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## CIR's Corner

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Hello everyone! "CIR's Corner" is my monthly article about international exchange and cultures around the world. I will introduce a variety of interesting international topics.

### This Month's Topic: Halloween

Halloween is celebrated each year on October 31. When I first came to Japan in 2007, Halloween wasn't very well-known among Japanese people yet. Nowadays, it's a pretty big event. Shops and restaurants decorate for Halloween, sell Halloween goods, and some even host costume parties. However, the two most important Halloween customs for Americans haven't caught on here. In this month's issue, I'll introduce those customs.



#### Jack-o'-Lanterns

Jack-o'-lanterns are strongly associated with Halloween. We draw a face on a large orange pumpkin, carve it out, and put a small candle inside to make a lantern. But why do Americans make jack-o'-lanterns? The custom actually started thousands of years ago with the Gaels, a group of people who mostly lived in modern-day Ireland and Scotland. Every year, the Gaels held a harvest festival called Samhain (pronounced *sab-winn*) from sunset on October 31 through November 1. The Gaels believed that during Samhain, the gate to the otherworld

would open, so dead relatives would return home. They also believed that fairies and ghosts would roam the earth. In order to keep evil spirits at bay, the Gaels carved lanterns from turnips and potatoes and displayed them outside their homes. When Irish and Scottish people started immigrating to America in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they brought their vegetable lantern carving tradition with them. Pumpkins, which are native to North America, proved to be easier to carve than turnips and potatoes, so the modern jack-o'-lantern was born.



(A traditional Irish jack-o'-lantern replica, made from a turnip ↑)

In order to make a jack-o'-lantern, a regular kitchen knife will do the trick. However, if you want to get really fancy, there are special pumpkin-carving tools available. When I was a child, my neighbor was a skilled artist, and was especially good at Japanese manga-style drawings. Every year, he carved pumpkins with the designs of popular anime characters. Pokémon and Dragon Ball jack-o'-lanterns definitely stood out among the standard ones.





## Trick-Or-Treating

Trick-or-treating is American children's most loved Halloween event. First of all, you need a costume. Vampires, witches, ghosts, and other scary costumes are standard, but cute character costumes are also extremely popular. I can remember the first time I went trick-or-treating, I went as a ballerina, and my brother went as a pirate. Once it gets dark, trick-or-treating begins. We go to a house with a porch light on, ring the doorbell, and shout "TRICK OR TREAT!" at whoever opens the door. Then, they give us some candy.



(The Obamas handing out Halloween candy to trick-or-treaters at the White House. I wonder what kind of candy they have. Maybe full-sized candy bars?)

In America, Halloween candy goes on sale in early September. It's generally small and individually wrapped, but according to rumors, rich people hand out full-sized candy bars. I didn't live in an affluent area, so people in my neighborhood handed out typical Halloween candy. However, if you walked about 20 minutes uphill, there were a bunch of big, wealthy-looking houses. One Halloween when I was in high school, my best friend and I devised a plan to confirm whether or not the rumors of full-sized candy bars were true. Trick-or-treating is normally for little kids, so it wouldn't have been appropriate for two high school students to go. In order to divert attention away from us, we took the three kids who lived next door. Also, since we were expecting to get a lot of candy, we brought pillow cases instead of the regular-sized treat bags. We started our trek.

Halloween in Seattle is quite cold, and temperatures often drop near freezing. A 20-minute walk, mostly uphill, in the freezing cold, is hard for anyone, let alone three children. All my friend and I heard were complaints. However, once we reached a huge house, we excitedly rang the doorbell. "TRICK OR TREAT!" we exclaimed as a Karen<sup>1</sup> opened the door. She looked at us with suspicion. "Huh? Aren't you two too old for trick-or-treating? Meh, whatever. Here you go. Happy Halloween." she said, as she placed a toothbrush into each one of our pillow cases and shut the door. "WHAT!? NO CANDY!?" The children shouted in disappointment. We went to the next house, and this time we got apples and bananas. "Unlike us poor people, rich people are health conscious," my friend and I quickly realized. In the end, we got a few more toothbrushes, some fruit, boxes of raisins, pencils and erasers, lots of regular Halloween candy, and only one full-sized candy bar.



