

Happy Halloween! This Monday was Halloween, a holiday that is probably most popular in America and Canada. When I was a child, Halloween was always a great holiday because we go to go trick-or-treating and come home with a bag full of candy. But once I was too old for trick-or-treating, I was less interested in the holiday. But living in Japan, I feel like it's my responsibility to make a big deal out of holidays like this, if only to share something about American culture that is not so well known in Japan.

While I was preparing for my lesson about Halloween in the past few weeks, I found out a lot of details about the history of the holiday that I never knew before. The holiday that we now call Halloween started as a celebration among the Celts who were living in different parts of Western Europe. Many people died in the long, cold winters, so the Celts were afraid of what bad things could happen during this season. The Celts believed that on the night before the start of winter, October 31st, ghosts of the dead could come back to earth. So they dressed in scary costumes and lit big bonfires to try to scare these spirits away. The tradition has changed a lot over the years, but this is why we dress in costumes, and why scary costumes and decorations are popular. We also carve pumpkins, scooping out the inside and cutting a face into one side, and put a candle inside making a small fire which is like the big bonfires they had long ago. These pumpkins are called jack-o-lanterns.

When I was growing up, I knew a little bit about this history of Halloween. But what mattered the most was carving the pumpkin, putting up Halloween decorations, and of course, going trick-or-treating. When I was a child I dressed up as all sorts of different things: a clown, a martian, a ladybug, a witch, a bumblebee—you name it, I probably wore the costume one Halloween. But in the past few years I haven't been as interested. Even though adults have Halloween parties, too, I was never too concerned about my costume. But now that I live in Japan, I feel like I should represent this holiday with a great costume! Last year, I went to school dressed as a witch with green hair. I was surprised how excited the students were to see my costume, so this year I wanted to do something bigger and better. Out of nowhere, I had the idea to dress like an ostrich, so in the past few weeks I was busy getting together all the parts of my costume. All the way from the feathers in my hair to the orange claws on my feet, I took my costume really seriously, and it turned out pretty well.

I think my friends at home were surprised to hear that I made such an involved costume for Halloween this year. Maybe I wanted to take it more seriously to show my students that Halloween is a real holiday and that it is important to me. But in the end, I had a lot of fun and will probably continue to dress up in fun costumes in the future. Sometimes all it takes is some time away from home to appreciate the customs that weren't so important to me before!