

# Elizabeth Krebs: Queen of Halloween

I scream, you scream, we all scream: It's Halloween! While the origins of Halloween are well known to many, how did we get from a serious religious holiday to one filled with candy and revelry in America? We have Elizabeth Krebs, a determined and bold homemaker and community leader, to thank for that. This activity includes a discussion and questions to start a conversation, as well as a Halloween trivia quiz.

### Props & Preparations

- To set the mood, play this vintage [Ragtime Halloween playlist](#). Hand out some Halloween candies to snack on.
- Print out the [large-print quiz](#) to hand out. Test people's Halloween knowledge after reading the discussion. If desired, you can hand out a candy for each correct answer.



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### Introduction

For over 100 years, we have had a mild-mannered, garden-loving woman from Hiawatha, Kansas, to thank for all the fun of trick-or-treating. From her local community of Hiawatha, which boasts the longest continuously running Halloween parade in the United States, to the nation at large, Elizabeth Krebs deserves credit for the joyous and peaceful way we celebrate the holiday each year.

Elizabeth Krebs (née Oehmer) was born on November 14, 1848, in Canton, Berne, Switzerland. Her family emigrated to America in 1855, settling in New Philadelphia, Ohio. The family was marred by tragedy, and by age 13, Elizabeth was orphaned. However, in 1870, she wed John Krebs and settled into a happy domestic life that included four children and a beautiful garden.

By 1914, the Krebses were living in Hiawatha, and Elizabeth was by all accounts a cheerful addition to the local community. She was a regular contributor to the local newspaper, *Hiawatha World*, where she voiced her thoughts about the local public gardens and also established the Hiawatha Garden Club. It was this passion for a beautiful community that led Krebs to be dedicated to her celebration of Halloween.

Before trick-or-treating was the norm, children called the night “Mischief Night” or “Night of Destruction.” They would run wild through their towns and cities, playing pranks that ranged from the simple house egging to starting dangerous fires. And in between? The destruction of gardens.

Obviously, the destruction of public and private gardens did not sit well with Elizabeth Krebs, but she did not feel that punishment or strict rules would do anyone any good. She began to think of a way to amuse and entertain the children so that they would be too busy and too joyful to think about pranking anyone—or pull up anyone's prized rose bushes.

## Discussion Starters

- What are your feelings on pranks? Where do you draw the line between fun and destructive?
- Why do you think Elizabeth had such a strong connection to her adopted hometown?
- How have you been involved in your community?
- Do you have anything in your life that you love or want to protect as much as Elizabeth Krebs and her gardens? What would you do if anyone tried to ruin your favorite thing?

## From Fright Night to Fete

According to local *Hiawatha Daily World* reporter Virginia Regier, Krebs' idea to host a party for the community's youth was considered "foolish" at first. Still, a headstrong and determined Elizabeth went ahead with her plans. She was adamant that there be costumes and a parade with whistles and music that would wind through the main roads to downtown. There, the parade would file into the Armstrong Opera House, where there was a costume contest for all the children, with sweets given away as prizes. Music and comedians made the event appealing to people of all ages.

The first year was a success, so Elizabeth threw the party again the following year, pleased she had figured out a way to protect the community from property damage. For the next few years, the event grew and grew until Elizabeth could no longer manage the event on her own. By then, the event was so popular that members of the community, and later the chamber of commerce, sponsored the event. Although Elizabeth was no longer in complete control of the merriment, she was still heavily involved.

Starting in 1919, the event added a second contest: Halloween Carnival Queen. The competition and the party continued to evolve each year, with the parade growing bigger and bigger. Floats were added, as well as a full marching band. People attended from near and far. With the influx of outsiders, so spread the idea of a Halloween filled with costumes, parties, and candy.

Today, America is home to some of the largest Halloween celebrations in the world. Although these celebrations have little to do with the origin of the holiday, it cannot be denied that they are fun and festive. So, this year, hand out a little extra candy in celebration of Elizabeth Krebs—a believer of fun and protector of gardens!

## Discussion Starters

- What are your memories of Halloween as a child? What was your community's celebration like?
- Why do you think that almost every country has its own version of Halloween? What about the idea of ghosts do you think resonates with us?
- Elizabeth Krebs decided to create a party for the children who vandalized her garden rather than punish them. What are your thoughts on what Elizabeth did to combat vandalism? Why do you think it worked? What are ways you and your community could try to redirect unwanted behavior into a more positive experience for everyone?

## Halloween Quiz

1. Where does the term *jack-o'-lantern* come from?

**Answer:** The term *jack-o'-lantern* originates from an Irish folktale about a cheap man named "Stingy Jack" who made a deal with the devil.

2. Why did women look in mirrors while walking downstairs at midnight on Halloween?

**Answer:** To see their boyfriends

3. Where is the world's longest haunted place?

**Answer:** The Haunted Cave in Lewisburg, Ohio, is a whopping 3,564 feet long and located 80 feet underground!

4. What vegetable is part of a tradition on the night before Halloween?

**Answer:** Cabbage is often used in pranks on Mischief Night, sometimes referred to as Cabbage Night. People would sometimes leave stinky, rotten cabbage near neighbors' doors.

5. How many pounds of candy corn are produced each year?

**Answer:** A whopping 35 million pounds of candy corn is made every year—amounting to about nine billion pieces.

6. When was Trick-or-Treat for UNICEF founded?

**Answer:** 1950

7. What was candy corn originally called?

**Answer:** Chicken feed

8. Which first lady was the first to decorate the White House for Halloween?

**Answer:** Mamie Eisenhower in 1958

9. What famous magician died on Halloween?

**Answer:** Harry Houdini

10. How many calories are in an average trick-or-treater's Halloween stash?

**Answer:** About 11,000

11. What is the most popular Halloween candy in America?

**Answer:** Skittles

12. What were the first-ever fun-size candy bars?

**Answer:** Snickers and Milky Way

13. How many pieces of candy does the average house give to each trick-or-treater?

**Answer:** Two pieces

14. Why do some people wear clothes inside out on Halloween?

**Answer:** One superstition states that if you wear your clothes inside out and walk backward on Halloween, you'll see a witch at midnight.

15. What was candy corn originally called?

**Answer:** Chicken Feed

16. What ancient Roman goddess is said to be honored on Halloween?

**Answer:** Pomona, the goddess of fruit and trees. Many believe bobbing for apples on Halloween stemmed from Roman traditions to honor Pomona.

17. What was the Munsters' address?

**Answer:** 1313 Mockingbird Lane

18. When was Halloween first celebrated in the United States?

**Answer:** Around the 1840s, when there was a flood of Irish immigrants

19. What is the most commercially successful horror franchise of all time?

**Answer:** *Godzilla*

20. In what country did Halloween originate?

**Answer:** Ireland.

### **Additional Activities**

1. Take some time to reminisce over [Halloween costumes of the past](#). Some are downright scary compared to what we wear today. Do you prefer the costumes of the past or more [modern ones](#)?
  2. If you haven't planned your costume for this year yet, here are [70 easy-to-make last-minute costumes](#) you can choose from. Host your own Halloween parade and hand out candy or other treats.
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