

PART C: PROSE

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the following passage and answer the questions on pages 8 to 13 of the written-response booklet.

The Hallowe'en Party

by Miriam Waddington

- 1 The year that I was twelve my father came home one day and announced that he had bought a farm. My sister Helen and I could hardly wait to see the farm which, according to my father, consisted of twenty-six acres in St. Vital, just beyond the outskirts of Winnipeg. There were twenty acres of bush with buildings, and six acres of meadow beside the river. My father had dreamed of such a farm all the years he was shut up in the dark greasy machine shop where he earned his living.
- 2 My mother was appeased by the knowledge that my father had no intention of giving up his job to move his family onto the land. That would come later. At this point he would begin to talk about his dream of a Jewish settlement on the banks of the Red River, an ideal farm community that would prove a thing or two to the world. And in his vision, we, the Lurias, were always the strongest, the busiest and the most ardent pioneers.
- 3 Now as I look back, I can understand my father's deep hunger for land. Separated from his native Russia, he searched without knowing it for landscapes that were like his old home. That is why he chose to settle on the windswept plains of Manitoba.
- 4 The first sight of our farm was a disappointment. We saw nothing but a few fields, a white-washed hut and an old barn. We couldn't share my father's enthusiasm for a mushroom bed behind the stable, or a cucumber garden beside the river. So we left him to plan his crops while we wandered down to the river's edge. There was nothing to interest us here either, and so we decided to go frog-hunting.
- 5 Our frog hunt brought us to a wooded grove, and after winding in and out, we found ourselves looking down into a gully. We skirted it, and as we came around the curve we could see ahead of us a tiny cottage set back in the trees. We stopped in amazement. It was so quiet and strange, finding the cottage in just that spot.
- 6 We stood there in silence and watched some chicks wander out of the coop to scratch in the garden. From around the corner came a kitten, and then the barking of a dog, followed by a woman's voice.
- 7 The voice was old and sturdy like its owner. Over her face, to shade it from the sun, she wore a stringy straw hat, and under it, her eyes looked out as clear and flawless as aquamarines. She smiled at us, greeted us in a neighbourly way, and almost before we knew it, we were talking like old friends. She told us her name was Miss MacNeill and that she kept house for her brother Dan.
- 8 Miss MacNeill had a little trouble pronouncing our last name and rolled it over her tongue experimentally. "Luria, Luria. Now would that be some foreign name?"
- 9 "Well," I told her, "not exactly; that is, we aren't, but my father—well, he wasn't born here, he comes from Russia."

- 10 “And besides,” said Helen, as though she were revealing some terrible secret, “we’re Jewish.”
- 11 Miss MacNeill nodded, “Well now, that’ll be like Dan and me—born in Scotland we were, and ever since we’ve been away we’re always scheming to get back.”
- 12 So there they were, the two of them, alone except for a boarder called John, who was cook for the construction crew working up the road. And that was how we came to know the MacNeills.
- 13 As the summer deepened we visited them often. Although we always called her Miss MacNeill, it wasn’t long before Dan was Dan to us, and as for John, we never knew his surname at all.
- 14 And then September came and we were sitting in the garden in front of the cottage, Dan whittling away at something, and Miss MacNeill busy cutting geranium slips for us to take home to our mother. Helen caught sight of the ripening pumpkins and asked Dan if he would help her make a jack o’lantern for Hallowe’en.
- 15 Then Dan was off on one of his stories, talking and whittling, whittling and talking. Pretty soon, John, who had been mending a pair of boots in the parlour, came out and joined us. John was no talker, but he always knew to nod in the right places. He nodded several times, and after a bit he took his pipe out of his mouth and said it would be nice if Helen and I could get my father to bring us out to the cottage on Hallowe’en night. We could then have a real old-fashioned party—and there’d be no lack of company either. Here John reeled off the names of a dozen children from the surrounding farms.
- 16 It all sounded wonderful, until I remembered that Helen and I probably wouldn’t be allowed to come. Apart from the fact that my father might not want to drive us out to a party so far from home, he was sure to object because Hallowe’en was not a Jewish holiday.
- 17 And sure enough when we brought it up that evening, my father took the position that we ought not to celebrate a Christian holiday. Although Helen and I both pointed out that Hallowe’en had nothing to do with religion, my father insisted that it was a culture symbol.
- 18 The MacNeills were almost as disappointed as we were. Miss MacNeill thought it a shame that my father would let a thing like being Jewish stand in the way of our having fun with other children, but Dan puffed thoughtfully on his pipe and surprised us all by saying that women couldn’t understand such things, but a man could see how another man wouldn’t want to lose the one thing he had lived for all his life.
- 19 This seemed deep coming from Dan, and I probably wouldn’t have paid much attention to it if he hadn’t followed it up by announcing that he intended to see my father himself.
- 20 It was lucky for Helen and me that we happened to be hunting for a couple of pails in the barn when Dan ran into my father. We didn’t even try to resist the temptation to eavesdrop, and we heard Dan say, “Mr. Luria, there’s something I want to talk to you about.”
- 21 “Yes, sure, and what may it be?” That was my father.
- 22 “Well, it’s about your children. I guess you know that we’d like to have them come to our Hallowe’en party along with the others from the farms hereabouts.”
- 23 We peered through a crack in the barn and could just see my father smile.

