

HALLOWEEN

Using Special-Occasion Cultural Materials in Language Skills Activities

W *hy Teach or Learn Language with Special-Occasion Materials?*

Almost everyone likes holidays! Traditionally, educators of children and second-language learners use special occasions as pedagogical opportunities to teach cultural history and customs.

Children sing songs, create holiday handicrafts, eat special foods, and may even dress up in costumes. In secondary and adult schools, English-as-a-Second-Language students read about the history and meanings of holidays. They learn related vocabulary. In speaking, they might compare North American celebrations and customs with similar (or quite different) ones in their native cultures. Such activities can be pleasant diversions from the “sameness” of everyday language lessons—instruction in oral and written language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), as well as in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. However, they can also be pedagogic time wasters—social events or entertainment with minimal educational value.

Especially in courses with a required curriculum to cover or a specified language proficiency level for students to achieve, there may not be time for “extra” holiday lessons or activities. Under such circumstances, it makes sense to use information about holiday culture and customs as language teaching and learning vehicles. By substituting special-occasion materials for textbook chapters or standard supplements, learners can still cover or master the objectives of the mandatory language-skills curriculum. At the same time, in motivating change-of-pace lessons, they acquire and communicate cultural knowledge, expediting language acquisition.

The suggested activities and language-learning steps in this book can be used with material on any common North American or international holiday. All the offered information and vocabulary, however, applies specifically to Halloween (October 31 in the U.S.), All Saints' Day, and the Day of the Dead (November 1 & 2 in Hispanic cultures). Feel free to duplicate and distribute any or all of the holiday materials in this book for your own educational purposes. Adapt (shorten, lengthen, or change) them for your particular goals and teaching or learning situation. As you become experienced in teaching or learning about holidays, you may want to do additional research. You may wish to create, or have participants create, even better reusable materials of your own. For more reproducible special-occasion material, see the other “Holiday Happenings” books by Authors & Editors.

How to Teach or Learn with Holiday Materials

Special-occasion information and materials are excellent vehicles for instruction in or acquisition of both oral and written language skills. Nearly all classroom or group activities integrate two or more of the four language abilities—listening comprehension, speaking (including pronunciation), reading, and writing. Even so, many language activities require or motivate participants to make more use of one skill than others. Some lessons emphasize grammar or vocabulary. For pedagogical effectiveness or convenience, in what order should various kinds of holiday material be presented? And how can they be taught or learned most effectively?

For conveying information about a special occasion, *reading* activities are probably the most efficient. By applying proven effective-reading strategies, participants acquire and practice essential reading-comprehension skills—*getting the main points, understanding important details, organizing info, communicating data in summary form*. They also learn and remember what is interesting and useful about the content—in this case, the history and meaning of the holiday, its symbols and customs, and related cultural practices and attitudes. Reading materials are also effective assessment instruments (tests and quiz games). Learners can demonstrate their mastery of newly-acquired knowledge and their reactions to it orally and/or in writing.

Vocabulary is often taught in the context in reading. In addition, vocabulary exercises and games enable learners to focus on the properties of new words and phrases—their parts of speech, definitions, and their appropriate use in context. Because of the images it evokes, holiday vocabulary is often fun to learn. More serious students can “go beyond the context” of special-occasion words and phrases to improve their general vocabulary proficiency.

Whether they are solemn or frivolous, nearly all special occasions are social events. It follows, therefore, that learning about them should occur during interactive *oral* activities. These lessons can include effective language-acquisition strategies and practice: *showing interest, listening for main points and important data, demonstrating comprehension through paraphrasing, asking for repetition or clarification, pronouncing clearly (improving accent), presenting info and ideas effectively, telling and retelling stories, communicating in groups*, and the like.

The materials and instructions for use in this *Holiday Happenings: HALLOWEEN* book are arranged in an order that they are might be presented in coordinated community-college language-skills courses. They are designed for participants with various educational goals, levels of language proficiency, interests, motivation, and personalities.

What is most feasible, interesting, motivating, effective, and fun for your particular pedagogical situation? How much time and which resources are available for instruction on this topic (this special occasion)? Based on your answers to these questions, choose the sections and steps that appeal to you most. As usual, you might want to adapt them to the particular needs and wants of each year’s participants and their situations.

Holiday Happenings

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I PREDICT THAT YOU WILL HAVE AN ENGAGING, MOTIVATING, STIMULATING, HAPPY, FUN HOLIDAY EXPERIENCE WITH THE IDEAS, INSTRUCTIONS, AND CLASSROOM MATERIALS IN THIS BOOK, *HALLOWEEN & RELATED OCCASIONS*, ISBN 1-891077-06-6. YOU WILL TEACH AND LEARN READING, VOCABULARY-ACQUISITION, LISTENING, PRONUNCIATION, AND SPEAKING STRATEGIES. YOU WILL BE ABLE TO TAKE MAXIMUM ADVANTAGE OF YOUR EDUCATIONAL TIME AND ENERGY. WITH WELL-RESEARCHED HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFORMATION, YOU WILL BECOME AN EXPERT IN THE SPECIAL-OCCASION TOPIC. YOU WILL KEEP AND MAKE MULTI-LEVEL, MULTI-FACETED USE OF THIS BOOK YEAR AFTER YEAR. AND YOU WILL BECOME INTERESTED IN OTHER HOLIDAY AND CONTENT TOPICS AS LANGUAGE-LEARNING AND TEACHING VEHICLES.

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