

Two Dreaded Days

by Carole Gauntlett

As a primary education teacher, there were only two days that I dreaded in the school year and one of them could be avoided when it fell on the weekend. April Fools' Day could be written off at least twice every seven years. Every March 31st I considered taking a sick day. It wasn't so much the shouts of "Oh, you've got a spider in your hair" and the like but strange things would be wriggled out of lunch boxes and turn up unexpectedly to shouts of "APRIL FOOL!" These threats came in waves when children remembered what their older siblings had invented for them. Waves that went on all day long. There was grave disappointment if the teacher wasn't "really scared," so a jump or a shout or a shiver was required each time. It was a very long day.

The other day is Halloween. If Halloween fell on a weekend, another date was set aside for the wearing of costumes. No avoiding Halloween. When I first began teaching, children wore their costumes to school in the morning and kept them on through the school parade, the lunch hour, all recesses until the day finally ended. Some of these costumes were uncomfortable, which created problems for the wearer as well as the teacher. If under these costumes there was only underwear, tears would begin to flow and a parent needed to be called. Costumes representing characters from movies came with actions and mottos and songs to be sung. This was especially noisy if there was a competing character in the room. Worse than the rest was the dependable child who has gone through a complete metamorphosis behind his mask and is for the first time feeling as though he can conquer the world, by running, growling and terrifying all of the princesses who are brought to tears as a group.

As teachers grew wiser, children were asked to bring costumes to school to wear near the end of the day. If you have ever tried to dress 30 five- or six-year-olds in unwieldy outfits, you will know to request four or five assistants. Some days are harder than others for teachers but these two will always be the most difficult.