Halloween math and reading at home: candy, pumpkin seeds and word searches

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Halloween math activities and reading ideas for home, by grade: count the candy in tens, graph the haul, estimate pumpkin seeds, read the labels and the jokes.

Halloween hands you a bag of things to count, sort and share, and most kids will happily do math to find out how much candy they got. Count the haul in piles of ten. Make a bar graph of what's in it. Guess how many seeds are in the pumpkin before anyone scoops. Read the labels before anything gets eaten. Below are Halloween math activities and reading ideas by grade, most needing nothing but the candy, a pumpkin and a piece of paper, plus the Halloween things on Peabody that do the same on a screen.

I'm a parent who built Peabody, a free reading and math site, and this week I built a Halloween game where every door asks a question and the bag gets counted in tens at the end of the street. Making it meant deciding which bits of Halloween are naturally math and reading. This is the list I ended up with. Everything on Peabody is free through the end of 2026, with no ads.

First: sort the candy (and check it)

The American Academy of Pediatrics' Halloween safety tips say to wait until you're home to sort the treats, and to throw away anything spoiled, unwrapped or that looks wrong. So the sorting is happening anyway. Make it the first activity.

- Pre-K and kindergarten: sort by color, by wrapper, or "chocolate" and "not chocolate". Sorting into groups is one of the first things preschool math asks for.
- 1st and 2nd grade: sort by kind, then count each pile.
- Older kids: sort by a rule they invent, and see if you can guess the rule.

If a baby or toddler shares the haul, the same AAP page says to keep hard candy, gum, popcorn, small or gummy candies, pumpkin seeds and whole nuts away from them, and the AAP's choking prevention page keeps foods like these away until at least age 4. They're a good pile to sort out first. If anyone at home has a food allergy, read every label (more on that below).

Halloween math activities by grade

- Grade: Pre-K and K · With the candy: Sort by color, count to 10, make a pile of ten · With a pumpkin: Count the ridges · On Peabody: Trick-or-Treat Street counts the bag aloud in tens

- Grade: 1st and 2nd · With the candy: Count in tens and ones, tally, make a bar graph · With a pumpkin: Estimate the seeds, then count them in tens · On Peabody: Spider crackers: 4 legs + 4 legs = 8
- Grade: 3rd and 4th · With the candy: Share it fairly (division), fractions of the haul · With a pumpkin: Weigh it, measure around it with string · On Peabody: Pumpkin muffins: measuring with fractions
- Grade: 5th and up · With the candy: Percentages, the average per house, a candy budget · With a pumpkin: Estimate from a sample · On Peabody: The Activity Book: logic grids and sudoku

Count the haul in tens (K to 2nd)

Put the candy in piles of ten, each pile laid out as two rows of five, like a ten frame. Count the piles by tens ("10, 20, 30"), then the leftovers by ones ("31, 32"). Then say it the place-value way: "32 candies. That's 3 tens and 2 ones." Place value, the idea that the 3 in 32 means three tens, is what US schools work on in kindergarten and first grade, and a pile of candy makes it something you can touch.

This is exactly how Trick-or-Treat Street ends each street: the candy jumps into piles of ten in two rows of five, the number climbs by tens and then by ones, and for Pre-K to 2nd grade Peabody says every number aloud. If your child has played it, they'll recognize the shape.

Make a candy graph (1st to 3rd)

Draw columns on paper (chocolate, gummy, lollipops, other), and put one tally mark or one colored square per piece. Then ask the questions a graph is for: Which pile is biggest? How many more chocolates than lollipops? If we ate all the gummies, how many would be left? A ruler and graph paper turn it into a proper bar graph for 3rd grade. For a graph with a question behind it, the Workshop's candy corn science drops candy corn into warm water, water, vinegar and oil to see which dissolves it fastest, and fills in a results chart. (That candy is for science, not for eating.)

Share it fairly (3rd and 4th)

"We have 27 pieces and 3 kids. How many each?" Fair shares are division, and leftovers are remainders. Deciding what happens to the leftover pieces is a good argument. (Some families say the grown-up gets them. Your call.) Then fractions: what fraction of the bag is chocolate? Is it more or less than half?

Make a candy plan (5th and up)

The AAP suggests rationing treats in the days after Halloween with consistent rules the family agrees on together. Older kids can do the math on it: "We have 48 pieces. Two a day lasts how many days? Three a day?" They can also work out an average: total pieces divided by

houses visited is candy per house. Percentages come next: what percent of the haul is chocolate?

