

Learning Guide



Pumpkin Spice

We hope you enjoyed learning about pumpkins, jack-o'-lanterns, costumes, and trick-or-treating. Extend your learning with this print-ready Learning Guide!



What's in this Learning Guide?

Get Set to Listen:

Check your knowledge before and after listening to the episode by determining if statements are TRUE or FALSE.

Vocabulary

Discussion Questions

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3-8.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3-8.3

Writing Prompts and Extension Projects

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.2; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.3; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.4; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.7; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.8

Lantern Tales: Creating New Stories from Old Legends

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.3

Halloween Around the World - reading passage and comparison chart

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.3-5.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.3.9; NMSS: Multi-Identity Interactions: 2.27

Pumpkin: A Fruit with Many Uses - reading passage with comprehension questions

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.3-5.1

Pumpkin Density Experiment & Other Math with Pumpkins

CCSS.Math.Content.8.G.C.9; CCSS.Math.Content.K.CC.B.4; CCSS.Math.Content.1.OA.A.1; CCSS.Math.Content.2.OA.C.3; 2-PS1-1 Matter and Its Interactions

Additional Resources and Book List



The Children's Hour
kids public radio

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<https://www.childrenshour.org/pumpkin-spice/>



Get Set to Listen

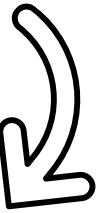
1. Before listening!

Read each statement and write TRUE or FALSE based on what you already know.



2. After listening!

Based on what the experts said in the episode, write TRUE or FALSE.



Before Listening	TRUE or FALSE?	After Listening
	1. A teal pumpkin outside a house means that it does not have any scary decorations that could give kids nightmares.	
	2. A pumpkin is a vegetable.	
	3. 151 million pumpkins are consumed in the United States during the Halloween season.	
	4. Pilgrims taught the Native people how to grow pumpkins and other crops.	
	5. There are more than 45 varieties of pumpkin, and they range in color from red, orange, yellow, and green.	
	6. Jack-o'-lanterns were originally carved from turnips, not pumpkins.	
	7. In Scotland and Ireland, children have to perform a song or poem to get treats when they trick-or-treat.	

What did you learn?



Get Set to Listen

Answer key

1. FALSE. A teal pumpkin outside a house means that it has treats that are safe for kids with food allergies.
2. FALSE. A pumpkin is a **fruit** because it develops from the flower of the pumpkin plant and contains seeds. But since pumpkins aren't sweet, people often cook and eat them like a vegetable.
3. TRUE
4. FALSE. The Wampanoag, who are native to the eastern coast of North America where the Pilgrims landed, taught the Pilgrims to grow pumpkins along with corn and beans using the sustainable 'Three Sisters' method. Guidance from leaders like Massasoit and the help of Squanto were crucial to the Pilgrims' survival as they learned to adapt to the new land.
5. TRUE
6. TRUE
7. TRUE

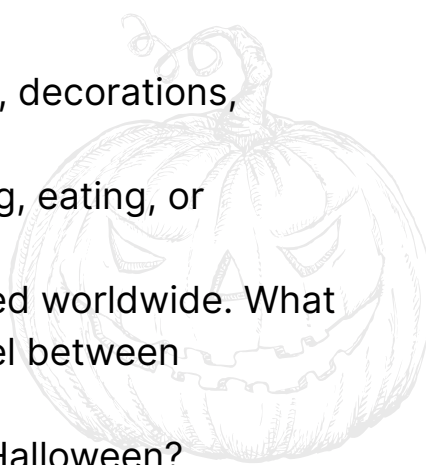


Vocabulary

jack-o'-lantern	A carved lantern most commonly made from a pumpkin or root vegetable. They are used to represent scary beings as a way to playfully scare others, and some believe that they protect homes from evil spirits.
Indigenous	The first people who lived in a place, and whose families, cultures, and traditions have been there for a very long time.
medicinal	Something that can be used as medicine to help people feel better or stay healthy.
anaphylactic food allergy	A dangerous reaction to food that can make it hard to breathe and needs fast medical help.
folklore	The traditional stories, songs, and beliefs shared by a group of people and passed down from one generation to the next.
ancestor	A family member from long ago, like a great-grandparent, who lived before you.