(Teal pumpkins)

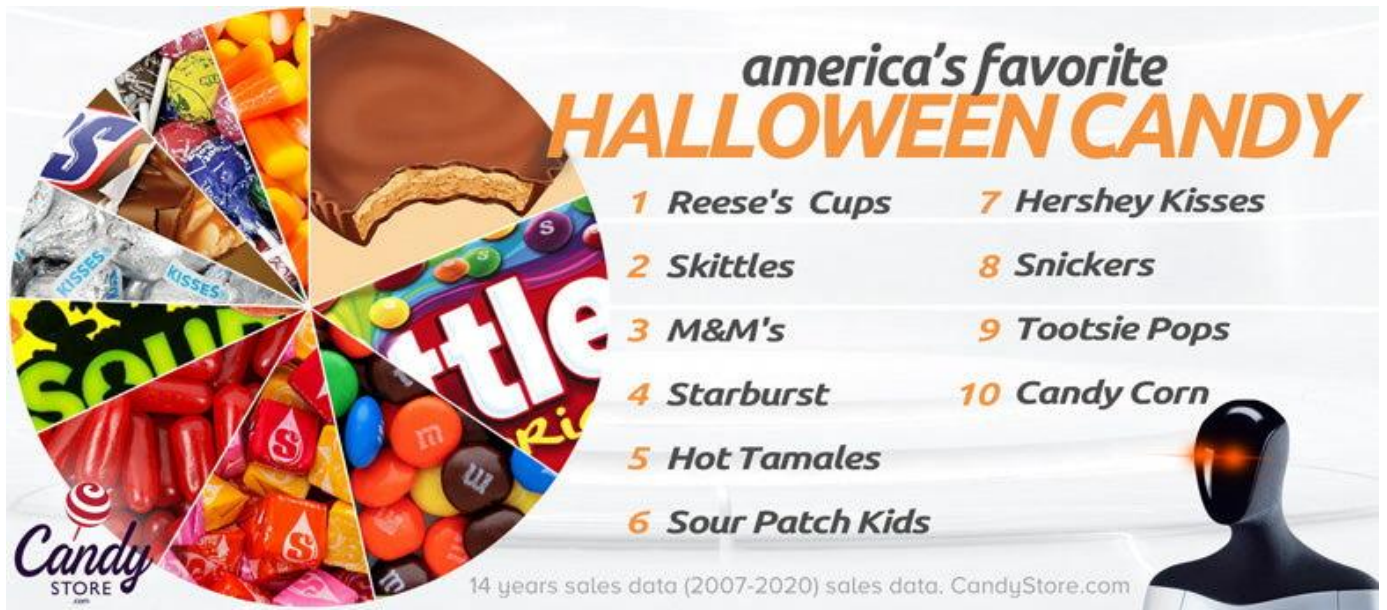
Recently, the number of children with food allergies is on the rise. In order for all children to be able to enjoy trick-or-treating, more and more houses are offering alternatives to candy. If you see a pumpkin painted the color teal outside, that's a sign that the house hands out non-candy treats.

Like jack-o'-lanterns, trick-or-treating started with the Gaels as well. During Samhain, people dressed up like ghosts and ghouls and visited the homes of their neighbors in order to receive offerings of food and drink for their deceased relatives. When Irish and Scottish immigrants settled in North America, their traditional Gaelic celebration of Samhain turned into the beloved American Halloween traditions we practice today. ★

1. Karen – slang for a middle-aged, entitled, demanding, angry, often racist white woman, usually with a blonde bob haircut.



## America's Favorite Halloween Candy



The website CandyStore.com analyzed 14 years of sales data in order to find out the top 10 Halloween candies in America. Reese's Cups came out on top, perhaps because of their bright orange packaging, but probably because the combination of peanut butter and milk chocolate is delicious. They've always been my favorite Halloween treat, so after trick-or-treating, I'd trade my brother my Sour Patch Kids (#6), sour gummy candy which I didn't like, for his Reese's Cups.

## The Worst Halloween Candy in America



According to the results of CandyStore.com customer surveys, these are the candies that people don't want to find in their trick-or-treat bag. I generally agree with this list, except I've always liked Tootsie Rolls (#8). My mother's favorite is licorice (#10), but every Japanese person who has tried it says it tastes like Chinese herbal medicine. Candy corn, the #1 worst Halloween candy, is also #10 on the favorite list. While most people dislike the sickly sweet taste and waxy texture of candy corn, it is the symbol of Halloween, so it sells well every year.

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