

The Knowledge House Guide to:

# Costumes for All Seasons

By *Teri Ann Berg Olsen*

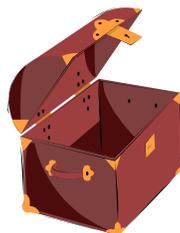
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The practice of dressing up in costume is usually associated with Halloween, but pretending to be some other person or character can be fun at any time of year. Costumes come in handy for tea parties, birthday theme parties, church and school events, stage plays, photo shoots, masquerade balls, historical reenactments, Renaissance fairs, old-fashioned weddings, vintage fashion shows, various other holidays and special occasions.



Costumes are also ideal for households with young children who enjoy make-believe play-acting. I think every family should have a costume trunk so the kids can play dress-up all year long. You can use a cardboard box, large plastic storage container, or wooden toy chest. We got a big Contico Tuff Bin at Home Depot. This will save time and trouble at Halloween and other events if you already have a supply of costumes and related accessories on hand, just like the treasures in Grandma's attic.



Outfitting a costume trunk doesn't have to cost a lot. You probably already have some stuff around the house that you can use – such as old hats and clothes that are out of fashion. Every year you can add a little more to it by stocking up on Halloween items at reduced prices after October 31. You can also find an assortment of inexpensive costumes, masks, hats, and other items at [www.orientaltrading.com](http://www.orientaltrading.com). Check thrift stores and rummage sales for funky, unique clothing and jewelry. Military uniforms and accessories can be found in army surplus stores. Toy stores usually carry fireman and policeman outfits.



Ready-to-wear costumes on popular themes are readily available at Halloween time, but making your own can be even more fun. If you know how to sew – or at least are able to do a few basting stitches – you can choose from a larger selection of costumes. Fabric stores sell patterns which can take anywhere from twenty minutes to several days to complete, depending on how complicated they are. A simple sewn costume can be a good beginning sewing project for kids. Non-sewers can use iron-on hem tape.



If you don't have a lot of time or talent, you can concentrate on capes and masks. An old sheet, beach towel, or piece of fabric can be cut to size for a cape. Depending on its color, the decorations added and other clothing worn, the cape can turn you into a butterfly, superhero, villain, or royalty. Create swords and shields out of cardboard. Masks can be made from cardboard, felt, paper bags, or paper plates. Dixie's Krazy Kritters and Hefty Zoo Pals plates feature colorful animal and creature faces that can become kids' masks.



## Costume Trunks

By putting together a costume trunk for your little girl or boy, you open up a world of creative possibilities. Children's young imaginations will run wild with all of the potential combinations. It can be great fun on rainy days, at parties, and when friends come over to play. We've found that when we read an adventure book aloud or watch an exciting movie, our two young sons like to act out the story immediately afterwards – fighting pirates, exploring the high seas, going on secret missions, posing as superheroes, etc. – so our costume trunk is used quite often.



**Girl's Costume Trunk** - Girls love fairy tale princesses, tea parties, American Girls, Barbie fashions, Indian maidens, and old-fashioned Victorian lace. Other ideas: dance costumes, cheerleaders, bridal, Hawaiian, tiaras, slippers, beads, necklaces, glitter wands, white gloves, tea party items, grass skirts, leis, boas, scarves, 1950's poodle skirts, fake fur stole, fringed frontier tops, etc.



**Boy's Costume Trunk** - Boys love knights and armor, frontier and exploration, cowboys and Indians, cops and robbers, superheroes, Civil War, safari and camouflage themes. Other ideas: construction worker, farmer, sheriff, pirates and pirate accessories (swords, hats, hooks, eye patches, etc.), sombreros, ponchos, bull-fighter costume with red cape, straw hat, bandanas, vest, black gloves, coonskin cap, engineer's hat, lab coat, bow tie, sailor hat, knight's cape, sword and shield, bow and arrows, sports uniforms.



## Educational Costumes

Rather than wearing the typical mass-market scary mask or cartoon character costume for Halloween, consider dressing up as a classic fictional character or historical person. Do some research and try to be as authentic as you can. Turn it into a book report, biography report, history report, movie review, unit study, speech, or play – and maybe your Halloween costume will double as an extra credit assignment! Here are some ideas:

- person from a different era (Greek, Roman, Viking, pirate, pioneer, cowboy, Indian)
- character from a movie or TV show (Lord of the Rings, Star Wars, Spy Kids, Batman)
- person from a different country (Scottish Highlander, Eskimo, Mexican Senorita)
- famous person (Abe Lincoln, Teddy Roosevelt, Daniel Boone, Laura Ingalls Wilder)
- rescue hero (firefighter, police officer, doctor, nurse, soldier, sailor, knight, sheriff)
- literary figure (Musketeer, Huck Finn, Robin Hood, Sherlock Holmes, Robinson Crusoe)
- favorite storybook character (Mary Poppins, Mother Goose, Little Red Riding Hood)
- Shakespearean character (Romeo, Juliet, fairy, Hamlet, Lady Macbeth, Julius Caesar)
- patriotic character (Minuteman, George Washington, Ben Franklin, Civil War soldier)
- scientific person (mad scientist, Einstein, astronaut, explorer, botanist, computer nerd)
- religious figure (Moses, Jesus, Wise Man, shepherd, monk, nun, Pilgrim, St. Patrick)



## Masquerade Ball

Have a costume party with prizes awarded to the best- and worst-dressed. Wear fancy, imaginative, or funny costumes. (For example, you might be a clown, jester, king, queen, prince, princess, Cinderella, etc.) Listen to classical music, serve punch and cookies, and play old-fashioned parlor games such as Charades and Blindman's Bluff.