Discussion Questions

- 
1. How do people use pumpkins in different ways (food, decorations, celebrations)?
 2. What is your favorite way to enjoy pumpkins—carving, eating, or something else?
 3. Pumpkins are native to the Americas but are now used worldwide. What does this tell us about how foods and traditions travel between cultures?
 4. Why do you think people tell spooky stories around Halloween?
 5. What Halloween symbols (like black cats, witches, or ghosts) do you know? What do they represent?
 6. The jack-o'-lantern comes from Irish folklore, but changed once it came to America (turnips → pumpkins). What does this say about how traditions adapt in new places?
 7. Why do people keep retelling folklore, even if they don't fully believe in it? What purpose does it serve in a community?
 8. What do you enjoy most about trick-or-treating?
 9. Should trick-or-treating be for all ages or just for kids? Why?
 10. How does trick-or-treating bring communities together, and what challenges does it create (safety, inclusivity, fairness)?
 11. How can communities make trick-or-treating safe and fun for everyone?

Group Discussion Strategies

Think Pair Share:

1. Individually, student writes down their answer to a question.
2. Students pair up and tell each other their answers.
3. Teacher calls for volunteers to share with the whole class their answer (and/or their partner's answer). Teacher notes key words/phrases on board.

Round Robin:

1. Teacher poses one question (written on top of a large page) to students, who are assembled into small groups of 3 or 4.
2. Students take turns brainstorming the answers. The recorder of the group writes down all answers.
3. The leader reads the group's ideas to the entire class. Teacher moderates.



Writing Prompts

Narrative Prompts

1. Imagine your jack-o'-lantern came to life on Halloween night—what happens?

Extension: Draw a comic strip of your story.

2. Describe what happens when you and your friends find a giant pumpkin in the middle of your neighborhood.

Extension: Design a “giant pumpkin” news article headline about it.

3. Tell the story of a Halloween night from the point of view of a pumpkin.

Extension: Record it as a spooky audio story.

4. In Scotland and Ireland, kids have to perform a song or poem before they are given treats on Halloween. Write a song or poem to perform when you trick-or-treat this year. I bet you'll get more candy!

Informative/Explanatory Prompts

1. Research different Halloween traditions around the world.

Extension: Choose one or more traditions to add to your celebration this year.

2. Compare and contrast pumpkins and other fall squashes.

Extension: Make a Venn diagram of similarities and differences.

3. Explain why people go trick-or-treating and how the tradition started.

Extension: Interview a family member about their trick-or-treating memories.

4. Research and explain one piece of Halloween folklore (like black cats, ghosts, or witches).

Extension: Present it as a mini “folklore museum” exhibit with drawings or props.

5. Explain the steps for carving a jack-o'-lantern, from choosing a pumpkin to lighting it up.

Extension: Make a step-by-step illustrated guide.

Opinion/Persuasive Prompts

1. Should trick-or-treating be allowed to go later at night? Convince your audience.

Extension: Write a letter to your town's mayor or city council.

2. What's better: homemade costumes or store-bought costumes? Defend your opinion.

3. Which is better, going trick-or-treating, or having a Halloween party and passing out candy at your house?

Extension: Hold a debate.



Lantern Tales

Creating New Stories from Old Legends

Read

[How Jack O'Lanterns Originated in Irish Myth](#) from history.com



Listen

- [Part 1: The Legend of "Stingy Jack"](#)

Write

your own legend about how jack-o'-lanterns came to be.



