

Halloween Tricks and Jewelers' Treats



Without superstition, there would likely be no jewelry business. There's nothing exactly rational, after all, about wearing a certain kind of ring to commemorate a life event. And of course, there's no scientific link between our particular birthstone and our personality or character. Wearing jewelry is something we do for primarily cultural, rather than logical reasons. And in that sense, the foundational desire for jewelry really has more to do with the realm of superstition, magic, myth, and folklore than with the world of pure reason. Indeed, jewelry, like superstition, and like myth and legend, is often a way of dealing with things that logic and reason don't quite fully solve for—the deeper mysteries of life, love, birth, death, those things that lie far beyond the bounds of our comprehension.

Despite the mostly efficient efforts of our brain to assure us that all is well understood and proceeding as planned, the universe remains a deeply mysterious and uncertain place, and it's in these fissures of mystery that superstitions flourish. It's in those same places that the rich symbolism of jewelry often finds a home.

Take Halloween as a starting point

Halloween has its roots in the ancient Celtic festival Samhain. Samhain marked the end of the harvest season and the beginning of Winter. For a pastoral, agricultural society, it

meant, in effect, the end of the old year, and the beginning of the new. In Irish mythology and literature, it also marked a time when a portal opened between the normal world and the Otherworld—a fantastical realm of supernatural beings and the dead. At this mysterious time of year, denizens of the Otherworld were free to wander the earth. This belief was echoed in the Samhain practice of dressing and parading in oftentimes ghoulish or skeletal costumes. It's also why you see the same practice in modern Halloween, and why the Catholic church celebrates All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day (celebrations of the dearly departed) during this same time frame.

The larger point is that Halloween/Samhain/All Soul's Day all mark an annual time of deep seasonal uncertainty and change—a time that is right at the threshold of one phase and another. Folklorists and anthropologists even have a word to describe this state: liminality. It's in these liminal spaces betwixt and between the major stages of the year that uncertainty grows, that change and mystery arise, that superstitions find purchase and that we gather our loved ones around to celebrate the holiday and reinforce our collective understanding of things. And that makes perfect sense. In times of change and uncertainty, we do the natural thing and try to counteract the mystery with togetherness, shared folk beliefs, songs, and community.

What does any of this have to do with jewelry?

It's a good question, but the answer is clear enough. Jewelry is a crucial part of our formula to counteract and master liminality. A significant element in our antidotes to existential disruption. Just think for a second about when jewelry is traditionally given and received and why.

Just like the holidays that stud the circle of our calendar

year like bezel-set sapphires, jewels appear in our lives at the most liminal moments between life stages. At graduation, at birthdays, at weddings. Even in the case of death, jewelry of course has a place, most famously perhaps in the mourning jewelry of the Victorians.

Another way of saying it is that jewelry is a tool of ritual, and ritual is our organized system for dealing with uncertainty, change, and mystery. Ritual is our magical way of managing liminality and ensuring a safe passage through to the next stage in the circle of life, or through to the next stage of the cyclical year.

Jewelry is well-suited to the task. It is designed to tame disorder. Made of the most resilient materials on the planet, jewelry is built to resist entropy even at the physical level. At the emotional and personal level, its beauty is designed to spellbind and capture the attention, to draw people in, rather than to disperse them to the four winds.

Commonplace ritual jewelry

Built primarily around the circular form of a ring, jewelry is designed to bind, to surround, to enclose, and to protect. Not surprisingly, similar circles tend to crop up in rituals of all sorts, as universal symbols of the human bonds that shield us from the vicissitudes of existences. Like the eternal circle of the year, they place our transitions and our changes and uncertainties into a kind of form that we can understand and live within.

In fact, the most famous scholar of rites of passage, French folklorists Arnold Van Gennep, describe ritual itself as having a cyclical structure. He explained that people undergoing a rite of passage undergo three phases: 1) a **SEPARATION** from a community and an old identity, 2) a liminal **TRANSITION** phase, and 3) a **REINCORPORATION** into a new role as, for instance, a wife or Amish teen after a wild Rumspringa.

Rituals, you might say, are ring-like patterns within culture—meant to adorn and enshrine these most delicate and crucial transitions in our lives.

To bring this all back into the more comfortable realm of reason and the sweet solace of numbers, you need only turn to the statistical jewelry industry oracle of your choice. The most popular days for engagements almost always coincide with the winter holidays—the same days of ritual and magic that give rise to superstitions, particularly romantic superstitions. Halloween, of course, abounds with lore having to do with love and romance, and is usually listed as one of the most popular days of the year for engagements. It's almost a bookend to the engagement season, which of course starts picking up in later October and tends to peak around Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, New Year's Eve, and New Year's Day—all, like Halloween, holidays with ancient roots in myth, lore, and ritual.

What does this all mean for jewelers?

The question should be: What doesn't this mean for jewelers? It means everything. It means that jewelers are nothing less than wizards and magicians, sacred providers of the ritual tools we humans need to navigate the most crucial times of our lives. There are doctors for our physical ailments, accountants for our financial maladies, and scientists who will scan the furthest stars for their secrets. But who can bring the heart back into union with itself amidst the eternal, ever-unfolding mysteries of existence?

No one but the poets, the musicians, the priests, the artists, and—yes—the

jewelers.

So with All Hallow's Eve upon us, and the ancient cycles of seasons turning away from the warmth of the summer, the days will grow darker. But people will turn to each other for companionship, love, and light. And they will increasingly turn to us for those artifacts of enduring illumination that are our special gift to a world.

In other words, with Halloween upon us and wandering souls out searching for nourishment, open your doors wide and welcome them. It's your time to shine.

Looking for more Halloween stories? [Find 6 Jewelry Superstitions and How to Use Them to Your Advantage here.](#)

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