

Hot topic: Halloween

A National Literacy Trust membership resource

Why Halloween?

When the summer's sun has said its final goodbye and the full moon sits high in the sky, thoughts turn to Halloween. Children love all things Halloween and what better opportunity to engage with literacy than the creation of spooky recipes, writing eerie stories, reading heart racing tales?

How can Halloween tales be used to teach literacy?

Our **hot topic** taps into current topics and trends to improve outcomes in literacy and make literacy engaging and relevant. Our research shows that pupils who enjoy writing are seven times more likely to write above the level expected for their age compared with pupils who do not enjoy writing. The activities featured here relate to the English programmes of study from the national curriculum in England.

Some schools may choose not to use stories linked to Halloween for religious reasons, in which case you can still use some of these ideas linked to celebrations around the world.

Reading ideas

Create a spooky atmosphere in your classroom to enjoy stories together. Turn off the lights, place battery powered candles around and set the tone with Halloween themed music. Then, enjoy an eerie story as a class. Here are a variety of age-appropriate reads that are certain to get little hearts racing:

Ages 3-5 years

- **Christopher Pumpkin** by Sue Hendra - told in rhyme about a pumpkin who no longer wants to be scary!
- **Gustavo the Shy Ghost** - by Flavia Z Drago, a beautifully illustrated story about a lonely ghost whose wish it to make friends.
- **Room On The Broom** by Julia Donaldson - a comical story about a witch and her broom that quickly runs out of room.



Ages 5-11 years

- **Horrid Henry: Fright Night** by Francesca Simon - an irresistible introduction to the world of Halloween.
- **Frankenstiltskin: Fairy Tales Gone Bad** by Joseph Coelho- A witty Halloween twist on well-loved classics.
- **The Halloween Parade: A Monstacademy Mystery** by Matt Beighton - a page turning read about a school for curious and monstrous children.



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Ages 11-14 years

- **MagicBorn** by Peter Bunzl- an adventurous tale about a royal sorcerer who is on the hunt for those who are magic born.
- **High Rise Mystery** by Sharna Jackson - a nail biting murder mystery!
- **Dread Wood** by Jennifer Killick – a brilliantly creepy book for young horror fans.



Oracy ideas

Storytelling

Halloween stories are a great opportunity for storytelling. After reading some festive stories together, give pupils the opportunity to **create and tell their own**. Have some cards prepared with words or pictures on them (see Appendix for some ideas) and invite pupils to pull four cards out of a witch's hat/pumpkin (anything Halloween related). Pupils are then encouraged to work with a partner to create a rough storyline inspired by the four words or images. Encourage **pupils to tell the story orally**, listening carefully to their partner and taking it in turns to continue the story. Once practised, some stories could be performed to the rest of the class.

Poems:

There are some marvellous poems that pupils could learn by heart, or pupils can create their own. In small groups, invite pupils to work together to create a performance for an assembly. Ideas for poems include:

- **Witch Witch** by Rose Fylman (KS1 and KS2)
- **The Night Of Halloween** by Sandi VanderSluis and Corky Ferguson (KS2)
- **Halloween Party** by Kenn Nesbitt (KS2)
- **Ghost Bus** by Joe Wayman (KS2)
- **Fall Flight Haiku** by Sheri Gourd (KS2/3)

Writing ideas

If you are holding a Halloween party, fireworks display or Diwali celebrations at your school, then ask pupils to **write a school leaflet** to go home to parents. *How can they persuade people to come along? What language would be effective to do this? How should they lay out their text for the most impact?* This could also be extended by asking pupils to work in teams to **plan a Halloween inspired feast and write a recipe** to allow others to make it.

Grammar for writing ideas:

Use the lure of a monster to practise **word classes** by playing *the game Frankenstein* (see Appendix for ideas). In this game pupils take it in turns to add a word from a determined word class (see below) to create a sentence. Pupils can each write a word on a piece of paper, fold it over and pass it to the next.

