



## This Halloween, let's ensure our costumes are kind and thoughtful

Dressing up for Halloween provides us with an opportunity for fun and community building. It's also a great time to discuss ways we can make sure all students in our school feel safe and honored. In West Vancouver Schools, we want everyone to know we value their culture and identity.

While Halloween costumes are designed for fun, some perpetuate stereotypes. At school, many students investigated the difference between cultural appreciation and appropriation and looked at how stereotypes can hurt. We want our kids to make sure that culturally-based and identity-based costumes are not part of our Halloween this year, because cultures and identities are not costumes.

Rather than laying out a set of rules, we are hoping you will talk with your children. Many of our teachers are also having conversations that have generated a lot of questions - as well as some beautiful insights - from students. We would like to invite our families into the discussion and encourage you to have conversations at home too. Here are some questions to consider when planning Halloween costumes this year:

### 1) Does the costume portray a specific character or an entire culture?

Dressing up as your favourite sports hero, or movie character is welcomed as these are popular figures. Halloween is a great time for kids to explore and be creative. But choosing to dress up in something your neighbour might wear every day - a sari, or a kimono, or hijab - or using something as a prop that is culturally significant to someone, may offend.

## **2) Does the costume represent a culture that is not yours?**

Cultural appreciation is when you learn more about a culture so you can better understand it. Cultural appropriation can happen when the person doing the borrowing is privileged, while the person who is being borrowed from is oppressed. (For example, a white person wearing dreadlocks on Halloween when a black man wearing dreadlocks on a regular Monday is told "You can't work here.")

## **3) Is there anything about the costume that could impact your peers in a negative way?**

If you are wearing a funny costume - is the humor based on "making fun" of real people or cultures? If you are wearing a 'cultural' costume - does this costume reduce cultural differences to stereotypes? Does your costume poke fun at those who might be suffering or marginalized (for example, a person who is homeless, imprisoned, or has a disability or mental illness)? We are asking students to put themselves in someone else's shoes figuratively, before they do so actually, and think about how they might feel if someone dressed up as them for Halloween.

Rather than checking individual costumes, we're encouraging kids to make thoughtful decisions. We look forward to celebrating with all of the students on Halloween and appreciate your help in making sure that it is a fun day for everyone!

If you want to further the conversation with your family about race, here are some great starting places:

<https://www.embracerace.org/>

<http://austinchanning.com/blog/2013/10/halloween>

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