

# The Proud Pumpkin

by RV staff writer J.C.

His eyes were lit for the first time, and Jack looked all around with wonder. He felt warm and happy, as all pumpkins do when they are turned into Halloween Jack-o'-lanterns. With a candle glowing inside, his toothy grin beamed out into the dark night surrounding him.

It was that special time of year when plump orange pumpkins were taken from the fields to be the guest of honor in the front windows of houses everywhere. Sure, there might be ghosts or skeletons hanging around, but everyone knew it was the Halloween pumpkin that was the most important. Every house needed a glowing, grinning face to beckon the children who came trick-or-treating. No Jack-o'-lantern meant that no children would climb the steps and ring the doorbell. It was a very important job.

Jack smiled proudly. All evening and into the night, many costumed children came to visit his house and ring the doorbell. The man in the house would open the door and put handfuls of candy into the plastic pumpkins, bags, and pillowcases the trick-or-treaters carried. Everybody seemed so happy that Jack thought he must be doing his job very well. He was quite pleased with himself.

After several hours of excitement and activity, the crowds of children drifted away, and the night was quiet again. Jack felt very tired after working so long and hard. When the man came out of the house and blew out Jack's candle, Jack didn't mind. He quickly dozed off to sleep, dreaming about happy little witches, ninja turtles, princesses, and bumblebees.

Early the next morning, Jack woke up and found he had been moved. He was sitting on the grass, at the curb near the edge of the street. Beside him sat a recycling bin and a garbage can. He wondered what had happened. Didn't he do a good job last night? Why was he sitting with the trash? Wasn't he special anymore? Even though he was still smiling on the outside, Jack was feeling quite glum on the inside.

From out of the quiet morning came the sound of scurrying and enthusiastic chatter. A family of mice had been inspecting the neighborhood garbage bins and soon gathered around Jack. "Oh my goodness!" one squeaked. "Look at this wonderful pumpkin!" The other mice agreed it was, indeed, a very fine pumpkin. Jack's spirits lifted a little bit.

"I think it would be perfect, don't you?" asked the biggest mouse.

"Yes, yes, absolutely," agreed the others.

Jack couldn't contain his curiosity. "Perfect for what?"

"A perfect place to build our nest," answered the first mouse, and pointed to her large belly. "As you can see, I'm about to have more babies very soon. You could provide great shelter to keep us safe and warm

while I wait.”

Jack listened as the mouse explained. They lived in a nearby field and wanted to take him there where they would be hidden by the bushes and tall grass. Jack knew he didn’t have a future if he sat on the curb waiting for the garbage trucks to come rumbling up the street. He agreed.

“But how will we get there?” he asked. “I can’t move by myself, and you are quite small. No offense,” he added quickly.

“None taken, none at all,” assured the mother mouse. “You are right. We’ll need some help. Boys, go and get a few friends, please.” The younger mice ran off in several directions. Within minutes, they had been joined by three squirrels, a skunk, and a raccoon.

Together the furry crew pushed and rolled the delighted pumpkin down the street and off into the fields beyond the local park. It was quite a sight to see, but there were no humans awake to see it. They finally settled Jack under a bushy evergreen, and started bringing twigs and leaves to fill up his insides. It didn’t take them long to make a cozy nest for the mother mouse.

Jack sat quietly while the animals worked around him, and thought about tiny babies being born in a safe home. He realized this would be a very important job. Maybe even more useful and important than being a Halloween pumpkin.

And once again, he was proud.

**Questions**

1. Describe what Jack looks like.
2. How did Jack feel about being a Jack-o-lantern on Halloween night?
3. What did the children use to hold their Halloween candy?
4. Why was Jack's new job with the mice so important?

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**Vocabulary List**

Each of the vocabulary words below are used in the reading passage. As you read the passage, pay attention to context clues that suggest the word's meaning.

1. plump
2. grinning
3. pleased
4. glum
5. scurrying
6. crew
7. cozy

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**Context Clues**

Using context clues from the sentences in the passage, underline the correct meaning of the word in boldface.

1) It was that special time of year when **plump** orange pumpkins were taken from the fields to be the guest of honor in the front windows of houses everywhere.

- a. happy    b. ripe    c. large    d. thin

2) Every house needed a glowing, **grinning** face to beckon the children who came trick-or-treating.

- a. smiling    b. frowning    c. laughing    d. silly

3) He was quite **pleased** with himself.

- a. upset    b. worried    c. satisfied    d. ashamed

4) Even though he was still smiling on the outside, Jack was feeling quite **glum** on the inside.

- a. tired    b. glad    c. unhappy    d. lonely

5) From out of the quiet morning came the sound of **scurrying** and enthusiastic chatter.

- a. loud sirens    b. moving quickly    c. music parades    d. tiptoeing feet

6) Together the furry **crew** pushed and rolled the delighted pumpkin down the street and off into the fields beyond the local park.

- a. group    b. band    c. family    d. boaters

7) It didn't take them long to made a **cozy** nest for the mother mouse.

- a. small    b. hot    c. comfortable    d. prickly