



## Be Mindful about Halloween Celebrations at School

By Educator Barnes – October 28, 2019

Since summer started to wrap up, Halloween displays began appearing in stores across America. Costumes of princesses, vampires, and superheroes line the shelves. Don't forget the section of the store filled with nothing but candy. As widely popular as Halloween is, it is still a day that some children do not participate. I remember being one of those children.

My childhood consisted of being raised in a Christian household where we attended a missionary Baptist church. Halloween was one of my least favorite days of the year (and still is). Once October rolled around, I was reminded at church that Halloween was bad, and it was

wrong to dress up as a scary monster. One church elder said it was demonic. To keep us out of trouble, my church held Holy Heroes Night on Halloween. Instead of trick-or-treating, the youth of my church were told to report to church dressed as a person from the Bible. We played games, ate pizza, and received candy. I hated every single minute of it except eating pizza. If I couldn't participate in Halloween, I wished I could stay home and not be forced to participate in an alternative celebration.

Alternative Halloween celebrations are becoming more popular in schools. Many adults who serve in schools love Halloween. It was part of their childhood. They have spent weeks thinking about their costume and purchasing all the components necessary for it to be perfect. They want to share their Halloween joy with their students. That may mean changing the classroom décor to a spooky theme or even sneaking in a scary movie onto the agenda one day in October. As much as this is a way to connect to many students, it isolates some.

To be more inclusive, schools have made substitutions. A popular activity is having a book character day in October near Halloween. Most schools won't have it on Halloween, so they won't be accused of celebrating Halloween...but it is clear they still are. For the most part, students wear the exact costume they will wear for trick-or-treating on Halloween.

Don't get me wrong; I think dressing up as a character is a great activity but not just for the sake of dressing up. If there was an academic component and it was an extension activity for a book students recently read, I would be all for it. Unfortunately, it is only a thinly veiled Halloween substitute. The other problem is some students come from families where they cannot afford to dress up.

I say scrap the substitutions. As a gardener who grows her own food, I would prefer students have a more authentic learning experience in October and learn about harvesting and what farmers do during this time. Then, conclude those lessons with a fall festival where delicious harvest treats are served. It would be a more authentic celebration where everyone could be included.

Instead of providing a substitute, don't bother with Halloween at all. In the younger grades, you won't have to worry about helping students get out of their costumes during the restroom break or students having difficulty working in all those costume components. It's not necessary. Let the families who want to participate do it on their own time. It will be one less thing for teachers to manage at school.