Websites such as [www.buffalobreath.com](http://www.buffalobreath.com) (my favorite) and [www.costumeuniverse.com](http://www.costumeuniverse.com) (parental discretion advised) feature thousands of costumes and accessories from every era. Browsing through these can be a great source of inspiration. Styles of costumes that are available include: Biblical, Elizabethan, Medieval, Renaissance, Colonial, Western, Civil War, World War II, Egyptian, Roman, Greek, Victorian, Roaring Twenties, Disco, Viking, Pirate, 1950's, hippie, royalty, Disney, etc.

## Last-Minute Costumes

Are you in a hurry and have nothing to wear? Or maybe you don't you want to spend the money on costume materials that will be used only once? Here are some quick, creative ideas that take the "cost" out of costumes. Ideas for both children and adults are included.

- Dress up as Mom or Dad** - Search through your closet for some old clothing that you no longer use, that your child can wear to dress up like you. Let your child help in the selection. Choices could range from shirts, skirts, pants, evening wear, business suit, sports jacket, whatever. Don't forget to let them borrow some accessories such as jewelry, ties, belts, and perhaps a hat. (Mom and Dad can likewise dress up as their kids!)
- Sports Uniforms** - Does your child or an older brother or sister have a sports uniform in their closet? This would make it easy to go as a sports figure.
- Farmer** - Get out some old overalls, add a flannel shirt and straw hat, stuff your pockets with straw, and grab a rake or shovel.
- Nutty Professor** - If anyone in your family still has their old high school or college graduation gown, ask if you can borrow it. Wear with funny glasses, nose, and mustache.
- Glamour Model** - Get out your most elegant outfit and fancy shoes, such as the prom or bridesmaid dress that you would otherwise never wear to any other occasion. For a silly look you can add funny-looking glasses, a boa around your neck, or a bow tie.



## Duct Tape Costumes

**Tin Man** - You can become the Tin Man from *The Wizard of Oz* by wrapping your entire body in gray or metallic duct tape, leaving your face uncovered. Put a metal funnel on top of your head and carry around an oil can.

**Mummy** - Wrap yourself from head to toe in white or gray duct tape (you might even try white strips of cloth or toilet paper).



## Cardboard Box Costumes

Turn a cardboard box into a Jack-in-the-Box, ABC block, Lego brick, wrapped gift, x-ray machine, television, dice, robot, train, monster truck, fire truck, airplane, spaceship, etc.



## Sweat Suit Costumes

Hooded sweat shirts and pants can be turned into any number of imaginative outfits. Black is probably the most versatile color. For example, in a black sweat suit you can become a cat, spider, mime, spy, villain, Zorro, or skeleton simply by doing a little sewing and adding some accessories. You may even use the sweat suit after dismantling the costume. Long sleeve Hanes Beefy-T's and tights make good sweat suit substitutes.

**Cat** - Get a brown, gray, or black sweat suit. Rope or fake fur can be used for a tail. Attach ears to a headband or create a face, with whiskers and ears, out of a paper plate. You can also make a lion out of a yellow sweat suit or a tiger out of an orange sweat suit. Attach strips of black tape for stripes.

**Ladybug** - Get a black sweat suit and a red cape. Sew or paste big black dots on the red cape. Attach pipe cleaner antennas to a headband.

**Butterfly** - Get a black, gray, or brown sweat suit and make a cape out of a colorful piece of striped or spotted fabric. Attach pipe cleaner antennas to a headband.

**Robin Hood** - Get a green hooded sweat jacket, a green shirt and pants or tights to go with a green cape. Carry a toy bow and arrow over your shoulder.

**Skeleton** - Cut "bones" out of white cloth, paper, or duct tape and attach them to a black sweat suit. Create a skull mask out of a paper plate, using string to hold it on.

**Pig** - Get a pink sweat suit. Make a nose and tail out of stiff paper or a paper plate. Attach it with string. Pose as one of the Three Little Pigs, Babe, or Wilbur from *Charlotte's Web*.

**Spider** - Get a black sweat suit, black gloves, and three old pairs of black socks. Stuff the socks with newspaper, polyester filler, or plastic bags. Sew three socks onto each side of the shirt - these, along with your arms, will be the spider's legs. For a black widow, cut an hourglass shape out of red felt or paper and baste it to the center of the shirt.

Additional homemade costume ideas (including costumes for wheelchair users) can be found at: [www.robinsfyi.com/holidays/halloween/costumes.htm](http://www.robinsfyi.com/holidays/halloween/costumes.htm). Have fun!

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Teri Ann Berg Olsen is a home educator and author of *Learning for Life: Educational Words of Wisdom*. Visit her website, [www.KnowledgeHouse.info](http://www.KnowledgeHouse.info), for more informative articles and resources.

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