Brainstorm

- Using a whiteboard and/or the worksheet below, brainstorm ideas:
 - Who might be the main character in your story? (human, animal, pumpkin, spirit)
 - Where does your story take place? (forest, village, backyard, magical land)
 - What problem or event leads to the first jack-o'-lantern?
- Encourage imaginative twists: magical pumpkins, talking ghosts, or heroic animals.

Draft & Edit

- Students write their own story about how jack-o'-lanterns came to be.
- Remind them to include:
 - A beginning that sets the scene
 - A middle with the main event or problem
 - An ending that explains how jack-o'-lanterns came to exist

Optional: Students can illustrate their story with pictures of the pumpkins or characters.

Extensions

- Turn the stories into a class book with illustrations.
- Perform a play or puppet show of your story.
- Tell the stories around a "fire".



Upload your stories to our Instagram [@tchradio](#), TikTok [@thechildrenshourradio](#), and [Facebook page](#), and check out what others have written!



Mail your stories to:
The Children's Hour
PO Box 70236
Albuquerque, NM 87197



[Record a Voice Message](#)
This might be used on The Children's Hour!



Post your stories
on our Instagram,
TikTok and
Facebook! Check
out others'
stories!



Lantern Tales

Creating New Stories from Old Legends

Name: _____

Write Your Own Jack-o'-Lantern Legend



Brainstorm Your Ideas

Main Character(s): _____

Where the story takes place: _____

What happens to **start** the story? _____

Problem or event in the story? _____

How it **ends**/how jack-o'-lanterns came to be? _____



Halloween Around the World

*Halloween is a holiday that is dedicated to remembering the dead. The holiday and a variety of versions of it are celebrated differently around the world. The origins of these holidays are found throughout the ancient histories, beliefs, and religious practices of **Indigenous** cultures. The way they are celebrated today has evolved greatly into many different versions. Read the following passage and compare and contrast the celebrations around the world using the comparison chart provided on the next page.*

Ancient people from Europe, such as the Celts, celebrated a religious festival called Samhain on the night of the 31st of October, when they believed a boundary between the living and the dead opened up and allowed for interaction with spirits who have passed. It was also a festival that celebrated the harvest and welcomed the winter season. Today, European countries with largely Christian populations celebrate “All Saints Day” or call it other names, including “All Hallows Eve” and “Dia de los Santos” on Nov 1.

Many of these traditions were brought over to North and South America and blended in with the already existing strong traditions of their **Indigenous** peoples. In North America, such as what is now Canada and the United States, ancient peoples also celebrated the harvest and the change of season. In the United States today, Halloween is celebrated on October 31st. Telling or hearing scary stories, carving jack-o’-lantern pumpkins, dressing in costume, and trick-or-treating are popular activities. Ghosts, witches, black cats, and other supernatural beings are often portrayed. These traditions have become so popular through music, movies, TV, and themed products that many of these traditions are followed and recognized in many other countries, including Australia and New Zealand, where some of the music from our show came from!

Mexico and other South American countries celebrate Día de Muertos (the Day of the Dead) and/or Dia de los Angelitos, y de los Difuntos. Typically, the celebrations last three days, from October 31st to November 2nd. Unlike in the US, where there is a focus on death as something spooky or scary, in these cultures, the mood reflects a celebration of life through family. Many families construct an altar with symbolic and important items to honor their late ancestors and make their favorite dishes for their spirits to enjoy. In Guatemala, giant kites are made to guide and welcome the spirits as they arrive to visit their families, in Mexico, monarch butterflies and marigold flowers help serve a similar purpose.

In China, there are several days and an entire month that are similar to Halloween, in that they honor the dead. The seventh month of the Chinese lunar calendar (August) is “Ghost Month” (鬼月 Gui Yue). People may try to avoid doing anything dangerous during that month because they believe bad things are more likely. Around this time is when the Hungry Ghost Festival is celebrated – it is reminiscent of Halloween or the Day of the Dead in that food is prepared for deceased ancestors and brought to places of rest such as cemeteries. Other holidays in China to honor the dead and living ancestors are the Qing Ming Festival (in April) and the Double Nine Festival (in October).



