

Halloween Events

by Joe Alsheimer

Besides holding parties at our school, there are two other Halloween events that we do: a Haunted House, and Trick-or-Treat. The students may choose to attend either or both of these events, each for a separate fee. We don't charge for the party as that is covered by the yearly materials fee. The other two events are 500 yen per event or 900 yen for both events. We charge a little more for non-student children and give no discount if they attend both.

Haunted house

A haunted house is a lot of work and can be expensive, but for us it is worth it and is still a unique Halloween event here in Japan. I've found some great source materials to help out. Give Them a Real Scare This Halloween, by Joseph Pfeiffer, is a book that has all kinds of ideas for sets, props, etc. Haunted House Horrors (from Drew's Famous Party Music Series) is a CD of creepy haunted house sound effects with some eerie synthesized sounds in the background. You can hear samples at Amazon.com. There is also a ton of stuff on the Internet about how to set up and run a haunted house. Let's just go over the basics of how we set up our haunted house.

Several weeks to up to a month in advance we give the students a series of 3 handouts. The first one states that we are looking for volunteers to help set up and take down the haunted house, and also has the time and the date of the event. A haunted house needs several people to make it work and setting and cleaning up can be quite a task if you don't enlist the help of your students and/or their parents. Don't underestimate people's desire to help and get to know you better. We had no shortage of volunteers last year. It is also a good idea to give a rough



approximation of how long they will be helping and what they will be expected to do. If you get 7-10 volunteers, taking things down and cleaning up is really quick and easy. Otherwise, you are looking at several hours of just you and your staff doing it. Once you have your volunteers you should make a specific list of things for the volunteers to do. Otherwise, you run the risk of having a bunch of people standing around while 2 or 3 people do all the work.

The second handout explains what Halloween is and what the students need to bring. For example, we would like them to come in costume and bring a treat bag.

The third handout has the various times that are available to tour the haunted house, with check boxes next to them. Since you can only take 5 or 6 students through at one time, you don't want everyone showing up at the same time. We offer staggered times for when they can come; otherwise there would be 50 to 75 costumed children with their parents hanging out in front of our school on a Saturday afternoon. There is also a tear-off receipt because they must pre-pay if they wish to attend, as well as the rules for the event. For example, we are in no way responsible for anything that happens during the event and they must sign to this effect. In



addition, they need to have at least one adult with them although the adults do not usually enter the haunted house because it is set up for the children only. We don't allow pre-grade school children because of the fear factor. After the students pay we give them confirmation for the time that they will come, and a sticker that they must wear on their clothes or costume so we know they have paid.

Your haunted house should have some kind of theme: a haunted graveyard, ghost pirates, zombies, alien invasion, or whatever you want to do. A bunch of gruesome things that have no relationship to each other isn't as scary as something involving your imagination. If you tap into your imagination then you can do anything. The kids who come to your haunted house want to be scared, but you have to prime them with something. The best thing that we have found to really get them going, as well as tie everything together, is to tell stories about each exhibit. We do this in Japanese, not English. Thus, your spooky tour guide should have a fair understanding of Japanese. I'm not saying that you can't use any English. For example, we tell the kids that when they start to get scared to say, "Happy Halloween," three times and the spirits will go back to where they came from and leave them alone. I had to stifle some laughs last year when I heard some of the kids repeatedly murmuring, "Happy Halloween, Happy Halloween," as they walked through the sets. The tours

take 5-9 minutes each, with 5-10 minutes between each tour for resetting everything for the next group.

Your haunted house should have several 'rooms,' as turning corners and not knowing what to expect adds to the suspense. Our school has a garage that we use as the haunted house. The shutters are pulled down and black cloth is hung near the entrance to try and keep out as much light as possible. We use more black cloth that runs from the ceiling to the floor to create walls and corridors. We board up the windows with cardboard and used some black lights. The tour guide walks around with a flashlight. We use a scary CD with lots of moaning, cackling and screams, set on replay and kept on the whole time. This helps to create an atmosphere of terror. We also have people dress up and jump out and scare the kids or pretend to be part of the sets and come out to scare them. However, you should be careful and adjust according to the age group and how scared they really are. We came up with some signals that the tour guide uses when the kids are really scared, so the next group of ghouls would not frighten them more. This is the reason for our lower age limit. Even with all of these precautions, there are still some children who get scared and can't go inside, in which case they just proceed to the apple bobbing and game room.

Trick or Treat

Whereas the haunted house is primarily for slightly older students, the trick-or-treat event is mostly for our younger students though all ages are welcome. It is actually quite simple to organize and the little ones are really cute in their costumes. It is also a fun event that the parents participate in, and we have a chance to meet some of the parents for the first time.

We have a series of 3 handouts for our students. The first one, which our students give to their parents, gives some general information about the event and states that we are looking for volunteers around our school to hand out candy, which we provide. Many of our students live near our school, and we often ask those parents personally if they would volunteer. We usually have 5 places around our school each year that volunteer.

The second handout explains what Halloween is and gives some illustrated examples of some costumes as well as a list of things for the students to bring, like a flashlight and a treat bag. The event is held in the evening, so the flashlight is a necessary item.

The third handout consists of a list of rules, including that every child, no matter how old, must be accompanied by an adult who is fully responsible for that child. We require that every child who wants to attend sign a form stating that. Also, we state that our school is in no way responsible for anything that happens during trick-or-treating. The parents are made to understand that it is their job to make sure their kids walk safely and act appropriately. If you have not more than 15 people (adults and children combined) in a group, you can take everybody together in one group safely. Any more than this is asking for trouble. In big groups some parents tend to chat and don't watch their kids. Crossing streets under these conditions is quite hazardous. This handout also has the time and meeting place where they can pick up the map of the trick-or-treat route. We prepare 2 or 3 maps with different routes so that people won't be stumbling over each other as they go trick-or-treating. We also let people know they can show up anywhere from 6:00-7:00, which also helps to keep it manageable. Along with a map of the route, there will be a sticker to be worn on the outside of the costume. If it is not worn, then they will get no candy, since the candy has been counted out and we want to make sure that those who paid get something. The due date to hand in payment and a tear-off receipt at the bottom is also on this handout.



We also find out who the kumicho, or neighborhood leader, is and talk to them so that they can let everyone in the neighborhood know about what is going on, as some people might be irritated at having a lot of people wandering around their neighborhood. Best to err on the side of caution. Then we count the number of attendees and go out and buy the candy to be handed out. More and more Halloween candy is being sold in Japan so it is easier to get something that looks Halloween-ish instead of just handing out little plain-labeled chocolates. We also buy pumpkins and let those who are handing out the candy for us come to the school and make jack-o'-lanterns. If they can't make the time or simply don't want to, we'll make the jack-o'-lanterns for them. The jack-o'-lanterns are to go out in front of their houses so that people will know which house to go to. We collect the jack-o'-lanterns the next day.

Hope your Halloween is frighteningly good!

Some helpful websites

Planning extra-curricular events: http://etjaichi.kweto.com/presenters/abe_xcurric.htm

How to make puppets:

<http://www.girlscoutsmilehi.org/content/documents/HandPuppets.pdf>

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