultural mix of Catholic and MesoAmerican traditions
• Families welcome back spirits of dead on Oct. 31
• On Nov. 2, gravesites are visited and cleaned
Guy Fawkes Day

• Guy Fawkes was a Catholic sympathizer who attempted to blow up the Parliament building and kill King James
• Executed Nov. 5, 1605
• Event is celebrated with bonfires and the burning of Fawkes in effigy

• Children will carry an effigy about and beg for a “penny for the Guy.”