Happy Halloween

Pre-reading

Questions:
• What do you know about Halloween?
• What would you like to know about it?

Definitions:
• Abolish – to get rid of or put an end to
• Appease – to satisfy, calm, or soothe

Reading

Leaves have fallen from the trees, a cool autumn breeze is in the air, pumpkins, candy and ghosts abound – these are all sure signs that Halloween is near. This October 31st holiday began over 2000 years ago in what is now Ireland and Europe. It grew out of a Celtic celebration called Samhain (pronounced sow-en). This pagan holiday combined the Celt’s harvest and New Year festivals. Time, order and structure were abolished, and chaos was encouraged to reign during the three-day festival.

The day before Samhain was considered the last day of summer (or of the old year) and the day after Samhain was the first day of winter (or of the new year). It was associated with the seasonal cycles of life and death as the last crops were harvested and livestock were brought in for winter or for slaughter.

Being between seasons or years, Samhain was considered a magical and fearful time. The barrier between the worlds of the living and dead broke and spirits walked on the Earth. People tried to make contact with friendly spirits of the dead, who were often seen as sources of guidance. Many people wore masks made of animal heads and skins to frighten off evil spirits.

It was thought that the spirits of the dead required food and drink. So, during the festival people would leave various articles of food outside to appease the spirits. The spirits would go door-to-door demanding the best food and wine. If none were given, a hungry and possibly irritated spirit might enter the house and cause trouble for the home dwellers.

Sacred bonfires were very important during the fiery festival. They provided light against the growing darkness and evil spirits. As the celebration ended, families carried home embers from the fire to relight their hearth fires.

The Jack-O’-Lantern is said to have come from this age-old practice of carrying home embers in hollowed-out turnips. In an Irish folk tale, a man named Jack once escaped the devil with a turnip lantern. When the Irish came to America, Jack’s turnip was exchanged for the more easily carved pumpkin.

Christians tried to replace the pagan festival with a church-approved holiday. November 1st was designated All Saints’ Day to honor saints and martyrs, and November 2nd became All Soul’s Day, a day to remember the departed and to pray for their souls.

Together, All Saints’ Eve, All Saints’ Day and All Souls’ Day were called Hallowmas. The night before, came to be called All-hallows Evening. After some time, the name was shortened to “Halloween.”
Understanding

1. What does the word pagan mean? ____________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

2. Why do you think Halloween is celebrated in the fall of the year? ________________
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   __________________________________________________________________________

3. What is a folk tale? _________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

4. How were spirits viewed as both “good” and “bad”? __________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

5. Why did the Christian church try to replace Samhain? _________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

6. What can you infer are the roots of trick-or-treating? _________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

7. Why is Samhain described as a “magical and fearful time”? ____________________
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Writing

Option A: Compare and contrast the “Halloween” of 2000 years ago to the Halloween of today.

Option B: Summarize the reading in your own words.

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Happy Halloween – Level 7.5