

Eerie Etymologies

Directions: Read about the spooky origins of these Halloween-related words. Then, answer the questions that follow each section to show your understanding of how language evolves over time.



1. Witch

The word *witch* comes from the Old English word **wicce** (for women) or **wicca** (for men), meaning "sorcerer" or "one who practices magic." These words are related to the Old High German *wizzo*, meaning "wise." In early history, witches were not always feared—they were often respected healers and wise folk. Over time, religious and cultural changes in Europe transformed the term into something dark and mysterious, linking witches with spells, broomsticks, and the supernatural.

1. What did *wicce* and *wicca* originally mean?
2. How did the meaning of the word *witch* change over time?

2. Phantom

The word *phantom* has ancient roots in the Greek word **phantasma**, which means "appearance" or "vision." It came into English through Latin (*phantasma*) and Old French (*fantosme*). Originally, the word simply meant something seen or imagined, like a dream or illusion. It wasn't until the Middle Ages that *phantom* began to take on its ghostly meaning—something haunting and not of this world.

3. From which ancient language does *phantom* originate?
4. How did the meaning of *phantom* shift through history?

3. Pumpkin

The word *pumpkin* comes from the Greek word **pepon**, meaning "large melon." It was later adopted into Latin as *peponem* and then into French as *pompon*. When English speakers encountered the squash plant in the Americas, they called it *pumpion*—a word found in Shakespeare's writings. Eventually, it became *pumpkin*. Over time, it grew beyond food to symbolize autumn, harvest, and Halloween traditions.

5. What did the original Greek word *pepon* mean?
6. How did the word *pumpkin* evolve through other languages?