

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# April Fools

By Kelly Hashway



If you've ever been pranked on April Fools' Day, you may wonder how this tradition started. Well, you're not alone. No one knows for sure how April Fools' Day began. But the most likely explanation has to do with the calendar.

No, that's not an April Fools' Day joke. People used to celebrate New Years Day on April 1st. Just like today, people would have big parties to celebrate. Over time, the calendar changed and so did the date for New Years. In the 1500s, the new calendar marked New Years Day as January 1st. But because there was no Internet or other means to spread the word, the news traveled slowly by word of mouth. It took a while for everyone to hear about the change, and even then some people resisted it. They continued to celebrate New Years on April 1st. These people were given the nickname "April fools."

People following the new calendar played tricks on the "April fools" by sending them on "fool's errands." They had the "April fools" deliver invitations to big New Year's celebrations that weren't really going to happen. In

France, "April fools" were called "Poisson d'Avril," which is French for "April Fish." This began because people thought fish were easy to catch since they could be fooled into taking the bait on a hook. Children would tag a paper fish on a person's back to mark them as an "April Fish." When the person discovered the fish, the prankster would yell "Poisson d'Avril."



Not everyone is convinced that this is actually how the tradition of April Fools' Day began. People have tried to pinpoint the exact date of the first April Fools' Day, but this only led to more pranks. A professor from Boston University pranked a reporter by making up a story about a court jester who said he could run the empire better than the king. The jester was made king for a day on April 1st. This turned out to be a big April Fools' Day trick because the reporter thought the story was real.

Even though we aren't sure how this tradition began, people still celebrate April Fools' Day by playing tricks on each other. So the next time you prank someone and yell "April Fools!" remember that the day may actually be about the people who didn't want to change their traditions when the new calendar was adopted. Or maybe it's just a day to celebrate the joker in all of us.



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1. In the 1500s, which people were given the nickname "April fools"?
  - a. people who celebrated New Years Day on January 1st
  - b. people who didn't know when April started
  - c. people who were not smart
  - d. people who refused to recognize New Years Day as January 1st
  
2. In France, what did children do on April 1st?
  - a. wore paper fish on their backs
  - b. placed paper fish on other people's backs
  - c. went fishing
  - d. bought a new calendar
  
3. The article states that people played tricks on others by sending them on "fool's errands." What is the definition of an *errand*? (Look the word up in a dictionary if you're not sure.)  

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4. What is the author's purpose for writing this article?
  - a. to teach readers about the history of April Fools' Day
  - b. to remind readers that April Fools' Day is coming up
  - c. to persuade readers into celebrating April Fools' Day safely
  - d. to teach readers how April Fools' Day is celebrated in America

**Now try this:** The fourth paragraph of the article describes a college professor who tells a made-up story to a reporter as an April Fools joke. On a separate sheet of paper, retell the professor's story in your own words. Add an illustration to your story.

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Match each vocabulary word from the article "April Fools" on the left to its definition on the right.

- |                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| 1. _____ jester     | a. person who teaches at a college or university                    |
| 2. _____ discovered | b. area ruled by a king or queen                                    |
| 3. _____ professor  | c. person who is paid to tell jokes and provide entertainment       |
| 4. _____ reporter   | d. found  |
| 5. _____ empire     | e. to narrow information down to a specific place or moment in time |
| 6. _____ pinpoint   | f. desire to know something   |
| 7. _____ calendar   | g. refused to change  |
| 8. _____ resisted   | h. table for keeping track of days and dates                        |
| 9. _____ wonder     | i. person who looks for news and writes articles for a newspaper    |

## ANSWER KEY

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**An errand is a short trip taken to get something done.**

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