Halloween Around the World

Halloween Around the World Comparison Chart

Fill the chart with notes from the reading.

Halloween or Other Version	When do they celebrate?	What do they celebrate?	How do they celebrate?
Europe			
United States			
Mexico and South America			
China			

In what ways do some places celebrate very differently than others?

In what ways do some places celebrate in ways that are in common with others?

Extension

Research more about how other areas of the world celebrate and honor their loved ones who have passed. Add them to your chart!



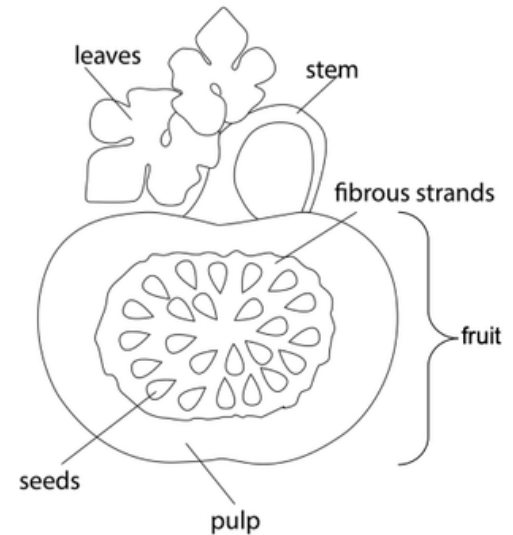
Pumpkin: A Fruit with Many Uses

Biologically, pumpkins are a fruit of the squash plant (scientific name: *Cucurbita pepo*) because they grow from the seed-bearing part of the plant—like apples, peaches, strawberries, and cucumbers. Fruits help plants spread their seeds: animals eat the pulp and seeds, then disperse the seeds when they defecate (poop). Vegetables, by contrast, are other edible parts of plants, like leaves (lettuce), roots (carrots), bulbs (onions), or tubers (potatoes).

As we learned in [the show](#), pumpkins are native to the Americas, and they have been harvested for thousands of years for different purposes. Apart from providing nutritious and plentiful food for energy, they also have **medicinal** purposes.

Pumpkin has vitamin C, vitamin E, iron, and folate—all of which strengthen the immune system to better ward off germs and speed healing when you get a wound. The delicious seeds can help eliminate infections and parasites in the intestines. Learn more about the medicinal benefits of pumpkins with this [article](#).

Indigenous peoples pass down knowledge of how to use every part of the pumpkin. [Dried flesh can be woven into mats](#), leaves and stems can be composted for fertilizer, and uneaten parts can be left for wildlife.



Comprehension Questions:

1. What part of the plant makes a pumpkin a fruit? _____
2. How do animals help plants spread their seeds? _____

3. List some of the medicinal benefits of pumpkins. _____

4. How can pumpkin seeds help the body? _____

5. What is the difference between a fruit and a vegetable according to the passage?

6. How did **Indigenous** peoples use all parts of the pumpkin? Give at least two examples.

Discuss

Can you think of other foods we eat that are fruits but often thought of as vegetables? Why do you think that happens?

Listen to [Part 2: Facts about Pumpkins](#)



Pumpkin Density Experiment

Materials

- Several pumpkins (different sizes, mini to medium work best)
- Large tub/bin of water (deep enough for pumpkins to float/sink)
- Scale
- Flexible measuring tape or string
- Student worksheet (predictions, measurements, calculations)

Discuss

Do you think this pumpkin will float or sink? Why?

Explore

- Place pumpkins one at a time in water.
- Observe: Do big pumpkins sink? Do small pumpkins float?

Explain

- Introduce the concept of density: *Density=Mass/Volume*
- **Measure:**
 - *Mass:* weigh pumpkin on scale.
 - *Volume:* $V = \frac{4}{3}\pi r^3$
- **Calculate** density in groups with teacher guidance.

