

Ignorance is Spooky.

A Guide to Culturally Sensitive Halloween Costumes.



tcsa

What is Cultural Appropriation?

Cultural Appropriation is the act of taking significant elements (symbols, dress, words, customs, practices, dances etc.) from a culture that is not your own.

Cultural Appropriation can take many forms, such as companies producing and profiting off of cultural symbols, practices, patterns etc. An example of happens when clothing companies take traditional patterns or styles from specific Indigenous Nations without any acknowledgement or consent.

Around Halloween, cultural appropriation often manifests in the form of wearing 'costumes' that rely on specific cultural signifiers or stereotypes. Dressing up as an ethnicity, race or culture that is not your own is problematic and racist.

CONTENT WARNING:

Please note that the following document seeks to discuss cultural appropriation, Transphobia, Anti-Indigenous Racism, Anti-Black Racism, Racism, Xenophobia and Ableism in an educational way.

Some images, terms, or descriptions used within this document may trigger particular feelings for students. If you require support please reach out to BIPOCorganizer@trentcentral.ca

Costumes that rely on stereotypes, disability, gender identity, sexual identity or expression, culture, or socioeconomic status are offensive and oppressive.

If you're reading this and thinking, *"But it's just a costume"*, take a moment to reflect on why you think that's the case. It's likely that your culture and/or identity (sexuality, race, socioeconomic status, ability, etc) has not been historically or currently trivialized, mocked, or viewed as 'funny' or 'scary'.

You may view your costume as "just a joke", but that joke comes at the real expense of an individual's safety and security. Oppression is upheld by stereotypes that dehumanize individuals through 'jokes' and caricatures that are found in many Halloween costumes.

You may want to ask yourself why a privileged individual can perpetuate harmful stereotypes of a group and wear their cultural dress for one night when that marginalized group cannot live safely?

Culturally Sensitive Costume Ideas:

Pick a celeb that looks like you: Choose an iconic moment from their career and create a similar outfit.

Be a monster: Be something scary and dress up as a Halloween classic such as Dracula, or a mummy.

Be a character from your favourite book, TV show, or movie: Take a tip from the cosplayers and do something really intricate and amazing.

Be something random: Like a table, chair, light bulb, or your favourite meme.

COSTUMES TO AVOID:



Indigenous Peoples

Common Costume Names: Ind*an Princess, Esk*mo, Zulu Warrior, Hula Girl, Polynesian Princess, Native Head Dress, Pocahontas, Chief Costume, Ind*an Warrior, Native American.

Non-Indigenous people wearing Indigenous regalia or cultural dress as a costume is extremely harmful to Indigenous peoples and communities. Not only do these outfits have great cultural meaning and significance but they are considered sacred and made with intention for an individual.

Many Halloween costumes perpetuate harmful stereotypes of Indigenous people that are rooted in colonial and racist tropes. Indigenous peoples in Canada and around the world have endured colonialism, genocide and exploitation. Assuming Indigenous identity through a Halloween costume trivializes the Indigenous experience.



COSTUMES TO AVOID:



Sexual Harassment or Assault

Common Costume Names:

Funny Flasher, Pervert, Flasher.

Someone exposing themselves to non-consenting viewers is a form of sexual harassment. These kinds of costumes are not only offensive but may trigger those who have dealt with sexual harassment themselves.

Brown / Blackface

This offensive practice includes painting or using makeup to darken your face past its natural skin colour. Additionally, it reinforces racist stereotypes that were presented in nineteenth-century minstrel shows that presented Black individuals as inferior.



COSTUMES TO AVOID:



Día de los Muertos

Common Costume Names: Day of the Dead, Sugar Skull, Dead Senorita, La Muerta Day.

Unless you were raised in Mexican culture, and observe Day of the Dead, painting your face, or wearing a costume associated with Día de los Muertos is not an appropriate costume. These outfits and face paintings have a significant cultural meaning that should not be done by individuals outside of Mexican heritage.

Mexican, Hispanic or Latinx Peoples

Common Costume Names: Mexican Man, Poncho, Serape Man, Latina/Latino Costume.

The Sombrero and Serape are beautiful aspects of Mexican culture and should not be mocked. These costumes often depict racist caricatures of Mexican individuals. The same goes for many costumes depicting of Hispanic or Latinx peoples.



