

Name:

Date:

THE TRADITION OF JACK-O'-LANTERN

A jack-o'-lantern is a carved pumpkin or other root vegetable with a face, lit from within by a candle or light. Irish Legend of Stingy Jack .

The jack-o'-lantern tradition comes from an old Irish folktale about a man named Stingy Jack, first told in the 1700s. Jack was a clever but mean blacksmith who loved tricking people – including the devil! One night, he tricked the devil into promising never to take his soul. When Jack died, heaven refused him because he was cruel, and hell refused him because of the devil's promise. Stuck between worlds, Jack was given a glowing coal by the devil to light his way. He placed it inside a carved turnip which was a common root vegetable in Ireland to make a lantern. Irish people began calling him "Jack of the Lantern" and believed his ghost wandered on Samhain night (October 31st), the ancient Celtic festival marking the end of harvest.

During Samhain, the Celts (who lived in Ireland over 2,000 years ago) believed spirits roamed the earth. To scare away ghosts like Jack, Irish families carved scary faces into turnips or beets and placed glowing coals inside. They set these lanterns outside doors or in windows. In the 1840s, millions of Irish people moved to America during the Potato Famine. They brought the tradition but found pumpkins – a Native American crop – were much larger, softer, and easier to carve than turnips. By the late 1800s, American newspapers reported children carving pumpkin jack-o'-lanterns for Halloween. This switch made the glowing, toothy faces we know today a uniquely American version of an ancient Irish custom.



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1. According to the Irish legend, why was Jack not allowed into heaven or hell?

2-What vegetable did Irish people first use to make lanterns, and why?

3-How does the jack-o'-lantern tradition connect to the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain?

4-What major historical event in the 1840s caused many Irish people to move to America ?

5-Why did Irish settlers in America switch from turnips to pumpkins for jack-o'-lanterns?
