

April Fools' Day Around the World

April Fools' Day is celebrated all around the world. How did this tradition start, and how do the celebrations differ across the globe? Learn about April Fools' celebrations in this activity.



Props & Preparations

- Check out the links in the article for additional information to bring to the activity.
- Print [pictures](#) to pass around during the discussion.

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Introduction

April Fools' Day, sometimes called All Fools' Day, is celebrated in many parts of the world on April 1, and it involves practical jokes and hoaxes. Its roots go back at least to the Middle Ages, and some claim it even has Biblical origins. How is it celebrated in different countries? Let's find out!

Origins

There are those who believe that the origin of April Fools' Day is tied to the Gregorian calendar. When it was adopted in the late 1500s, the start of the year is said to have moved from April 1 to January 1. Those who weren't in the know about the new calendar still celebrated the new year on April 1 and were called "April fools."

It has been suggested that the origins go back to the Bible: the date when Noah first let a dove out of the ark, before the waters had abated, was April 1. Those who forgot about God's grace and deliverance were punished on April 1; they were sent on a pointless errand—"a fool's errand."

Some experts have said that April Fools' Day originated in Germany. According to these stories, a man named Gabriel Hoffmann arranged a fake meeting for legislators on April 1. This prank was documented, and playing practical jokes on this day became popular.

Regardless of how the holiday began, its popularity spread across the globe, and it is celebrated in many countries today.

Great Britain, Scotland, and Ireland

In Great Britain, Scotland, and Ireland, playing pranks is fair game until noon on April 1. After that, decorum must again be observed. Anyone who plays a prank after noon is considered a fool. Even news media gets into the celebration by publishing hoax articles. Some people even drive on the wrong side of the road!

In Scotland, the holiday was sometimes called Huntigowk Day. A gowk is a fool, and thus *Huntigowk* means "hunt the gowk." In this tradition, people try to get another to deliver a sealed message. The sealed message says, "Send this gowk on another errand with this same message," and so on, until the gowk catches on. This is another possible origin for the phrase "a fool's errand."

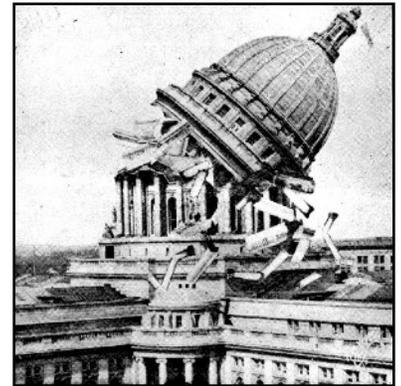
Discussion

- What pranks have you played on people on April Fools' Day?
- What pranks have been played on you?
- What is the best prank you've heard of?

The United States of America

In the United States, April Fools' Day is celebrated all day. People play pranks on one another at work and at home. News sources often create false news stories. Here are some of the best pranks:

- On April 1, 1878, the *New York Graphic* announced that Thomas Edison had created a machine that turned dirt into cereal. It was also reported to turn water into wine. Newspapers across the nation immediately picked up the story and ran it as a true news story.
- On April 1, 1933, the *Madison Capital-Times* printed a photo with a story that the state Capitol building had been destroyed by a series of explosions due to hot gas. The "hot gas," of course, referred to the politicians debating inside, but people believed the story.
- On April 1, 1985, *Sports Illustrated* featured a man named [Sidd Finch who could throw a baseball 168 mph](#). (That's 65 mph faster than the current record.) People called the magazine to learn more.
- On April 1, 1996, Taco Bell took out a full-page ad stating that they were buying the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia and were going to rename it the "Taco Liberty Bell." They said they were doing it to help with the national debt. People took it seriously and furiously called the Independence National Historical Park. Taco Bell apologized.
- On April 1, 2013, Google launched Google Nose, which supposedly could transfer scent files. When buttons labeled *diaper* or *wet dog* appeared on their computer screens, people plastered their noses to their screens, trying to smell the odors.



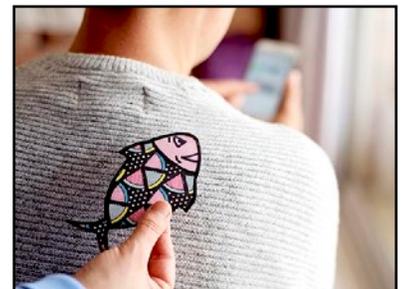
France

In France, youngsters observe the day by drawing a picture of a fish on a piece of paper and then sneakily sticking it onto another's back. When the victim discovers the prank, the prankster yells "Poisson d'Avril!," which means "April fish!" With the advent of social media, people also now take photos of fish in unusual places and post them.

Optional Activity

Color your own fish and try to stick them on each other's backs!

1. Make copies of the attached fish page for each participant.
2. Have participants color the fish.
3. Cut out the fish.



4. Make tape “loops” and attach to the back of the fish.
5. Attempt to put them on the backs of other participants without them knowing.
6. Shout “Poisson d’Avril!” or “April Fish!”

India

In India, the Holi festival begins on March 31 and is marked by playing jokes, throwing colored dust, and wearing face and body paint. It is known as the Festival of Colors or the Festival of Love, and it lasts a night and a day. It celebrates the arrival of spring and is a day to laugh, joke, and to repair relationships through forgiveness. Anyone is fair game to be drenched in color—men or women, young or old!



Other Countries

In Brazil, the day is called “Dia da Mentira,” which translates to “Day of the Lie.” News outlets create and post absurd stories, and individuals tell whopping stories to their friends.

On April Fools’ Day in Poland, sophisticated hoaxes are often coordinated efforts involving individuals, media, and even public institutions. In Poland on April 1, people can reliably doubt anything that is said!

In Iran, Sizdah Bedar is celebrated on the 13th day of the new year on the Persian calendar. This day often falls on April 1. Iranians have celebrated the day with fellowship, pranks, and jokes since 536 BC, making it the oldest tradition for celebrating April Fools’ Day.

Many other countries also celebrate April Fools’ Day with activities similar to those described here. It is a very popular holiday!



