

## Lesson Plan: Rising Zombie

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### Summary

This lesson explores the cultural, historical, and pop-culture evolution of zombies. Students will examine ancient burial practices, literary origins, folklore, and modern media interpretations. The lesson also includes current data on Halloween candy sales and cultural traditions. Students will analyze how myths evolve and reflect societal fears and values.

### Objective

Students will identify and explain the historical origins and cultural transformations of zombie mythology, and connect these to modern traditions and consumer behavior.

### Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.7: Integrate information presented in different media or formats.

NGSS.HS-LS4-2: Analyze and interpret data for patterns in the fossil record.

C3.D2.His.2.6-8: Classify series of historical events and developments as examples of change and continuity.

### Materials

9 Fun Facts list

Worksheet

Optional: whiteboard, projector, Halloween-themed media clips

## Introduction

Begin by asking students what they know about zombies. Discuss how myths and stories change over time. Introduce the concept of revenants, voodoo folklore, and pop-culture zombies. Explain that today's lesson will trace the evolution of zombie mythology and its connection to modern Halloween traditions.

## Activity

Students will read the 9 Fun Facts and complete the worksheet. In small groups, they will discuss how different cultures interpret the idea of the undead. Each group will choose one historical or pop-culture zombie reference and present how it reflects societal fears or beliefs.

## Assessment

Evaluate student understanding through worksheet responses and group discussion. Use the rubric to assess depth of analysis, participation, and ability to connect historical facts to modern interpretations.

## Rubric

Criteria	Excellent (4)	Good (3)	Fair (2)	Poor (1)
Content Understanding	Demonstrates deep understanding of all facts	Understands most facts with clarity	Understands some facts with gaps	Misunderstands or omits key facts
Discussion Participation	Engages actively and shares thoughtful insights	Participates with relevant comments	Participates minimally	Does not participate
Worksheet Completion	All questions answered with detail and accuracy	Most questions answered correctly	Some questions incomplete or vague	Worksheet mostly incomplete
Technology Connections	Makes strong connections to media or data	Makes some relevant connections	Few connections made	No connections made

## 9 Fun Facts

### **1. The oldest known “revenant” graves date back over 4,000 years.**

Archaeologists have found Bronze Age burial sites across Europe where bodies were pinned with stones or had jaws stuffed with objects to prevent them from rising. These precautions suggest ancient people feared the dead returning to harm the living. The practice spanned cultures from Greece to Scandinavia and often involved mutilation or binding of the corpse.

### **2. The first zombie film was inspired by a 1929 travelogue about Haitian Vodou.**

William Seabrook’s book *The Magic Island* described rituals involving “zombi” slaves raised by sorcerers. Just three years later, *White Zombie* (1932) hit theaters, starring Bela Lugosi as a necromancer. The film helped launch the zombie genre, decades before brain-eating became part of the lore.

### **3. In Viking sagas, revenants were called “draugr” and could crush bones with superhuman strength.**

These undead figures haunted burial mounds and attacked livestock, homes, and villagers. The sagas describe them as blue-skinned and terrifying, often requiring decapitation or burning to stop them. Some communities even abandoned entire settlements due to repeated revenant attacks.

### **4. The word “zombie” entered English in the early 1800s through British literature.**

Poet Robert Southey used the term in a footnote in 1819, referencing West Indian folklore. It came from the Kongo word “nzambi,” meaning spirit of a dead person. The term gained traction in colonial writings and eventually in pulp horror fiction.

### **5. The brain-eating zombie trope was invented in 1985 by a comedy spoof.**

*Return of the Living Dead* introduced zombies that eat brains to ease the pain of death. Director Dan O’Bannon added the idea for laughs, not horror. George Romero’s original zombies never ate brains, they just consumed flesh. The trope stuck thanks to pop culture saturation.

**6. A Haitian man named Clairvius Narcisse was declared dead, buried, and later found alive.**

In 1962, Narcisse was pronounced dead at a hospital and buried. In 1980, he reappeared, claiming he'd been poisoned with tetrodotoxin and enslaved by a bokor. His case is one of the most documented examples of alleged zombification, studied by Harvard ethnobotanist Wade Davis.

**7. Some ancient Greeks buried corpses with heavy rocks to stop them from rising.**

Graves from 5th century BCE show skeletons pinned with stones or bound with iron. These were likely people who died violently or were feared in life. The practice was meant to prevent hauntings or posthumous revenge.

**8. Over 20 million pounds of candy corn are sold each Halloween season.**

Despite its reputation, candy corn remains a staple. Mississippi buys 92% more than the national average, while Hawaii orders 55% less. The waxy texture and intense sweetness divide opinion, but it still accounts for 2–3% of all Halloween candy orders.

**9. Halloween candy sales in the US are expected to hit \$3.9 billion in 2025.**

Reese's Peanut Butter Cups remain the top seller, followed by M&M's and Snickers. Rising cocoa prices have pushed chocolate costs up by 30–50% since 2020. Despite inflation, 66% of Americans still plan to hand out candy, averaging \$114.45 in spending per household.

## Worksheet

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Review

1. What burial method did ancient Greeks use to prevent the dead from rising?
2. Who was Clairvius Narcisse and why is his story important?

### Discussion

3. How did the Viking “draugr” differ from modern zombies?
4. Why did some cultures fear shallow graves?

### Data Analysis

5. How much candy corn is sold each Halloween season?
6. What is the projected total for Halloween candy sales in 2025?

### Reflection

7. Why do you think the brain-eating zombie trope became popular?
8. How do zombie stories reflect cultural fears or beliefs?
9. Which zombie origin story did you find most surprising, and why?