

Spooky Stories To Read By The Jack O' Lantern

by **Kaimi Rose Lum**

More wholesome than sweets, Halloween books are the treat we enjoy after dinner at this time of year, when the dishes are done and the pajamas put on. Reading together is our favorite bedtime ritual – one child in the top bunk, peeking over to see the pictures, and one in the bottom, where I squeeze in with the stack that's been handed to me. If we're lucky, the screech owl who lives in our willow tree will give us a soundtrack. Or the moon will be out, lending atmosphere.

We have our favorites. A neighbor who's made a tradition out of giving the girls a picture book every October presented us with a copy of Aaron Reynolds's "Creepy Carrots" a few years back, and it's become so integrated with Halloween in our house that we now string up demonic-faced construction-paper carrots alongside the cut-out pumpkin and bat decorations. "Creepy Carrots," for those unfamiliar with it, is the story of a rabbit named Jasper whose depre-dations in a carrot patch known as Crackenhopper Field come back to haunt him. The illustrations by Peter Brown are gently noir, laid out like a detective comic book, and the twist at the end always elicits giggles, no matter how many times we've read it. (For ages 4 to 7.)

"Nobody Likes a Goblin," by Ben Hatke, is another charmer that we borrow from the library every fall. You've never seen a dungeon as homey as the one Goblin inhabits with his best friend Skeleton, until adventurers, "with the sound of boots on stone," storm the dungeon, plunder the pantry, knock over the torches and make off with Skeleton. Goblin quits his lair and heads out on a quest to rescue his pal, but along the way he learns that not everyone in the outside world is keen on goblins. Pitchforks come out, and poor Goblin and his reclaimed Skeleton are forced to hide in a cave. What happens next is like a ghoulish spin on a Leo Lionni story, where a loner recovers his family and his sense of belonging. (Ages 4 to 8.)

Some books I bring home because they're just pure eye-candy – anything

by Dahlov Ipcar, for example. In "The Cat at Night," Ipcar, Maine's famous painter and printmaker, tracks a farm cat on his nocturnal prowling through field, pasture, wood and town in paintings that alternate between the shadowy hues of the nightscape perceived

by the human eye and the vivid colors saturating the cat's vision of the world, as Ipcar imagines it. We turn from pages filled with dark and cryptic silhouettes, suggesting flowers in a garden or hens in a henhouse (what the human sees), to

ones where the shapes fill out with brilliant color and lines that were hidden are now revealed, fleshing out dazzling, painterly scenes (what the cat sees). This book is an art lesson for children. (Ages 2 to 6.)

For the littlest one in the family, "Room on the Broom" (ages 4 to 8) by Julia Donaldson and illustrator Axel Scheffler, the duo behind "The Gruffalo," tells, in memorable rhyme, the story of a witch, the passengers she collects on her broomstick one moonlit night and the adventure that awaits in a sticky swamp. "Ghosts in the House" (ages 2 to 6), strikingly illustrated in linocut prints on an electric orange background, also features a witch as the main character, but this time she's a little girl-witch who excels at catching ghosts. What does she do with them once she's caught them? Launder them, of course, and make them useful. One of my favorite pictures in any Halloween book is Kohara's illustration of the witch and her pert black cat waiting for some ghosts to come out of the dryer.

All of these titles are available at Snow Library, as well as other libraries in the CLAMS system. For more information on them, and to find other spooky, silly and endearing Halloween books to add to your story-time repertoire, visit our website at snowlibrary.org and click on "Children's Reading Lists" on the children's page. You may also come by the library to pick up a list.

Happy Halloween from Snow Library.

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