



Hallowe'en Guidance for Schools

Many schools may be planning to incorporate the theme of Hallowe'en into curricular, assembly or extra-curricular activities in the coming weeks, both in RE and other subject areas. The decision about whether to include activities based around Hallowe'en in school rests entirely with the Headteacher and governing body. In order to assist schools in this decision-making process, SACRE has produced the following information about the origins of Hallowe'en and why some parents and students may be uncomfortable or unhappy with it being included in school activities.

Background

The word Hallowe'en comes from All Hallows (All Saints) Eve, and is celebrated the day before the Christian festival of All Saints (1 November). Hallowe'en originated in the Celtic New Year celebration of Samhain. It was a time when it was thought that the dead revisited the earth, and when people wondered what the new year held in store. Meals were left out for the dead, fires were lit and loud noises made to frighten away evil spirits. This pagan festival accounts for the twin emphasis of Hallowe'en: fear of the dead and evil spirits alongside the customs associated with predicting the future. These pagan customs were remarkably persistent, so the Christian Church provided alternative festivals that incorporated many of the old customs. (The festival of All Souls (2 November) became a day for especially remembering the dead.) Instead of fearing evil and worrying about the future, All Saints provided a time when the achievements of the saints were remembered and the ultimate triumph of good re-asserted.

Aspects of Hallowe'en that might cause concern

- Christians believe that evil is a real but defeated power. Hallowe'en, however, can be perceived as being about giving evil too much importance.
- Concentrating on evil at Hallowe'en can bring fear to impressionable minds.
- There is some concern that Hallowe'en can breed an unhealthy interest in the occult, which could lead to emotional, mental and spiritual distress.
- Trick or treating can breed vindictive attitudes, and lead not just to childish pranks as 'tricks' but vandalism and even violence.

What schools might use as an alternative to Hallowe'en

If a school decides not to include Hallowe'en themed events and lessons it may wish to consider the following as an alternative source of creative topics and celebration:

- One World Week
One World Week is always at the end of October. This is an ideal opportunity to look at different aspects of belonging to one world. The main ideas explored are

those of diversity and interdependence: we are all different, but we need each other. This has an obvious curriculum link to education for sustainable development (ESD). Further information can be found at www.oneworldweek.org and www.globaldimension.org.uk.

- All Saints / All Souls

The festival of All Saints could become the focus for a topic with work on local places named after saints, saints' symbols, the lives of famous saints, illuminated lettering and other activities.

- Remembering

This could connect All Saints at the end of October to Remembrance Sunday in November. All Saints is a time when the good are remembered, and when right prevails, when heroes and heroines are honoured. Remembrance Sunday encourages us to remember those who have made sacrifices in times of war.

Further information can be found in the publication "Hallowe'en in School" by Richard Wilkins (ISBN 1 899169-03-2). This is published by the Association of Christian Teachers and can be purchased via their website: www.christian-teachers.org.uk/publications

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