

Holiday Happenings

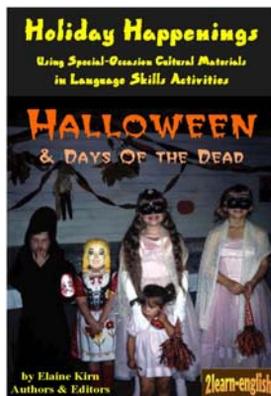
Using Special-Occasion Cultural Materials in Language Skills Activities

Why teach or learn language with holiday materials?

Almost everyone likes holidays! Traditionally, educators of children and second-language learners use special occasions as pedagogical opportunities—primarily to teach cultural history and customs. Children sing songs, create holiday handicrafts, eat special foods, and may even dress up in costumes before or on an occasion.

In secondary and adult schools, *English-as-a-Second-Language* students read about the history and meanings of holidays. They learn related vocabulary. They might compare North American celebrations and customs with similar (or quite different) ones in their native cultures.

Such activities can be pleasant diversions from the “sameness” of everyday language lessons—instruction in the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) with grammar and vocabulary. However, they can also be time wasters—social events or mindless entertainment without sufficient educational value.



Especially in courses with specified curriculum to cover or language proficiency levels for students to achieve, there may not be time for “extra” holiday activities. Under such circumstances, it makes sense to use information about celebration culture and customs as language teaching and learning vehicles. By substituting special-occasion materials for text chapters or standard supplements, learners can still cover required language skills curriculum. And in motivating change-of-pace lessons, they’ll also receive and consider cultural knowledge and ideas.

For some special occasions, *Vocabulary Card Decks* make it fun and efficient to learn words and phrases systematically.



The suggested activities and language-learning steps in this book can be used with material on any of the common North American or international holidays. All offered information and vocabulary, however, apply to *Halloween* (October 31 in the U.S.) and/or the related special occasions that follow.

Feel free to duplicate and distribute any or all holiday materials for your own individualized educational purposes. Adapt (shorten, lengthen, or change) them for *your* particular goals or teaching/learning situations.

As you become experienced in teaching or learning about special cultural occasions, you may want to do additional research and create even better materials of your own. For more reproducible holiday information, see other “Holiday Happenings” books by *Authors & Editors*.

READING SKILLS ACTIVITIES



Getting the Point (the Main Idea)

Except in play-acting, pronunciation, or listening comprehension activities, most informational printed material should be read and understood *silently*. Individually as fast as they can, learners should read each piece of information for *meaning*. Their first task is to get *the main idea* or *the point*. Adapted (or in some cases, unsimplified) holiday readings can be used to teach, learn, and practice this essential *first* reading skill.

STEP 1. Either use available printed information or rewrite the material to adapt it to the language proficiency level of learners and the time available. If you choose to rework available information, reorganize each section so that learners will readily recognize the *one main point*. You may want to include a clear "topic sentence"—one statement that gives the general idea of the selection. Other sentences should give details relevant to *that* main point.

(Continued on page 18)

On the next pages are reading selections on *Halloween* + related occasions. They are on two levels of difficulty: six (6) are *High Beginning*; eight (8) are *Intermediate*. Each piece contains a topic sentence or clear main idea—with supporting detail (examples, reasons, etc.) for that point.

The sections may be duplicated and pasted up on reading cards. In small groups, there should be as many different selections as there are people. In large classes, make duplicates of all readings so that participants can work on them in groups. Or use your own methods to present the info.

HALLOWEEN: High Beginning Readings 1-6

Main-Idea Quiz

INSTRUCTIONS: For each of the six (6) sections in the *High-Beginning Halloween Reading*, circle the letter of the best statement of the main idea—the *most general, most important point* in the selection. Tell reasons for your choice. Can you retell the supporting details?

PART ONE: How Halloween Began

- a. The English and French people of long ago began a holiday because they wanted to pop corn and cook animals in fires.
- b. Halloween began because of the ancient Celtic beliefs about the *Lord of the Dead*—and ghosts and their customs.
- c. The ghosts of dead people left earth on the last day of summer to remember and honor the birth of Christ.

PART TWO: Why Halloween Continued

- a. Peoples of other cultures of long ago—the Romans and the early Christians—added their beliefs and customs to the celebration of Halloween.
- b. Because the English ruled Rome, the Celtic people had to give up their festival in honor of black cats in costumes.
- c. The name “Halloween” came from a old English and Irish greeting for the good and bad ghosts of animals.

PART THREE: How Halloween Came to America

- a. Halloween came to America with the farm products from Scotland and Ireland.
- b. People from the British Isles brought their Halloween customs with them to the farm areas of America.
- c. To go trick-or-treating, children do tricks with apples and nuts and popcorn and sweets.

HALLOWEEN: Intermediate Readings 5-6 Main-Idea & Important Info Quiz

PART FIVE: Halloween Superstitions

Many Halloween superstitions are associated with _____
_____. For example, to predict romance, party guests might

Regarding ghosts, superstitious people believe that they _____

Some other Halloween symbols that came from superstitious beliefs are

PART SIX: The "Terror" of Halloween

Although at the beginning of the 20th century, Halloween was mainly _____, it quickly became scary again because people began to _____

The dark and scary spirit of Halloween soon became part of _____

Because of the "fun" of today's Halloween "blood, gore, and terror," young adults are becoming more interested in _____

VOCABULARY (PHRASES) TO CHOOSE FROM TO FILL IN THE BLANKS

- | | |
|--|--|
| ➤ divination (the power to see into the future magically) | ➤ a harmless holiday to amuse children— with parades and parties |
| ➤ throw apple peelings on the ground or burn pairs of nuts together in the fire | ➤ play dangerous pranks, like setting fires and committing crimes |
| ➤ can't leave a body with a ring, give warnings on Halloween, live in haunted houses, can be strange animals | ➤ the entertainment industry, with Hollywood "horror movies" and special effects and illusions |
| ➤ jack-o-lanterns, monsters, devils, vampires, skeletons, goblins, witches | ➤ having a good time "letting go" with costumes and make-believe |

VOCABULARY SKILLS ACTIVITIES



Parts of Speech as Learning Tools

Though traditional and perhaps “old-fashioned,” attention to major “parts of speech” (*nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs*) helps learners understand *general meanings* of new vocabulary they hear or read. It enables them to *use new words and phrases effectively* in their own speech and writing. Here are some suggested ways to incorporate awareness of *parts of speech* into the teaching and learning of information about holidays.

