

# Halloween

## History

Halloween, which takes place on October 31<sup>st</sup>, is thought to have originated with the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain, though it shares important ties with various other celebrations from a number of faiths and cultures, including Día de los Muertos (or the Day of the Dead), All Saints Day, and All Souls Day. Halloween made its way over to the United States with British and Irish colonists, eventually becoming the holiday we know today, with traditions of door-to-door trick-or-treating and decorations. Contemporary Halloween as celebrated in the United States and, to a lesser degree, elsewhere in the world, is generally thought of as a secular holiday, but is also a significant observation for neo-Pagans, such as Wiccans, and precedes important religious observations for other religious communities.

## Samhain

The Celtic festival of Samhain, which originated in ancient Ireland and Britain, marked the end of summer and beginning of winter. People believed that during Samhain, the souls of the dead returned to visit their homes and those souls who had died during the past year journeyed on to the next world.<sup>1</sup> To observe the holiday, people built bonfires and practiced divination, or attempted to foretell the future, as Samhain was a period when divination was believed to be particularly effective.

## All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day

In the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE, Pope Boniface IV established the observation of All Saints' Day, originally on May 13<sup>th</sup>. Later, the date was shifted to November 1<sup>st</sup>. For the Catholic church and some Protestant denominations, All Saints' Day is a commemoration of all the saints of the church.<sup>2</sup> All Souls' Day, which is observed on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, is a Catholic commemoration of the souls of the deceased who are believed to be in purgatory. The day is observed with prayers for dead, masses, and visiting the graves of loved ones.<sup>3</sup> The period from October 31<sup>st</sup> to November 2<sup>nd</sup> was sometimes known as Allhallowtide.<sup>4</sup>

## Día de los Muertos

In Mexico, and to a lesser degree, elsewhere in Latin America, the Day of the Dead (or Día de los Muertos) is an opportunity for family and friends to honor and remember deceased loved ones. The observation of

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<sup>1</sup> "Halloween," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed September 25, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Halloween>.

<sup>2</sup> "All Saints Day," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed September 25, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/All-Saints-Day>.

<sup>3</sup> "All Souls Day," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed September 25, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/All-Souls-Day-Christianity>.

<sup>4</sup> "All Saints Day."

the day likely has roots in the rituals of the pre-Hispanic people of Mexico.<sup>5</sup> After Spanish colonization and the arrival of Catholicism, the holiday became intertwined with All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day. Observances vary from region to region but often involve families decorating grave sites or building altars to deceased loved ones.

## **Halloween (Samhain) as a Neo-Pagan Observance**

For many different groups of Neo-Pagans, Halloween (Samhain) is the New Year, when mythically, The Goddess enters the Underworld to confront the Lord of Death and Rebirth. Neo-Pagans, or modern pagans, are people who belong to spiritual movements that seek to reconnect to the ancient, Indigenous religions of Europe and the Middle-East. Neo-Pagan beliefs and practices often focus on Nature and the natural cycle of the seasons, as well as the immanence of Divinity. Samhain is considered a high Holy day in which Neo-pagans honor the spirits of their ancestors, as well as their journey into a deeper understanding of the cycle of seasons and their own selves.<sup>6</sup>

## **Observance of Halloween**

Overall, businesses based outside of the U.S, will likely have limited changes to schedules, whereas those with a presence in the U.S. may choose to engage in Halloween related activities. Companies might host a Halloween party with treats and costumes for employees and/or their families. Some celebrations may be in conjunction with a charitable event or organization as a means of community building, both within the company and in support of external communities.

Today, Halloween is often celebrated by children and their families at home, in neighborhoods, and in schools. Halloween is also a time for large community events, such as the Village Halloween Parade in New York and the West Hollywood Halloween Carnival in California. Some companies may choose to acknowledge or celebrate the holiday in the workplace. Tanenbaum recommends that companies acknowledge both the Christian and pagan roots of Halloween in its communications about any company celebrations or observances.

Celebrating Halloween for some people may involve taking time off to observe, whether that's as part of a longer, three-day celebration or to travel to be with friends or family for the holiday, some employees may choose to take time off from work. If employees request time off, consider the history and variety of observations explained here that reflect only some of the ways in which individuals may choose to observe Halloween.

## **How Will Halloween Affect the Global Workplace?**

Though Halloween celebrations in the United States are largely secular in nature, the holiday can also be religiously significant. As previously mentioned, Halloween can be an important neo-Pagan observance. Just as an individual's religiosity might compel them to celebrate the holiday, it should also be noted that religious beliefs might also preclude an individual from celebrating. Workplace Halloween celebrations should be open to all, but not mandatory.

This Fact Sheet outlines a number of other holidays and days of significance acknowledged across different religious traditions across various geographic locations. These holidays exemplify the intersection of religion and culture. It is important to remember the personal nature of religion and belief, acknowledging the varying levels of adherence and diversity of practices across all religious traditions.

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<sup>5</sup> "Day of the Dead," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed September 25, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Day-of-the-Dead>.

<sup>6</sup> Currott, Phyllis. *WitchCrafting: A Spiritual Guide to Making Magic*. Broadway Books. New York, 2001. p. 306.

Employers should make good faith efforts to accommodate time-off and other requests. The rationale and nature of accommodation requests are likely to vary.

**For more useful information on world religions, subscribe to Tanenbaum's online resource, [Religion at Work: A \(Human\) Resource](#). Visit the Tanenbaum [Workplace Resources](#) page for additional Tanenbaum fact sheets and contact Tanenbaum at [workplacediversity@tanenbaum.org](mailto:workplacediversity@tanenbaum.org) with questions.**