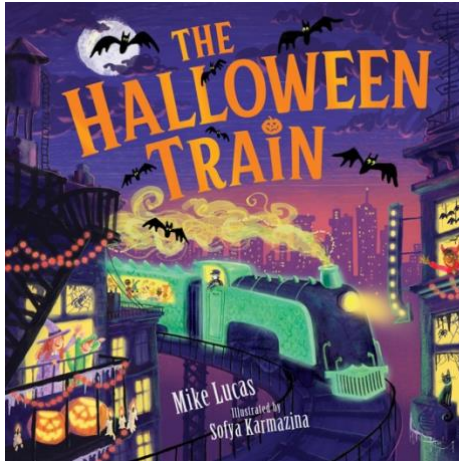


Teacher's Notes



The Halloween Train
Written by Mike Lucas

Illustrated by Sofya Karmazina

Teacher's Notes by Bec Kavanagh

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

RECOMMENDED FOR

primary-aged readers (ages 3-7, grades Prep+)

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- Learning areas: English (AC9EFLA07, AC9EFLA08, AC9EFLE04)
- General capabilities:
 - Intercultural understanding – reflect on the relationship between cultures and identities
 - Intercultural understanding – examine cultural perspectives and world views
 - Literacy – reading and viewing

THEMES

- Spooky stories
- Dressing up/costumes
- Community
- Special Events
- Seasons/holidays
- Celebrations

SYNOPSIS

All aboard, it's Halloween! Climb on *The Halloween Train* and delight in a magical journey through the joys of the spooky season.

Come along for a Halloween ride ... if you dare. But keep your eyes peeled – or you might get a scare! From trick or treating in costumes to magic potions and spells – and, of course, witches, skeletons and zombies – this lively Australian picture book blends young readers' perennial passion for train trips with the anticipation of Halloween.

From the bestselling creators of *The Christmas Train* comes another celebration of community.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ ILLUSTRATOR

Mike Lucas is an author of picture books and young adult novels. His YA fiction has been shortlisted for the Readings Book Prize, CBCA Book of the Year Award and the Prime Minister's Literary Award. His picture book, *Where is Cheeky Monster?* won the 2025 Speech Pathology Award for children from birth to 3 years. Mike presents writing and poetry workshops at schools, owns a bookshop in Blackwood, South Australia, and works as a full-time engineer. He has very little time to sleep, but often thinks up a poem or two while he does. Mike's partnership with illustrator Sofya Karmazina includes *The Bookshop on Lemon Tree Lane* and the beloved and bestselling modern classic, *The Christmas Train*.

Sofya Karmazina is a book designer and illustrator currently living in Spain who has illustrated many books for children. Sofya works traditionally in mixed media, creating richly textured illustrations with a strong sense of atmosphere and space. Sofya was shortlisted for the Children's Book Council of Australia New Illustrator Award (2021) and Book of the Year (2025), and she received the Established Illustrator: Highly Commended prize in the SCBWI Australian Picture Book Illustrator Awards (2024). Sofya's partnership with author Mike Lucas includes *The Bookshop on Lemon Tree Lane* and the beloved and bestselling modern classic, *The Christmas Train*.

THEMES

Halloween is an annual festival that began as the ancient Celtic ritual of Samhain, which celebrated the seasons changing from light (summer) to dark (winter). Ancient Celts would light a bonfire, eat sweets and wear costumes to ward off evil spirits.

Now, Halloween isn't so embedded in traditional beliefs, but many elements associated with those early celebrations remain – people wear costumes and go trick or treating to collect candy. Some communities still celebrate with bonfires, and pumpkins are carved and placed at the front of people's houses. It is a time for local communities to connect and celebrate.

Holidays that are sometimes associated with Halloween include All Saint's Day, a Christian holiday to celebrate Christian saints, All Souls Day, to remember the souls of the dead, and the Mexican Dia de Los Muertos celebrations, which celebrated the connection between the living and the dead.

Read more about Halloween here <https://www.nypl.org/blog/2018/10/26/brief-history-halloween>

Discuss your own Halloween traditions. How do members of your community celebrate Halloween?

WRITING STYLE

This book uses a range of techniques to tell a slightly spooky story in a way that feels comfortable and familiar.

Structure – the story follows a simple 'home, away, home' structure, where the characters begin in the safety of their home before venturing out on a journey (in this case on board the Halloween Train) and then returning home.



Language – the author uses words commonly associated with spooky stories (like ‘creeping’, ‘shriek’, ‘howl’, ‘dare’) to tell readers what kind of story this is.

Rhyme – the author uses a familiar rhyming couplet to create an easy and familiar rhythm. This helps readers to predict words and also echoes the movement of a train.

COMPREHENSION

- What are the signs that Halloween has arrived?
- What sounds does the Halloween Train make as it's getting ready to roll?
- What does the Halloween Train look like?
- Who's driving the train?
- How do the trick or treaters know which doors to knock on?
- How do the trick or treaters stay strong and brave when they're going past the creepy old castle?
- What Halloween snacks do the children eat?
- What are the ‘zombies in ditches’ and the ‘graveyard of monsters’ really?
- Do you think the train ride was real or a dream?

WRITING EXERCISE

Make a list of spooky words. Write a short rhyming couplet* that uses some of these words to describe a stop on the Halloween Train.

**a rhyming couplet is a pair of successive lines, approximately the same length, that rhyme, usually at the end. The rhyme in the following example is highlighted in blue.*

‘We trundle past children dressed up in the **street**,
Knock knocking on doors, shouting out, ‘Trick or **treat!**’

ILLUSTRATION STYLE

Halloween is a celebration of light turning to dark, and the illustrations reflect this by using purple and black to create the shadows of nighttime. Orange and green are used to introduce some warmth, and also reflect colours common to representations of many monsters, witches and ghouls.

The illustrations are very detailed, and if you look closely you'll see all of the different costumes that trick or treaters wear, as well as the decorations people adorn their homes with, and little hidden ghosts, bats and skeletons throughout, adding to the overall mood of the story, and giving sharp-eyed readers something to look out for as they read.

Discuss the way that light is used to bring warmth into the dark of the illustrations, in the same way that bonfires and lanterns were used in traditional Halloween celebrations to bring light into the long dark days of winter.



CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

- Make a Halloween mask. Look up your favourite character or use one of the characters from the book as inspiration. Have a Halloween parade to show your masks off to the rest of your class.
- What seasonal celebrations do you share with your family or community? Make a list of specific foods, costumes or traditions associated with your celebration.
- Imagine you were invited to take a ride on the Halloween Train. Write a short story that follows your journey – from boarding the train in your costume, to going trick-or-treating, bravely visiting scary places before finally returning home.
- Use one of these free pumpkin templates (<https://www.weareteachers.com/pumpkin-template/>) to draw a face for a pumpkin lantern to light the way during Halloween. Give your pumpkin a name.

RELATED READING

The Christmas Train

By Mike Lucas & Sofya Karmazina

The Great Big Halloween Hunt

By Ekaterina Trukhan

Wild About Halloween

By Sarah Speedie & Kruti Desai (illus.)

Emily Brown and the Not-Very-Spooky Halloween

By Cressida Cowell

