



## School Culture Must be More Than Dressing Up for Halloween

By Educator Barnes – October 26, 2021

“We have to figure out what our theme will be for Halloween.”

Every year when I heard this statement, I cringed. Halloween is just another day on the calendar for me. The only Halloween activity I do faithfully is watch “It’s the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown.” It does not matter how many times I hear Pig-Pen say “I got a rock,” I still laugh. Aside from laughing at Pig-Pen’s misfortune, I do not celebrate Halloween.

That never mattered to my colleagues. My failure to participate in dressing up in a Halloween costume sent a message that I was stuck up or that I was negatively impacting the school culture. What negatively impacted the school culture was a sense of peer pressure and a lack of acknowledging that someone can be different and belong. The people who were negatively impacting the school culture were the ones who failed to understand that some people do not want to participate in Halloween activities. This could be for various reasons.

These two memes sum up my childhood.



Every Halloween, I was at church for Holy Heroes Night where you could dress up as your favorite person from the Bible. My sisters and I didn't dress up. I liked it better than whatever it was I was allegedly missing out on because I was not allowed to go trick-or-treating. At church, I got a decent dinner and a bag of candy, and we only had to go to one place. Some of my childhood friends from church used adulthood to make up for Halloween. Some of us, like me, were not that interested in reclaiming what we lost supposedly lost as children. I do not feel like I lost anything. As an introvert, I wish I could have had dinner and candy at home, but since that was not an option, being around people I knew from church was better than knocking on strangers' doors.

The last thing I wanted to do as a teacher was help pick a theme and then participate in dressing up. I knew that would bring me no joy. If you would have said make pumpkin bread with the pumpkins you grew, I would have answered that call ... not this year but during previous years when I grew pumpkins. School culture is not forcing people to participate in

activities. It is allowing them to be their authentic selves and participate if they want to participate without being made to feel bad if they do not participate.

When I was an administrator, I did participate one time. I regretted breaking my streak of not participating. I refused to be dressed up during the day, but I put on this apron and hat to be an expo marker. No one got what we were supposed to be, but everyone realized quickly that I only participated for the picture ... which became its own story. The next year, as an admin, I did not participate. The culture at that school was damaged and no amount of dressing alike was going to save it.

If you are pressuring a fellow educator to dress up for Halloween for the sake of school culture, stop it. Accept no for an answer and find other ways to connect with your colleague.