COSTUMES TO AVOID:



Samurai or Geisha

Common Costume Names:

Dragon Lady, Geisha Dancer, Dragon Mistress, Asian Persuasion, Kimono Girl, Samurai Warrior.

Aside from the obvious cultural appropriation, geisha costumes often misrepresent geishas as sex workers. In fact, geishas were performers and forbidden from developing personal relationships with their customers. The samurai is an important symbol in Japanese culture and should not be mocked with a costume.

Romani

Common Costume Names:

Fortune Teller, Gyp*y, Swindler.

The term gyps*y is a derogatory term that has often been used to describe the Romani or Roma, people. These costumes reinforce the same stereotypes that people have used to justify the persecution of Romani people.



COSTUMES TO AVOID:



Voodoo

Common Costume Names:

Voodoo Doctor, Voodoo Priestess, Voodoo Witch, Voodoo Warlock.

The "voodoo" we often see in media or represented within Halloween costumes has little to do with religion, and more to do with racism. Wearing a voodoo costume ignores the real religious significance of the symbols, and plays into a racist imagery created by the media.

Egyptian Gods or Goddesses

Common Costume Names:

Nefertiti, Pharaoh, Queen of the Nile, Cleopatra, King of Egypt, Anubis, King Tut.

While many Egyptian goddesses and gods are portrayed as fair-skinned, they actually originate from one of the most well-known African civilizations. Dressing up and portraying these gods and goddesses with fair skin perpetuates the erasure of Black and Brown people from Egyptian history.

COSTUMES TO AVOID:



Bollywood

Common Costume Names:

Bollywood Star, Bollywood Beauty, Bollywood Boy.

Wearing a traditional Indian dress and calling it "Bollywood" isn't a costume. Doing so makes Indian culture into a trope and perpetuates harmful stereotypes about Indian people. Additionally, it trivializes the experiences of Indian identity.

Middle Eastern Peoples

Common Costume Names:

Arab Costume, Arabian Costume, Middle Eastern Dancer.

A burqa, hijab, or turban does not belong on your body on Halloween if you don't wear one year-round. These coverings are important religious, cultural, and traditional symbols that shouldn't be mimicked for costumes.



COSTUMES TO AVOID:



Transgender Peoples

Common Costume Names:

Caitlyn Jenner, Tra*ny,
Tranvest*te.

Wearing a 'transgender' costume mocks the transgender community and promotes transphobia by reducing trans individuals to a stereotype. Costumes like these lead to greater transphobia and marginalization of an already at-risk community.

Houseless Peoples

Common Costume Names:

Hobo, Homeless Man.

Being a 'hobo' was considered a harmless costume for decades. However, in Canada, we have thousands of unhoused people caused by systemic inequalities. Dressing or mimicking their lived reality is perpetuating harmful stereotypes.



COSTUMES TO AVOID:



Psychiatric Patient

Common Costume Names:

Psycho, Sk*tzo Prisoner, Insane Patient, Mentally ill Patient, Asylum Patient.

Halloween costumes that make light of mental institutions are offensive.

Wearing a straight jacket, or any other equipment typically associated with the institutionalization of people with mental illness, trivializes that experience.

Fat Suit

Fat suits make the statement that being plus size is a joke, and can be mocked. For straight size individuals,

it's easy to wear a fat suit for Halloween. But a plus-sized person can never dress in a 'skinny suit'. There's no room for equality when it comes to this type of costume as they perpetuate harmful stereotypes of plus-size people.



COSTUMES TO AVOID:



Rastafarian Man

Common Costume Names:

Jamaican Man, Rasta, Rastafarian.

The Rastafari movement is a spiritual tradition born out of Jamaica. Through costumes, these spiritual beliefs are reduced to harmful and often racist stereotypes.

Prisoner

Common Costume Names:

Convict, Jail Bird,

Unless you're prepared to talk at length about criminal justice reform, do not wear a prison jumpsuit. Whether you've been to prison or not depends a lot on class, race, and privilege. Wearing a jumpsuit or 'acting' like a prisoner trivializes the experiences many have faced.



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Have a Halloween costume and are not sure about its impact? Email BIPOCorganizaer@trentcentral.ca and chat.

