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**Halloween’s scary fairies**

By Jennifer Muscato, Cricket Media

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Ghosts. Ghouls. Goblins. And ... fairies? We don't usually think of fairies as spooky Halloween creatures. However, if you traveled the streets of an ancient Irish village on the night of October 31, you'd hide from them!

Halloween began with the Celts, who lived in Ireland over 2,000 years ago. Back then, the holiday was an end-of-summer harvest feast called Samhain (pronounced SOW-en), a time when cattle and sheep were brought in to closer pastures and food stored for the winter. Samhain also marked the Celts' New Year. On Samhain Eve, the Celts believed that the ghosts of the dead walked the earth as they crossed to the underworld, and that fairies and demons came out of hiding. The Celts spoke of fairies as the "good folk," so as not to offend them if any were listening. But they also feared them — especially on this night.

If you stole a glimpse of an Irish fairy, it might have looked like a tiny person, but some could change size and shape. Their dancing and beautiful music were enchanting to humans — but watch out. Fairies had bad tempers. They got angry if you bothered them or spoiled their fun. On Samhain Eve, you might come across fairies in a field dancing with ghosts, or playing pranks and causing mischief. If you upset them, they could spoil your crops, bring nasty weather or even kidnap you to fairyland.

On Samhain Eve, the Celts feared the pooka most of all. This mysterious type of fairy often appeared as a yellow-eyed black horse. It liked scaring people, taking them for wild rides while trampling their crops and spooking their farm animals.

In a Celtic village you did all you could to protect yourself from unkind fairies and ghosts on Samhain Eve.

You left sweets out to keep them well-fed. Your priests and wise ones, the Druids, lit huge bonfires on hilltops to drive them away. You made sure your potatoes were dug, your oats stacked and your cattle pastured nearby. If you left your house, you disguised yourself in a scary mask so that the real goblins would think you were one of them! You may even have marched in a freaky parade with your costumed neighbors, hoping to lead the spirits out of your village.

As hundreds of years passed, people from other lands added their own traditions to Samhain. Missionaries to Ireland turned the pagan holiday into a Christian festival honoring the sacred dead, called All Saints' Day or All Hallows' Day. The night before this holy day became All Hallows Eve, and then Halloween. Still, Samhain lived on in many ways. People throughout Europe continued to fear fairies, wear costumes and drive out ghosts on October 31. They even carved candlelit turnips into eerie faces and placed them outside to keep spirits away — the first jack-o'-lanterns.

Halloween did not become popular in the United States until the influx of Irish immigrants in the late 19th century. Today, we spend Halloween having scary fun, not hiding from fairies.

Even so, we still carve jack-o'-lanterns and offer sweets, as people across the ocean did long ago. So as you step into your creepy costume this October 31, keep in mind that you're following a 2,000-year-old tradition. And remember the ghosts, goblins and especially the fairies of Ireland. After all, they helped invent one of America's most beloved holidays!

**Questions:**

* **Using evidence from the text, explain the origin of Halloween, telling where it came from and what its original purpose was.**
* **Using evidence from the text compare and contrast Samhain Eve, All Hallows Eve, and Halloween.**
* **Using evidence from the text, discuss the most feared creatures that led to the Irish practice of Samhain Eve.**