STEP 1. Learners make “PARTS OF SPEECH CHARTS” with these headings: NOUNS, VERBS, ADJECTIVES. (“Adverbs of manner” can often be formed by adding the ending *-ly* to an adjective and making necessary spelling changes, as in the adjective-adverb pairs *fearful / fearfully, historic / historically, eerie / eerily*. Consider students’ language proficiency levels when deciding whether or not to add a fourth column of ADVERBS.

Probably with dictionary use, more advanced groups may be able to fill in the chart with words related to those they found in the holiday material. Here’s the beginning of a sample *PARTS OF SPEECH CHART* with words from the **HALLOWEEN** readings in this book. (X = no possible word.)

HALLOWEEN VOCABULARY: PARTS OF SPEECH CHART			
NOUNS	VERBS	ADJECTIVES	ADVERBS
customs	customize	customary	customarily
beliefs	believe	believable	believable

HALLOWEEN VOCABULARY: PARTS OF SPEECH CHART, cont.

NOUNS	VERBS	ADJECTIVEsS	ADVERBS
a celebration	celebrate	celebrated	x
birth	bear	born	x
protection	protect	protective	protectively
a mixture	mix	mixed	x
symbols	symbolize	symbolic	symbolically
evil	x	evil	evilly
a scare	scare	scary	scarily

STEP 2. Collective or individual "PARTS OF SPEECH CHARTS" can be used for different kinds of vocabulary-learning lessons:

- A group leader or instructor can give meaning clues (simple definitions of the words), such as "cultural things people do," "to create for individual needs or wishes," or "famous, well-known through publicity." From the PARTS OF SPEECH CHART, learners pick out and pronounce the appropriate words. (Answers to these clues from the sample CHART are customs = PLURAL NOUN, customize = VERB, and celebrated = ADJECTIVE.)
- Making sure they use the same part of speech in each definition as the vocabulary item itself, learners in turn tell the meaning of one of the words in the PARTS OF SPEECH CHART. Listeners write down the words in a list or simply tell the words. The "definition giver" gets one point for each listener that figured out the right answer.
- Without saying the words themselves, the leader or teacher can give sentences or phrases with oral (or printed) blanks, such as "On November 1, the Celts held a _____" or "Halloween began before the _____ of Christ." Learners find the missing words in the PARTS OF SPEECH CHART and write them in a list or say them aloud. (The answers to these two clues from the chart are celebration and birth.) If they can, they suggest other words or even phrases of the same parts of speech that would fit the context and make sense in each sentence or phrase clue.

LISTENING SKILLS ACTIVITIES



Story-Telling & Retelling

On most special occasions, the best and most engaging *listening material* consists of *stories*.

Among fiction narratives, there are *fables*, *folktales*, and *fairy tales* with plots that fit into nearly all holiday themes. And there are *anecdotes*—some based on real experiences retold so they have funny endings. *Non-fiction* stories can be *true news*, *urban legends*, and/or *personal experiences*.

STEP 1. Using language at the comprehension level of listeners, “present” each story in one or more of these forms:

- ▶ Read the story aloud, using gestures, body language, and your voice to communicate meaning. Use “story-telling techniques” to make the narration easy to understand and engaging.
- ▶ Play the part of the “narrator” only, having others “act out” the roles of people/animals in the story. Actors say the words in quotation marks attributed to their characters.
- ▶ Record the story. Control the speed of the replay and/or rewind to make sure listeners understand.
- ▶ Show a video of the same story—and/or another version.

If a story is beyond many listeners’ comprehension level—or if there’s particularly difficult and important vocabulary to present, you might also provide printed materials—in handouts or on a board or screen. Printed matter can be the story you read aloud, a *Script*, or a *plot synopsis*. There might also be a vocabulary list to go over. Depending on language-ed goals and the time available, vocabulary can be taught or reviewed before, during, and/or after oral story-telling.

SPEAKING SKILLS ACTIVITIES



Information-Gap Activities

More than *ghosts* or *witchcraft*, “regular people” fear public speaking! An effective way to provide confidence for speaking is to assign oral language tasks with specified purposes or outcomes. Paired “Information-Gap Activities” work because learners get to *help* each other instead of “being called on to perform.”

STEP 1. For each pair of learners, find or create *two pieces of information* that speakers might naturally want to communicate to each other in “real life”—like the sample *holiday recipes* that follow. Make *two copies* of each portion of text. For “Version 1,” keep the contents intact. On “Version 2,” delete (cover with “white out,” correction tape, or strips of paper) some of the verbiage. Each partner in each pair receives the intact *Version 1* of one piece and the “Info Gap” *Version 2* of the other.

STEP 2. In turn, learners ask each other questions and give each other the info they need to fill in the “gaps” in their version of the information. In the two sample recipes, they fill in the blanks.



To check their “answers,” they compare what they have written with what appears on their partner’s page. If the *sense* of the info is the same, it doesn’t have to be the exact words.

STEP 3. To someone else, or perhaps to the whole group, each learner retells what he/she has learned from his/her partner.