OVER

- 24 “I know you mean well, Mr. MacNeill. You and your sister, you must be kind people. Helen and David tell us how they enjoy it at your house—and I don’t want you to think it is anything we have against you as people.”
- 25 Dan didn’t seem to have any trouble understanding my father’s accent, and said right off that he was glad it was nothing like that. “We won’t keep the children late, and if it’s that you’re worried about, why, you and Mrs. Luria are more than welcome to come, too!”
- 26 My father laughed.
- 27 “But thank you, no—what would we do at a Hallowe’en party? No, it isn’t that either.” And here his voice came slower. He began to frown the way he usually did when he was serious.
- 28 “You look to me like an honest man, Mr. MacNeill, so I’m going to tell you the truth. I don’t want to start this kind of thing. I don’t want my children celebrating Christmas or going to Hallowe’en parties. Once you begin, even with a little Hallowe’en party, everything is lost. You see, we are Jewish, and I have suffered because of it. I don’t want them to forget who they are, where they belong. And here, in this country, it is easy to forget. There are so many who are forgetting. You think I like to make problems for my children, Mr. MacNeill?”
- 29 Dan said, “No, I don’t think you are trying to make it hard. I guess you maybe figure that it is hard—I guess I know what you mean—you want them to face it.”
- 30 My father said with a sigh, “That’s right, they don’t know yet, but there will be many problems.”
- 31 Dan nodded. He went on to tell my father that he knew it wasn’t easy, that he himself had left home and come to a new country. It was true that the language was the same, but a hundred little things were different—the songs, the food, the people.
- 32 “What I keep wondering about is whether it’s outside things like Hallowe’en that matter—can that change what’s inside a person? Gosh, it’s like asking a preacher to put religion into a soul when religion isn’t there already. Or like telling the devil to take it away when it is there. No sir—if you’ll excuse the example—you can’t put religion into a lad just by showing him the inside of a church.”
- 33 “You mean that if my children don’t feel what I want them to feel inside themselves, then keeping them away from a Hallowe’en party isn’t going to teach them?”
- 34 “Something like that. These things go deep, lots deeper than a Hallowe’en party. After all is said and done, in years to come they’ll only remember the fun they had at MacNeills’ one Hallowe’en. And if you don’t let them come, it’ll be childish grief that’ll stay in their minds forever.”
- 35 My father listened and rubbed his chin. We knew when he started that he was about to give in. So we crept out of the barn and made for the cottage to bring Miss MacNeill the good news.
- 36 As it turned out, Dan was right. We went to the Hallowe’en party, and bobbed for apples with the other children. Miss MacNeill told our fortunes and John produced an orange pie with licorice trimming. We played games, pulled molasses taffy and drank punch. And later, riding home in the back of my father’s truck, sleepy and tired, my mind blurred with excitement, I kept thinking of the cottage with its festoons of coloured streamers, and grinning jack o’lanterns, and I clutched my witch’s broom with a feeling of happiness.