Pumpkin math: estimate, then count

A pumpkin is the best estimating object of the year, because nobody knows how many seeds are inside.

1. Guess first. Everyone writes down a number before the lid comes off. Bigger pumpkin, more seeds? Write that guess down too.
2. Count the ridges. Little ones can count the ribs around the outside. Older kids can check whether the ridges match anything inside.
3. Count the seeds in tens. Lay the rinsed seeds on a towel in groups of ten. Count the tens, then the ones. Whose guess was closest? How far off was it?
4. Estimate from a sample (5th and up). Count the seeds in one quarter of the pulp, then multiply by four. Then count them all and see how close the estimate was.
5. Weigh and measure. Is it heavier than your backpack? Measure around the middle with a piece of string, then lay the string against a tape measure.

The Pumpkin Patch has the same idea on screen and on paper: a seed counter that fills ten-frames and says the tens and ones, a few three-box pumpkin questions, and a printable seed-counting mat of ten ten-frames. Its stencils are in how to carve a pumpkin with kids.

Afterwards, the seeds go into the oven. Peabody's roasted pumpkin seeds recipe ends with the same question: count how many seeds came out of one pumpkin. A grown-up cuts the lid and does every oven step, and the child scoops, rinses, dries and spreads. The clementine pumpkins snack has a smaller version: pull one apart and count the segments. Is it 8? 10? The rest of the Spooky Kitchen is on the Halloween treats for kids page.

Halloween reading activities

Read the labels

Halloween is full of labels worth reading. On a candy wrapper, look for the "Contains" line, which names the major allergens (like "Contains: milk, soy"). A 2nd or 3rd grader can scan an ingredient list for a word like "milk" or "peanuts". If someone at home has an allergy, this is real, useful reading, and a grown-up should always check too. The FDA lists the nine major food allergens labels must name.

Costume labels count too. The AAP suggests looking for "flame resistant" on costumes, wigs and accessories. Hand your child the tag and ask them to find it.

Read the jokes aloud

Jokes are reading with a reason: the reader has to get the timing right, and there's a laugh at the end. Peabody's Halloween jokes for kids page has over a hundred, grouped by ghosts, skeletons, pumpkins, bats and more, plus riddles. Each one hides its answer until it's tapped. Knock-knock jokes suit early readers, because they come in two short parts and someone has to answer "Who's there?". A good job for dinner: read three Halloween jokes to the table.

Do a word search, or make one

Word searches are spelling practice in disguise. The Activity Book has a Halloween word search that grows with your child, from BAT and CAT up to SKELETON and CAULDRON, plus a haunted house maze, a Halloween crossword and Count the Candy for the math side; all of them are on one page of Halloween puzzles, with Halloween coloring pages for a quiet hour. Better still, make your own: write costume words on graph paper, one letter a square, fill the gaps with random letters, and swap with a brother or sister. Picking the words and spelling them is half the practice.

Read a spooky-cute story

The Halloween stories shelf has free spooky stories at reading levels from a first mystery in the fog up to The Legend of Sleepy Hollow, each marked spooky so you can choose first. For a library trip, there's a list of Halloween books for kids, from silly to properly spooky. The rest of the free library has stories at every level for after the candy's counted.

Write the instructions

Once the pumpkin is carved, ask your child to write (or tell you, while you write) how you did it, in order: first, next, then, last. Instructions are a kind of writing schools ask for, and your child just did every step.

Questions parents ask

What are easy Halloween math activities for kindergarten?

Sort the candy by color, count out piles of ten, and count the ridges on a pumpkin. Then guess how many seeds are inside and count them together in groups of ten. Trick-or-Treat Street counts the bag aloud in tens at the end of each street.

How can I use Halloween candy for math without a sugar overload?

Do the math before anyone eats: sort, count, graph and share it out, then set a plan for how many pieces a day. Working out how long the candy lasts at two a day is a math problem, and it makes the plan easier to agree on.

What Halloween learning activities don't need candy?

Pumpkin seed estimating, a homemade word search with costume words, reading Halloween jokes aloud, a spooky-cute story, writing the instructions for carving the pumpkin, and Trick-or-Treat Street in Just play or with questions.

Is Trick-or-Treat Street free?

Yes. It's free through the end of 2026, with no ads and no sign-up, and it plays in a browser on a phone, tablet or computer.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/halloween-math-and-reading-activities-at-home