

## Tim Burton's *The Nightmare Before Christmas*



### Summary

Jack Skellington, one of the most important people in Halloweentown, discovers Christmastown and the concept of Christmas, which he doesn't quite understand. He convinces the people in his town to celebrate Christmas, which turns out to be scary. Santa Claus helps him see what Christmas is about and after celebrating a nice Christmas, they become good friends and visit each other whenever they can.

**Chapter 1:** On Halloween, the Mayor of Halloweentown thanks Jack for an excellent celebration. But Sally, the doctor's creation and one of Jack's friends, sees that Jack is sad and bored.

**Chapter 2:** Jack discovers Christmastown, which he considers a very nice place. Meanwhile, the Mayor is worried because Jack cannot be found anywhere.

**Chapter 3:** Christmas Eve is a very special day in Christmastown. Jack is looking at the people inside their houses. Everybody is happy. He thinks of a plan for the people in Halloweentown. Sally runs to the center of Halloweentown where Jack is showing the people what Christmas is about. People don't really understand it.

**Chapter 4:** Jack asks the doctor for chemicals to help him get a clear idea of Christmas. Sally sees that Jack's plan is a mistake and that this celebration is scary.

**Chapter 5:** Jack asks everybody to help celebrate Christmas.

**Chapter 6:** Oogie Boogie is a scary person. But Jack calls his three boys to help him with the celebration.

**Chapter 7:** The three boys go to Christmastown to get Santa Claus and take him to town.

**Chapter 8:** Jack is going to take Santa's place. Sally is worried.

**Chapter 9:** When children open up the presents that 'Santa Claus' gives them, they start screaming. The toys are very scary.

**Chapter 10:** The police try to kill Jack because he's dangerous. Jack sees his mistake. Sally runs to Oogie Boogie's house to find Santa because he can help Jack.

**Chapter 11:** Oogie Boogie catches Sally and he is going to cook her and Santa. Jack arrives and kills Oogie Boogie.

**Chapter 12:** Santa helps to celebrate Christmas. He drives his sleigh across the sky and everybody's happy. Now Jack understands that Christmas is about love.

### About the creator

Tim Burton was the creator of the movie on which the novel is based. He's an American film director and writer, famous for his peculiar style. His characters—especially in animation movies—show humanlike characteristics. He directed famous movies like *Beetlejuice* and *Batman*.

### The original text

The novel is for children and it was published in 1993 with the name *Tim Burton's Nightmare Before Christmas: A Novel*. It is based on director Tim Burton's famous film, released in 1993. This animated musical was one of the top ten family movies in 1993.

### Background and themes

This story presents several themes related to values:

**Collaboration:** Everybody in town helped in some way to find Jack or to contribute to Christmas.

**Love:** Talking about love is not enough to know what it is. Love has to be felt.

**Friendship:** Friends can help in good and hard times.

**Justice:** Justice prevails and Oogie Boogie is killed.

**Stereotypes:** Bad and ugly are not the same thing. Appearances can be deceptive. Witches and vampires are considered to be bad characters but they helped Jack all along.

**Open communication:** People can take action if they know what is going on. Being able to communicate is of key importance to keep any group of people working together.

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**Good intentions:** if people realize somebody's intentions are good and honest, they will find a way to make things work and to correct mistakes.

### Discussion activities

#### Chapters 1–2

##### Before reading

- 1 **Discuss:** Have students talk about the book cover. Guide them with these questions.  
*Is it fact or fiction?*  
*What can you see?*  
*Why is there a hat? Whose is the hat?*  
*Who is the person on the hat? What's he doing? What about the other person?*  
*Is there love in this story?*  
*Is the ending happy or sad? Do you think you're going to like the story? Why (not)?*
- 2 **Discuss:** Have students talk about what makes them afraid.  
*Do monsters scare you? Do animals make you afraid? Imagine you're 5 years old. What scares you? Now imagine you're twenty. What can make you afraid? Think about stories. Which are scary stories? Why do people read scary stories?*
- 3 **Guess:** Have students make a list of the words they think will appear in the story. Have the students dictate the words to you. According to the number of times each word is mentioned, decide on the most popular. Ask students to keep this list while they read.
- 4 **Read carefully:** Have students read the lines in italics after the title of Chapter 1.  
*Who is Jack Skellington? What is he like? What's boring? Why is it boring? What's his dog like? Is the hat in the cover his? Who is the scariest skeleton?*  
 Have students focus on the word *skeleton* and Jack's last name to see if they can find any connection.

