

Halloween

Every year in North America, on October 31st, children go out into the night dressed as witches, skeletons, pumpkins, demons, black cats, and ghosts, knocking on doors and saying, “trick or treat!” The idea is that anyone who refuses to give the children a treat will have a trick played on them. In Spanish, this phrase would translate as “travesura o trato.”

The origins of such a festival are very old and draw on a variety of cultures, including Celtic, Roman, and Christian. Centuries ago, Celtic towns organized festivals to honor Samhain, god of the dead. They associated death and bad spirits with the coming of winter, during which time they made bonfires and used disguises (or costumes) to keep evil spirits far away. The Celts also believed that during this night the spirits of their dead family members and friends could come back to visit their loved ones.

Many celebrations also contained Roman elements, such as festivals that honored the harvest goddess, Pomona. With the arrival of Christianity the European towns started to celebrate All Hallows' Eve. This celebration commemorated people both living and dead, and formed a part of the Community of Saints.

In the Middle Ages, the Celtic, Roman and Christian traditions fused together, into what is recognized today as Halloween. The traditional colors of black and orange are said to have originated from the festivals of Samhain and Pomona respectively, while the Celtic ideas of the return of the spirits were combined with the Christian beliefs of communication between the Community of the Saints, and this also gave support and significance to the festivity.

In the 19th century, the Irish took this tradition to the United States. In spite of its European origins, the festival is more important in North America than in the old world.