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Sesame Family Newsletter

October 30, 2009

A Not-So-Spooky Halloween!

by Jordan D. Brown

Keeping Halloween "fun scary" for young children.

Featuring:

- The Perils of "Pretend Scary"
- Pumpkins and Princesses, Please
- Planning a Not-Very-Scary Party



This Week on the Street...

Happy Halloween!

- [Zoe's Halloween Game](#)
Make Halloween decorations with Zoe.
- [Surprises in the Pumpkin Patch](#)
What surprises will Zoe, Elmo, and Telly find in the pumpkin patch?
- [Costume Party](#)
A fun clip featuring a Halloween costume party.

A Magical Halloween Adventure DVD

Explore a pumpkin patch, make scarecrows, and visit an apple orchard with Elmo and friends.

[Buy the DVD!](#)

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What's your favorite Sesame video of the 90s?

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THE PERILS OF "PRETEND SCARY"

Halloween is almost here! Big kids like my 8-year-old son Finian can't wait for the frightful fun to begin. The prospect of wearing a scary costume, mixing a batch of fake blood, and mock terrorizing



his friends and family thrills him to the core. But my 4-year-old daughter Olivia, like many younger children, approaches this spooky holiday with understandable trepidation. This point was driven home on a recent visit to the aquarium.

After watching an entertaining sea lion show, an aquarium volunteer encouraged our family to visit the "Haunted Sea-fari" in a nearby building. "It's like a Haunted House! You'll LOVE it!" exclaimed the volunteer. Finian's face lit up. Olivia's eyes, however, revealed a definite lack of enthusiasm. From her point of view, looking at real sharks from behind glass barriers was one thing, but wandering into anything "haunted" was another story altogether. At many a bedtime, Olivia has confided her fears--specifically she tells us she is "scared of monsters," and asks for extra hugs.

At the door to the "Haunted Sea-fari," an aquarium worker noticed Olivia's hesitation, and reassured her, "Don't worry, hon', it's all PRETEND scary!" I smiled but thought to myself, "Well, the movie FRIDAY THE 13th is 'pretend scary'... but that doesn't mean that watching it can't be terrifying, even for grown-ups." My wife Ellen and I told both kids that they didn't have to go inside if they didn't want to. Finian, gung ho to explore, bolted forward. Olivia, eager to act brave in front of her big brother, asked me to pick her up, and said, "OK, I'll try it." (It didn't hurt that the greeter also mentioned to Olivia the free candy at the end.)

Once beyond the entrance's black curtain, our eyes adjusted to the darkness. Olivia was in my arms, holding on tightly. A staff member, dressed as a pirate, laughed ominously, as he stuck his head out of the jaws of a cardboard shark skeleton. Another employee dressed as a ghost in gangling chains, popped out, saying, "Oooo! Ooooo!"

Olivia cried out, "Daddy, It's too dark! Get me outta here!" As we exited, Olivia clinging to me, I felt the underside of her pants. Wet. It didn't matter that she'd been toilet trained for over a year. This experience was much more frightening for her than we had anticipated.

While the costumes and decorations were all "pretend," as the aquarium worker had promised, the other things--the darkness, my daughter's urine-drenched pants, and the terror in her mind--were all 100% real.

PUMPKINS AND PRINCESSES, PLEASE

This is not to say that Olivia doesn't sometimes enjoy "pretend scary" experiences. I still vividly recall the pure bliss on my children's faces when they were less than 1 year old, and Ellen and I would indulge their wishes to play peek-a-boo over and over. In fact, I think much of the pleasure came from their knowing exactly what was going to happen, in a general sense, but not knowing the precise moment that the peek-a-boo surprise would occur.

Another thing Olivia adores is actually doing the scaring! "Olivia," I playfully dare. "You can't scare me." Then, of course, "Rooooarr!" comes Olivia the Monster from behind the couch, and I act so terrified that I faint. "Again, again!" Olivia giggles. It is especially adorable when her older brother Finian lets Olivia "frighten" him in this way.

Of course, Halloween is about more than scary things. From Olivia's point of view, two of the big thrills about the holiday are pumpkins and princesses. A few weekends ago, we visited a local farm where the kids picked their own pumpkins. At home, we had fun decorating them with markers, glue, glitter, feathers, and more. This weekend, I look forward to helping the kids carve a Jack-o-Lantern. In particular, I am sure that Olivia will get a kick out of yanking out the pumpkin's gushy innards, and separating out the seeds for toasting.

Olivia is also very excited about her costume. This year, she's dressing up as an "elegant princess." (She learned the word "elegant" from the wonderful *Fancy Nancy* books by Jane O'Connor.) Playing dress-up is one of Olivia's favorite activities to do throughout the year, so having a day devoted to it makes it extra-special.

PLANNING A NOT-VERY-SCARY PARTY

We live in a rural area where the houses are very spread apart, so trick-or-treating isn't practical.



[Fear Of The Dark](#)

A girl copes with her fear of the dark.

[Grover In The Dark](#)

Watch this clip with your little pumpkin, and discuss how Grover copes with his fear of the dark.

[Feelings](#)

Asking questions and talking together are some of the best ways to understand and respond to your child's fears and concerns.



[Pumpkins On Halloween](#)

What you do with pumpkins on Halloween.

Instead, this weekend, we will host our annual Halloween party for the neighborhood kids, and friends from school. Over four years of hosting this party, Ellen and I have learned to strike a balance between semi-scary experiences for the older kids, and totally un-scary experiences for the younger ones. Recalling Olivia's fear in the haunted house at the aquarium, we'll make sure to have games and activities for the littlest ones that don't involve going anywhere dark or spooky. For the older, daring ones, we've transformed an unusual "secret staircase" in our home into a "secret scare-case," which Ellen has painted with Halloween pictures, I've hung some fake spider webs and plastic bugs, and where we've hidden prizes.

One of our most popular activities is the Mummy Wrap. In this game, each child pairs up with an adult, and is given a roll of toilet paper. When Ellen says, "Go!" each adult wraps up his or her child into a mummy as quickly as possible. It is not as easy as it sounds since toilet paper tears easily, and it is hard for kids to hold still amid all the excitement.

Our homemade pumpkin/apple launcher is another favorite among the neighborhood kids. Inspired by a similar device I saw at a local apple orchard, I constructed a launcher using 2 x 4s stuck in the ground, between which I suspended a funnel, attached with rubber tubing. If you do a web search for "water balloon launcher," you'll probably find directions for making a similar gizmo, or buying a pre-made one, inexpensively.

Wishing you and your family a "spooktacular" holiday!

Jordan D. Brown
Sesame Workshop

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