

THE LEGEND OF THE JACK-O'-LANTERN

Do you know the story of the Jack-o'-lantern? There is an Irish legend associated with it, and the tradition was brought to the United States by Irish immigrants.

The story goes that there was a man named Jack who invited the Devil to drink with him at his favorite pub. Jack did not want to pay for the drinks, though, so he and the Devil made a deal. The Devil would turn himself into a coin so Jack could pay, but Jack had to promise to give his soul to the devil. So, the Devil kept his part of the agreement by turning himself into a coin, but Jack was very sly---he put the coin into his wallet, where he also carried a cross. The cross prevented the Devil from turning back into himself. The Devil negotiated another deal with Jack: the Devil would be set free if he would wait for ten years to come back to take Jack's soul.

Ten years went by, and the Devil came to take Jack as he was walking down a country road. Jack told the Devil that he had just one last wish--to eat an apple, his favorite fruit--before he left Earth. Jack convinced the Devil to climb an apple tree on the side of the road and pick him a nice, ripe apple at the top. As the Devil was climbing, Jack carved many crosses on the trunk of the tree so that the Devil was unable to climb down to take Jack's soul. Jack had outsmarted the Devil once again! In order to be set free, the Devil had to agree to never take Jack's soul, not even in death.

Jack went back to his life, and he became old and did eventually die. Now, Jack had a big problem! In his life, Jack had been a drinker, a liar, and a cheater, so he could not get into Heaven. The Devil had agreed never to take him, so he could not get into Hell, either. He had nowhere to go! The Devil reached into the fire of Hell, threw a hot coal at him, and told him to go away. Jack put the coal inside a turnip he was eating and used it as a lantern to light his way. Since that day, Jack travels the countryside, a lost soul, looking for a place to go. The Irish called him "Jack of the Lantern", or Jack O'Lantern.

Many people believe that on Halloween ghosts and evil spirits try to come back to the Earth. They thought that Jack, because he was damned, would scare them away. They carved turnips or beets and put candles in them so that they looked like Jack's lantern. They put the lanterns in their windows to keep the evil spirits away from their homes.

Many Irish came to the United States between the years of 1845 and 1850 because of a great famine in Ireland. They brought the tradition of the Jack-o-lantern with them. Turnips were not easy to find in the United States, but there were many pumpkins, so they began to use pumpkins to make their lanterns. Actually, pumpkins are easier to carve, because they are bigger and softer than a turnip.

Today, you can see many interesting faces and shapes carved from pumpkins, especially around Halloween. With a lit candle inside, they can be quite spooky in the dark! If you do carve a pumpkin, don't forget to cook the flesh to make a delicious pie or muffin, and to roast the

seeds for a great snack. Then, light a candle, put it inside your carved-out pumpkin, and enjoy your own Jack-o'-lantern.