Reflect

- *Compare pumpkin density to water's density (1 g/mL).*
- *Why do hollow pumpkins usually float even if they're heavy?*
- *Why does a pumpkin's structure (hollow vs. solid) affect whether it floats?*

Extensions

- Compare whether a whole pumpkin floats vs. just a chunk of the rind.
- Are different varieties of pumpkins of different densities? (Do they all float?)
- Cut open a pumpkin: compare seed-filled sections vs. hollow space.
- Try with other fruits/vegetables (apples, potatoes, squash) to see which float.
- Do pumpkin seeds get lighter or heavier when you roast them? How much? Why?

Other Math with Pumpkins

Measurement

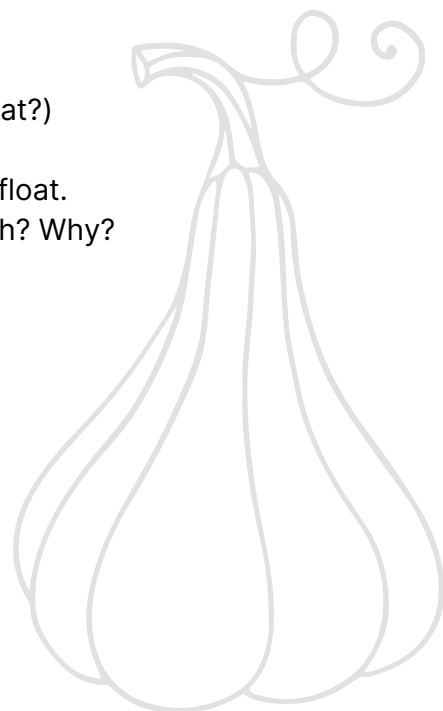
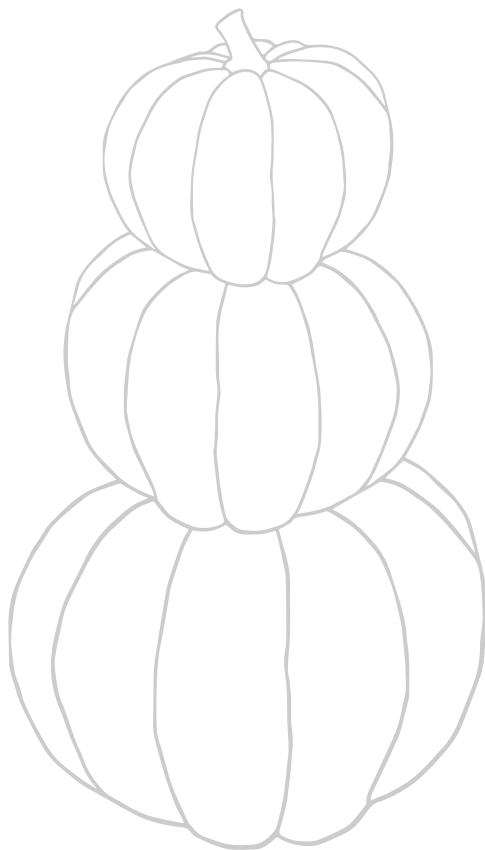
- Estimate, then measure pumpkin height, circumference, and weight.

Numbers & Operations

- Estimate and count the number of seeds in a pumpkin.
- Skip count by 2s, 5s, or 10s.
- Create addition/multiplication problems from the seed groups.

Graphing

- Record estimates vs. actual measurements on a table or graph.
- Discuss patterns: Do bigger pumpkins always have more seeds?





Pumpkin Density Experiment

Step 1: Predictions

Do you think the pumpkin will float or sink? ☐ Float ☐ Sink

Why do you think that?



Step 2: Observations

What actually happened when we placed the pumpkin in water?

Step 3: Measurements

Pumpkin Mass (grams): _____

Pumpkin Circumference (cm): _____

Estimated Radius (cm): _____

Estimated Volume (cm³): _____

Hint: Volume of a sphere $\approx V = \frac{4}{3}\pi r^3$

Step 4: Density Calculation

Density = Mass / Volume

Pumpkin Density = _____ g/cm³

Water Density = 1 g/cm³

Step 5: Conclusion

Is the pumpkin's density less than or greater than water's density? _____

How does that explain why the pumpkin floated or sank?

Challenge:

Compare different pumpkins or other fruits/vegetables. Do they all float? Why or why not?



Additional Resources

[How to Make an Ofrenda for Día de los Muertos](#) from NPR

[51 Easy Halloween Costumes for Kids](#)

[Healthy Pumpkin Recipes to Cook with Kids](#)

Practice cooking with these kid-friendly, healthy pumpkin recipes.

[53 Halloween Activities for Kids](#)

Check out these 50 Halloween activities for kids.

[Be a Pal program](#)

This program teaches children and teenagers how to protect friends with food allergies, providing resources for educators and youth leaders in grades K–12.

Videos

[Kids Try Halloween Foods from Around the World](#)

dd

[What is Day of the Dead?](#)

This video from National Geographic

[How to Make an American Indian Pumpkin Mat](#)

The Pawnee and Wichita peoples made pumpkin mats for storage and trade, and you can try making one too.

[PBS Kids Halloween videos](#)

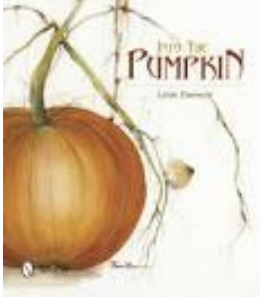
Find something fun and interesting in PBS Learning Media's Halloween Collection.

[Teal Pumpkin Project](#)

Halloween can be extra scary for the 1 in 13 children with food allergies. Learn how you can help!



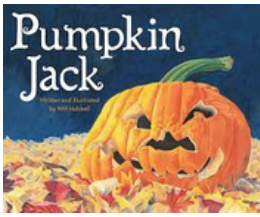
Book List



Into the Pumpkin

by Linda Franklin

Pumpkins, witches, and ghosts team up for a party, a broomstick ride, and a magical trip in this beautifully illustrated book.
ages 8-12



Pumpkin Jack

by Will Hubbell

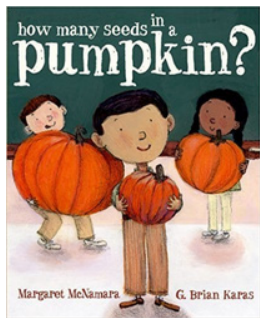
Tim's jack-o'-lantern rots, sprouts, and grows again in this gentle, beautifully illustrated story of life's cycle.
ages 4-8



Pumpkin Circle

by Shmuel Thaler

Follow pumpkins from seed to harvest and back in this vibrant, fall-filled picture book with lively verse and stunning photos.
ages 4-8



How Many Seeds in a Pumpkin?

by Margaret McNamara, illustrated by G. Brian Karas

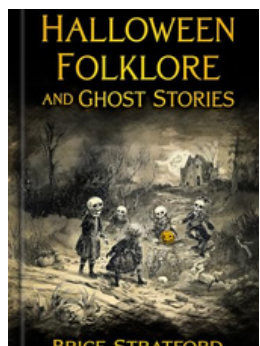
A spirited young girl named Ruby discovers the joy of birdwatching and quietly observing nature with her neighbor, and inspires her family to join in the adventure.
ages 4-8



In Search of the Perfect Pumpkin

by Gloria Evangelista, illustrated by Shawn Shea

Join a family hunting the perfect pumpkin in this fun, fact-filled picture book—and try your own pumpkin taste test!
ages 5+



Halloween Folklore and Ghost Stories

by Brice Stratford

A wild, witchy journey through Halloween's forgotten history, ghost stories, and ancient lore—where jack-o'-lanterns burn and the eerie past comes alive.