

Halloween Traditions in France and French Halloween Vocabulary



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Halloween is a relatively new thing in France. Some people will tell you that it's a Celtic celebration, which has been celebrated in parts of France (Brittany) for centuries. OK, it may have been something important for some people, but nothing that reached the general public of France.

Traditionally in France, we celebrate the Catholic holiday of "[la Toussaint](#)", which is on October 31st. It's a rather sad celebration, when family mourn their dead and go to the cemetery to clean up the tombs, bring flowers, and pray. There is often a family meal, but no special tradition about the food. We bring "[des chrysanthèmes](#)" (a type of flower usually called mums, from the Latin chrysanthemum) because they still bloom at this time of the year.

However things are changing. If I remember well, it started in the early 90s. Celebrating Halloween became fashionable among young adults, especially among people who liked to travel. I remember going to a Halloween party at a very trendy friend when I was twenty, and I felt I was in the "it" crowd!!

Nowadays, shops and trademarks use the images of Halloween, pumpkins, skeletons etc... in their ads, so now, French people know it well, and some even start to celebrate Halloween with their kids. Why not? The French traditionally love to get in costumes, and it's quite common to have a costumed New Year party or a costumed birthday, even more so among kids

Additionally, Halloween is a great opportunity to teach some English words to kids. French kids start to learn English in elementary school. It's merely an introduction to the English language (don't expect a fluent conversation out of a 10 years old), but since kids would do pretty much anything for candies, elementary school teachers jump at the opportunity and often organize a costumed parade, and some trick or treating. Note however it never gets to tricks!! Most French house will not have candies, and would be furious if their house got toilet papered!

French Vocabulary

La Toussaint – All Saint Day

Le trente et un octobre – 31st of October

Halloween – halloween (say it the French way "a lo ween")

Friandises ou bêtises/ Des bonbons ou un sort – treat or trick

[Se déguiser](#) (en) – to wear a costume, to dress-up as

Je me déguise en sorcière – I am wearing a witch costume, I am dressing-up as a witch

Sculpter une citrouille – to carve a pumpkin

Frapper à la porte – to knock on the door

Sonner à la sonnette – to ring the bell

Faire peur à quelqu'un – to scare someone

[Avoir peur](#) – to be scared

Donner des bonbons – to give candies

Un déguisement, un costume – a costume

Un fantôme – a ghost

Un vampire – a vampire

Une sorcière – a witch

Une princesse – a princess

Un squelette – a skeleton

Un épouvantail – a scarecrow

Un diable – a devil

Une momie – a mummy

Un monstre – a monster

Une chauve-souris – a bat

Une araignée – a spider

Une toile d'araignée – a spider web

Un chat noir – a black cat

Un potiron, une citrouille – a pumpkin

Une bougie – a candle

Des bonbons – candies