##### After reading

- 5 **Guess:** Have students check (✓) the words they have found. Tell them to add more words to their list if they feel it is necessary.

#### Chapters 3–4

##### After reading

- 6 **Discuss:** Have students discuss typical Christmas plans. If Christmas is not celebrated, think of any other important celebration. If the class is multicultural, different students can tell the rest about their celebrations. These questions can help the discussion:  
*What do you usually do at . . . ?*  
*What do families do?*  
*Do you get presents? Who buys the presents?*  
*Why is this celebration important?*  
*Do people like the celebration? Why (not)?*  
*What's the real meaning of the celebration?*

- 7 **Guess:** Have students check (✓) the words they have found. Students can go back to the words they haven't found yet and discuss why they are not related to the story.
- 8 **Research:** Find information about Christmas. Jack wants to understand Christmas. Make a list of different pieces of information about Christmas.

#### Chapters 5–6

##### Before reading

- 9 **Guess:** Have students read the title and the lines below and have them try to predict what will happen next. Guide them with these questions.  
*What's Jack's great idea? What is he going to do?*  
*How is he going to celebrate Christmas?*  
*What are different people going to do to help?*  
 Have students make a list of characters and tasks. The chart below can help.

Character	is going to ...	?
Jack	celebrate Christmas	
Sally		
the Doctor		

##### After reading

- 10 **Check:** Have students check their predictions. In the third column in the chart above, students write a check if their predictions were OK.
- 11 **Guess:** Have students predict what they boys are planning.  
*What are the three boys going to do?*  
*Are they really going to help?*  
*What tricks are they going to play?*

#### Chapters 7–8

##### Before reading

- 12 **Guess:** What is going to happen? Have students look at the picture on page 28.  
*Who can you see?*  
*What are they doing?*  
*Why is Jack showing Sally a picture of a Santa Claus suit?*  
*What is Sally going to do?*

##### After reading

- 13 **Check:** Have students go back to their predictions about the picture on page 28.  
*Were you right? Why is Jack showing Sally the picture? What is Sally going to do?*
- 14 **Discuss:** Have students talk about the decorations on the doors, and the boys' mistake.  
*What animal did the three boys get?*  
*What door did they open?*

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- 15 Read carefully:** Tell students to turn to page 4 and make a list of each door and its decoration.  
Ask students:  
*What mistakes can the three boys make? Imagine they go to the Thanksgiving door. Can they get Santa Claus? What can they get?*
- 16 Guess:** Have students try to predict what will happen next. Tell students:  
*Sally thinks that something bad is going to happen to Jack. What can it be?  
Is Sally wrong?*

### Chapters 9–10

#### After reading

- 17 Discuss:** Have students talk about toys. You can guide the discussion with the following questions:  
*When do children get toys?  
Do older people get toys? When? Why?  
What toys do older people like?  
What toys are good and what toys are bad? Why?*
- 18 Guess:** What's going to happen? Have students predict what is going to happen. Divide their ideas into positive, negative and neutral. A chart can help.

Positive (+)	Negative (–)	Not Positive or Negative

### Chapters 11–12

#### Before reading

- 19 Discuss:** Have students talk about Oogie Boogie and imagine his house.  
Ask students to describe his house. *Why is it scary?*

#### While reading

- 20 Guess:** What's going to happen?  
Ask Ss to look at the picture on page 53. *What's going to happen?*

#### After reading

- 21 Discuss:** Have students talk about the book cover.  
Go back to the questions in Activity 1. Ask students if they were right in their predictions.
- 22 Research:** Have students watch the movie and make a list of similarities and differences as regards:  
characters  
character description  
problems  
end of the story
- 23 Discuss:** Have students imagine a new movie is being made of the story. Ask students to discuss what actors and actresses are perfect to take the role of:  
Jack  
Oogie Boogie  
Sally  
the Mayor  
Santa Claus  
witches  
vampires