“Don’t step on the crack, or you’ll break your mother’s back!” This is one of the many common superstitions still flourishing today. People do things such as avoid walking under ladders and tipping over salt shakers, prevent black cats from walking in front of them, and try not to break mirrors. Although this all may seem asinine, these beliefs have an origin. These superstitions have roots in the common celebration Americans know as Halloween.

Halloween in America is characterized by costume parties, scary movie marathons, haunted houses, and scary figures roaming the neighborhoods in search of free candy. It’s a fun time for kids to dress up as they want and for the community to bond in a way unlike any other.

The origins of Halloween date back to ancient Celtic times in what is now modern day Ireland. The Celts were an early tribe that inhabited a large portion of Europe (England, Ireland, and many other Northern European countries descended from Celts). In the Celtic culture, the new year began on November 1, which was the end of both summer and the harvest. They believed that the eve before November 1, being a change between years, was a time when the spiritual dimension mixed with the human world and evil spirits would come out and wreak havoc. On that evening the Celts held a celebration called Samhain (sow-in), where they would light bonfires, dress up like monsters, and sacrifice livestock and crops to their gods in order to scare away evil spirits. The festival was also a new year celebration and a rejoicing over harvest. They carried on with the festivities until the rise of the Roman Empire, when their land was overtaken. The Romans controlled them and thus imposed their own rites to them. The Celts carried on celebrating Samhain, but it was meshed with a Roman festival that honored the dead. The commemoration lasted this way until the rise of Christianity in Western Europe. When Pope Boniface IV declared May 13 “All Martyrs Day,” Pope Gregory III (731-741), later moved the day to November 1 and changed it to “All Saints Day.”

This holiday expanded, and to honor the saints, people would dress up as saints, martyrs, and devils. The night before “All Saints Day” was known as “All-hallows Eve,” celebrating harvest and scary evil spirits. Eventually, “All-hallows Eve” became “Halloween,” and it was an evening dedicated tomocking evil spirits with bonfires, costumes, and decorations such as jack o’lanterns. The tradition spread in England, and eventually carried over to the colonies. Later, when America became independent, Irish immigrants helped to reaffirm the celebration. In 1806, to make the holiday less savage-like and more secular, cities made a movement to make the holiday friendlier by hosting parties with food and games. From there, the tradition of Halloween began being shaped in molded in different ways.

Halloween, as we know it today, has morphed into a day when horror films, like Friday the 13th, run on TV all day and people decorate their yards to look spooky and eerie. The heart and soul of the holiday in today’s society are dressing up in costumes and trick-or-treating. On the evening of Halloween, one can look out the window and see oodles of three-foot ghosts and ghouls wandering about the streets, holding bags of sweets. The holiday offers parties and festivities, such as haunted houses for people to walk through.

The North Star elementary had fun celebrating Halloween this year. The kids eagerly welcomed the holiday, as they always do, with costumes and “spooky” festivities. The beginning of the school day went as usual, with classroom learning and lectures. In the afternoon, the kids dressed and then paraded through the school, showing everyone their costumes. After the parade, the elementary students returned to their rooms and had their own merriements. Some of the classes did different things, but the most of them had their own Halloween parties. The 1st grade came to the high school and did an art project with Mrs. Reiser’s geometry class and later went to the nursing home and sang. The 4th grade watched Mon- ster’s Inc. All of the classes had games and snacks afterwards, making it a pleasant Halloween afternoon.

In the past, different things have been done to venerate the 31st day of October. Years ago, Mr. Reiser put on a haunted house for the elementary in his classroom. As a project, the whole class worked together to set something up. The 6th grade has not done this recently, but Mrs. Henke’s Tech Ed class took up their own haunted house project for the past years, although they didn’t do it this Halloween. Every year the elementary has done their walk-through to display their costumes to the high school.

In this year’s parade, one could see a large array of outfits, ranging everywhere from UFC fighters and football players, to mermaids and cowboys, to pilgrims and superheroes. Batman and Spiderman made several appearances in the classrooms—mysteriously changing height every time.

Halloween is a holiday loved by children for many reasons. When asked what they thought Halloween was about, the elementary presented two answers: “scary stuff” and “candy.” They replied with the same two answers when asked about their favorite part of Halloween. After being questioned about their favorite Halloween movie, one of the Kindergarteners vivaciously replied, “Zombies eating people!”

Halloween has grown into an American tradition celebrated by several cultures. Though the holiday itself has taken on a different meaning over the years, let us remember the roots of Halloween: a day celebrating and being grateful over the harvest and preparing oneself for the something new; a holiday originating from one of the earliest organized cultures. Let us also not eat all of our candy in one night. ♦