

MIDDLE SCHOOL

1. The Reconstruction of Halloween

Halloween has traditionally been considered the one national holiday that belongs to children, and children alone. An examination of store flyers may indicate a much larger audience. Have your students collect store flyers for several weeks prior to Halloween. Discuss with the class when the Halloween selling season begins. In small groups, have your students examine the flyers in order to answer the following questions:

- What types of products are highlighted before Halloween?
- What are the current trends in children, adolescent, and adult costumes?
- To what extent do these costumes relate to social and political trends in our culture (i.e., costumes related to current movies, children's television, music genres, or masks of politicians)?
- What methods do advertisers employ to make Halloween an important time for all people (e.g., show people of different ages, races, and sexes in the ads, present a child's version, AND an adult version)?
- How is Halloween being reconstructed to appeal to a larger audience (e.g., showing adults of different races and sexes in a Halloween context)?

Discuss with your class some of the common rituals of Halloween (carving the pumpkin, trick-or-treating, decorating the front porch, etc.). View some television commercials that incorporate these Halloween rituals, and discuss what might be some social values of Halloween.

- What methods do advertisers employ to make Halloween an important time for all people?
- How is Halloween being reconstructed to appeal to a larger audience?



Ask students to consider other times of the year when seasonal commercials are shown.

- What are the types of products being advertised for each?
- Are similar selling techniques used for these other occasions, e.g., family togetherness, children's joy, discovery, learning how to behave in different situations?

2. Halloween and Prime-Time Television

This unit of study is designed to provide students with the opportunity to critically examine the television world of Halloween.

Divide your class into seven groups, and provide enough copies of a television listing for the week leading up to Halloween. If Halloween falls mid-week, this might require two different TV listings. Each group is responsible for watching the television shows aired during the 7–9 p.m. time slot for one evening during that week. Groups should divide up the viewing responsibilities to ensure that most channels are screened.

Have students watch the prime-time television shows in order to determine if the show had a Halloween theme or was a Halloween special. One student in each group should be given the responsibility to watch and make note of how Halloween was celebrated and/or represented on one particular show.

Data can be presented in the form of a pie chart or any other visual form, and shared with the rest of the class. Display the pie charts in chronological order leading up to Halloween, and have the students reflect and respond to the following questions:

- Overall, what percentage of the television programs had a Halloween theme?
- Is there a pattern of which kinds of programs included Halloween or the way they included it (e.g., more references on sitcoms, quiz shows, dramas, sportscasts)?
- Are there more Halloween-themed programs the closer we get to Halloween?

- List the products that were advertised in the commercials during the program you watched.
- Did these commercials use any of the ritualistic activities of Halloween (e.g., pumpkin carving, decorating, making loot bags)?
 - What were the target audiences of some of the programs?
 - How does the Halloween theme make the programs more appealing?
 - How is the television world's Halloween different from yours? Why?
 - What Halloween-themed programs did you watch when you were younger? Why did you like them?
 - Did you watch the same programs each year? Why?
 - If you didn't watch Halloween shows, why not?

Scary Movies

3. Halloween and Scary Movies

Why is watching a scary movie a good way to set the Halloween mood? Horror movies elicit an adrenaline rush and speak to our deepest, darkest fears, and Hollywood has always relied on gory gimmicks to make our hairs stand on end. Survey your class to determine the titles of their favourite scary movies. Find out what has made them favourites, and if the same elements appeal to most of the students.

- What are some of the horrific elements of these movies?
- What might be the purposes of horror movies for producers? ...for teens?

Ask your students to reflect on one particular scary movie that they have seen. Alternatively, teachers could choose a particular scene from a movie that relied upon the visual impact of dramatic cinematography, illustrated the isolation of the main character, etc. Have students reflect and respond to the following questions:

- What scene or image in the movie is particularly memorable?
- What connection, if any, does this have with your own life?

Describe the source of the horror (monster, creature, haunted house, graveyard, etc.).

- For what audience do you think the movie was created?
- How can you tell?
- What aspects of human experience do you think the movie is trying to dramatize?
- What human fears do you think the movie is trying to exploit?
- What purpose do you think the writer, producer, and director had in creating this movie?
- In what ways do cinematography, music, and sound effects contribute to this purpose?
- How have horror movies changed over the years?
- If you were to direct a scary movie on the same subject, what would you do differently?

Some horror movies are restricted.

- Do you think this is a good idea? Why?
- At what age is a child too young to watch a horror movie? Why?