Determiner: A word that comes before the noun to state its quantity. (the)

Adjective: A word that describes the noun. (terrifying)

Concrete noun: A person, a place or a thing. (monster)

Past tense verb: A word to say what has happened. (stumbled)

Adverb: A word to describe how something has happened. (slowly)

Simile: A phrase that compares something like/as something else. (as monstrous as)

Preposition: A word that describes where the noun is. (inside)

Inspired by film writing ideas:

Watch a clip of a spooky film such as *The Witches* found [here](#) or one from the *Ghostly shed* on www.literacyshed.com and focus on creating a piece of writing building suspense. Invite pupils to consider the different ways that they could build tension for their reader (e.g. using the senses, similes and metaphors, withholding information, hinting at danger to come, short sentences and ellipsis) then use the toolkit to start writing. The appendix includes a list of spooky vocabulary pupils could explore when writing.

Cross-curricular writing ideas:

Potion making is a spook-tacular way to inspire writing. Conduct **science experiments** such as: *Fun Bubbling Potions. (Fill a small cup with vinegar, add a few drops of food colouring, squeeze in dish soap, mix together, add a teaspoon of baking soda and then watch the potion ooze).* Can pupils write up this spooktacular potion recipe?

Further recommended reading

Halloween booklist

Below is a range of further reading recommendations to engage pupils with Halloween and inspire a love reading whilst developing key literacy skills.

Ages three to five years:

- ***We're Going to Find the Monster*** by Malorie Blackman and Dapo Adeola
- ***Frankenslime*** by Joy Keller
- ***Creepy Carrots*** by Aaron Reynolds

Ages five to seven years:

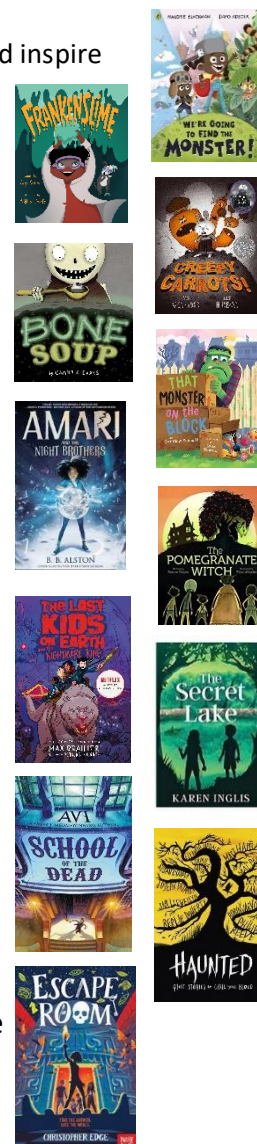
- ***That Monster on the Block*** by Sue Ganz-Schmitt
- ***The Pomegranate Witch*** by Denis Doyan
- ***Bone Soup*** by Cambria Evans

Ages 7 to 11 years:

- ***The Last Kids on Earth and the Nightmare King*** by Max Brallier
- ***Amari and the Night Brothers*** by BB Alston
- ***The Secret Lake*** by Karen Inglis

Ages 11 to 14 years:

- ***School of the Dead*** by Avi
- ***Escape Room*** by Christopher Edge
- ***Haunted*** by Susan Cooper, Joseph Delaney, Berlie Doherty, Jamila Gavin, Matt Haig, Robin Jarvis, Derek Landy, Sam Llewellyn, Mal Peet, Philip Reeve



Appendix – resources

Spooky Halloween Vocabulary

Monstrous	Spine-chilling	Eerie
Hair-rising	Dark	Ghastly
Chilling	Unnerving	Startling
Wicked	Bloodcurdling	Shocking
Magical	Ear-piercing	Repulsive

Spooky Halloween Story Cards

Cauldron	Witch	Bats
Cackle	Potion	Spell
Monster	Trick or Treat	Pumpkin
Ghost	Haunted house	Creaking
Bubbling	Spell	Carving

Frankenstein

Fold over the dotted lines

1. determiner

2. adjective

3. concrete noun

4. past tense verb

5. adverb

6. preposition

7. determiner

8. adjective

9. concrete noun

Write the full sentence: