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Teachers' Corner

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Trick or Treat, Smell My Feet, Give Me Something Good To Teach



The fall climate, in combination with the highly anticipated annual Giant Pumpkin weigh-off this coming weekend, has led me to reflect upon the season from multiple educational perspectives. I had so much fun last year making interdisciplinary connections to this month's holiday, so I figured I would revisit my ideas for classroom connections during this month of October, where the topic of conversation seems to revolve around the question, "What will you be for Halloween?" I offer the following suggestions for great content to use with your curious and/or advanced students, who will certainly benefit from looking at Halloween as more than just a night to go out and trick (hopefully not too tricky) or treat.

Below are a few ideas and resources for each of the main discipline areas (Science, Math, History/Business, Language/Writing/Reading, Arts/Music.) These "mini-lessons" may be used during class or serve as enrichment activities for students who show interest and have some spare time during a particular class period. Gifted coordinators and teachers could make use of them during weekly enrichment times, as part of before and after school programs, or inserted into pre-existing curriculum. Again, these are just a short sampling of what is possible. I hope that they stir up a cauldron of ideas. Have fun, and Happy Halloween!

Science Connections

- Have your students visit the online database, [The Encyclopedia of Life \(EOL\)](#), and search and read about the many different pumpkin and bat species. They can even create a virtual collection of their finds.
- Involve students in the dissection of a pumpkin, identifying the parts and using their observational skills to sketch and describe what is seen. Or, bring a variety of pumpkins and gourds in for comparative studies.
- Prepare a procedure for [growing a pumpkin](#). If time and conditions are right, carry it out.
- Introduce students to a great [Virtual Skeletal System](#) website developed by the University of Wyoming. There is so much to learn about.

Math Connections

- Instruct the students to take [size and growth measurements of pumpkins](#). A great discussion and classroom lesson can be found here.
- Introduce the topics of correlation and/or forensics using a [Bone Measurement activity on PBS](#).
- Start a discussion about estimations with bags of candy corn or statistics relating to surveys about costumes or candy.

History/Business Connections

- Explore the History of Halloween. [The History Channel](#), along with the [Library of Congress' Folk Life Center](#) have great resources for the classroom.
- Travel to a local cemetery and conduct some historical research and grave rubbings. [An example lesson can be found here](#) .
- Access or create business plans and complete a cost analysis of growing and selling pumpkins and related seasonal items.

Language/Writing/Reading Connections

- Visit the library around this time of year and you will most likely find a display of the most popular ghost stories, children's books, poems and plays which could be shared and discussed with your students.
- View and offer the complete text of Washington Irving's [The Legend of Sleepy Hollow](#) from Project Gutenberg. The website also has a host of other great seasonal stories and an [audio recording of the story](#).
- Have the students write a short poem or story with a suggested spooky theme.

Arts and Music Connections

- Present a variety of painters and illustrators whose work touches on Halloween themes. [View a selection online](#).
- Have the students create masks, props, and costumes with an expert touch. They could also research professional make-up design.
- Offer musical selections often associated with Halloween. "Monster Mash," "Thriller," and "Werewolves of London" are my favorites!
- Introduce film appreciation? There is a [great free download of "Nosferatu,"](#) a 1922 silent film. Nothing could be better than watching some of the classic horror films and their stars Bela Lugosi and Lon Cheney. The camera shots and editing are great examples of fine cinema.
- View the ["Scary Mary" spoof trailer](#) of Mary Poppins. It presents a great example of the impact of soundtrack elements.