Università di Firenze Dipartimento di Formazione, Lingue, Intercultura, Letterature e Psicologia

Lingua Inglese Corso in Lingua e cultura degli U.S.A. John Gilbert

Instructions: Put the following paragraphs in the appropriate order to reconstruct the text. The first paragraph has already been done for you.

**HALLOWEEN**

1\_ A. The origins of Halloween go back over 2,000 years to the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain /saʊn/ (Irish Gaelic). The Celts were the most powerful people in central and northern Europe from the 8th to 1st century BC. The Celts passed on their culture orally and so did not leave written records. Most of what is known of the Celts comes from the hostile writings of Julius Caesar and the Romans, who invaded Britain in the 1st century BC and outlawed the Celtic religion and persecuted the Druid priests. Today scholars often disagree about aspects of Celtic culture.

\_\_\_\_\_B. Irish and Scottish immigrants took their Halloween traditions to North America in the 19th century, especially after the Great Famine in Ireland in the 1840s. One of the most popular customs is that of the Jack 0’Lantern, its name coming from an old story in Irish folklore in which poor Jack, after being refused admittance to Heaven, at the gates of hell is also refused entrance, but is given a burning ember in a carved-out turnip by the devil so he can light his way as he wanders for eternity through the darkness. The Jack O’Lantern tradition began a few hundred years ago in Ireland and Scotland, and was originally a carved-out turnip with a face and a candle inside, to scare off evil spirits. But in North America immigrants began using the larger and more easily-carved pumpkins found there.

\_\_\_\_\_C. But the old pagan Celtic traditions of Samhain continued alongside the new Catholic practices, and in a further attempt to Christianize the holiday and its association with the dead, at the end of the 10th century the Catholic Church created the new holiday of All Souls' Day on 2 November, a day to commemorate all of the dead, not just the saints. In Medieval Europe, All Souls’ Day was often celebrated with bonfires, parades and people dressing up in costumes as saints, angels and devils. In British villages children went door to door asking for “soul cakes” in exchange for reciting prayers for the dead.

\_\_\_\_\_D. After the Roman invasion of the 1st century BC, the Celts were eventually pushed back into Wales, Scotland and Ireland. Although their religion was outlawed and the Druid priests were persecuted, Celtic traditions continued, especially in Scotland and Ireland. The Roman harvest festival of Pomona, the goddess of fruit and trees, was introduced and some scholars believe that the use of nuts and fruit (especially apples) associated with Halloween today can be traced back to this tradition.

\_\_\_\_\_E. Today Halloween continues to be one of the most popular holidays celebrated in the U.S.A., a festival with ancient multicultural roots which was taken to North America by poor Irish and Scottish immigrants and now, thanks in part to Hollywood, is spreading back across the Atlantic to Europe and much of the rest of the world. In the U.S Southwest Halloween encounters the *Dia de los muertos* holiday of Mexican-origin. New culturally-hybrid practices are already arising. Only time will tell if they become established traditions.

\_\_\_\_\_F. On Halloween, according to Medieval Christian superstition, the evil spirits of the dead can rise from their graves and cause harm to the living until dawn on 1 November. Christianity was also responsible for the association of superstitions about witches and black cats with Halloween. In the late Middle Ages there were horrible persecutions of witches taking place in much of Europe, including Britain, first by the Catholics but then also by the Protestants (e.g. New England Puritans in Salem, Massachusetts 1692). At this time, the figure of the witch as a purely evil being was adopted by the Church, further imposing patriarchy through the persecution as witches of thousands of women in society who were herbalists, midwives, nurses, fortune-tellers or other prominent, problematic figures. “Witches” were tortured to confess to participating in “black Sabbaths” and “night-flying.” Long subjected to negative superstitions among Medieval Christians, cats at this same time, in particular black cats, came to be seen as evil spirits associated with witches.

\_\_\_\_\_G. Samhain is believed to have been the most important of the Celtic “fire festivals”, a 3-day harvest festival around the end of October, a magical turning-point in the year marking the end of the summer and the season of the sun, and the beginning of the winter and the season of darkness and cold. For three days the barrier was lifted between the world of the living and the world of the dead, and the laws of space and time (past, present, future) were suspended. Bonfires were built on hills in the sacred oak groves, and religious rites and sacrifices were performed by the Druid priests. All of the cooking fires in the villages were extinguished the first night, and in the morning the Druids distributed burning coals from the embers of the sacred bonfire to the families to relight collectively the home fires for the new year. It was a very magical time, in which the world of the spirits could intermingle with the world of the living, and the dead were honored and feasted, and through the Druid rites they could provide guidance and direction, as sources of wisdom not fear. According to some legends, people dressed in furs with animal skulls or cross-dressed, did pranks and crazy things, and children would visit their neighbors for special food.

\_\_\_\_\_H. Into the 20th century, the holiday in the U.S.A. further developed as a harvest festival, with bonfires, the telling of scary stories of the supernatural, playing games of magic and divination, dressing in costumes, doing neighborhood pranks. With increasing urbanization and the poverty of the Depression in the 1930s, the “pranks” began to get nastier and more vandalistic. Towns started organizing “safe” Halloween events and people began offering nuts, fruit or candy to children who came to their door. The term “trick or treat” first appeared in print around 1939 and “trick or treating” had become common by the 1940s.

\_\_\_\_\_I. With the coming of Christianity, other cultural contributions were added to the holiday. Christianity had a tradition of co-opting the time periods and traditions of pagan religions in order to strengthen the Church (e.g. moving Christmas from the spring to 25 December to coincide with pagan winter solstice celebrations). In this way, in the 8th century the Western Church moved All Saints' Day (or All Hallows, or Hallowmas, the archaic noun *hallow* meaning “saint” or “holy person”), a holiday for honoring early Christian martyrs, from 13 May to 1 November. In this way the Catholic celebration of the “good dead” (the saints) was superimposed on the pre-existing Celtic supernatural beliefs about the return of dead spirits on Samhain. The night of the 31 October became the evening of All Hallows, or rather “All Hallow E’en”, then “Hallowe’en” and finally “Halloween.”