

April Fools' Day



Roman Origins

Various experts believe that April Fools' Day can be linked to the Roman festival of Hilaria which was celebrated every year around 25th March. It included parties, games and making fun of family and friends.



Every year on 1st April, various people worldwide participate in jokes, tricks or hoaxes. It is difficult to say for certain how or when April Fools' Day began but the silliness of this day continues even today.



English Origins

Other Theories

Other historians believe that it began in 16th-century France when the country changed from the **Julian calendar** to the **Gregorian calendar**. This changed the start of the new year from April to January. Since most communication was delivered by horse or runner, it took some time for the calendar to spread. Some people still celebrated the new year on 1st April and they were called 'April fools' because of it.



Another theory is that it started in Gotham, England. According to local legend, King John wanted to build a new home there in the 13th century but the people of Gotham were unhappy about it. Together, they planned to act like fools in front of the King's men to dissuade him. When King John was told by the soldiers about the villagers' strange behaviour, he decided to build his home somewhere else so the hoax had worked.

In 1561, a poet called Eduard de Dene wrote a comical story about a nobleman sending his servant on silly errands specifically because it was 1st April. It was called 'Refrain on errand day/which is the first of April'.

April Fools' Day



Famous Pranks and Hoaxes

In 1698, people were invited to the 'Washing of the Lions' at the Tower of London, which at that time was home to many animals. However, when people showed up to watch, it was revealed to be a prank.

In 1957, a well-known BBC programme called Panorama shared a news story about Swiss farmers picking spaghetti from spaghetti trees. The BBC received so many calls from people wanting to purchase their own spaghetti trees that they had to quickly confess their prank.

Did You Know...?

In 1977, the Guardian newspaper printed a story about a fictional island.



April Fools' Day Traditions

April Fools' Day began to spread throughout the UK in the 18th century. It was considered appropriate to play jokes, tricks and pranks up until noon but anyone participating in April Fools' Day after that became the new 'April fool'.

In Scotland, April Fools' Day was traditionally a two-day festival called Hunt the Gowk or Huntigowk Day. Unsuspecting people were sent to 'hunt the gowk or cuckoo bird'. This phrase meant they were sent on fools' errands.

In France, it is called 'poisson d'avril' and it is where many people, especially children, will pin a small paper fish to each other's backs as a prank. If a person doesn't realise it, they are called a fish of April or 'poisson d'avril': usually young and easily caught.

Glossary

Gregorian calendar: The calendar that most of the world uses today.

Julian calendar: A 12-month calendar introduced by Julius Caesar around 45 BC.



Questions

1. Where was the '**Washing of the Lions**' supposed to take place? Tick one.

- ☐ Gotham
- ☐ Tower of London
- ☐ Scotland
- ☐ France

2. Number the events from 1-4 to show the order that they happened in.

- ☐ The men told the King about the villagers.
- ☐ King John wanted to build a new home.
- ☐ The villagers planned to act like fools in front of the King's men.
- ☐ The King decided to build his house somewhere else.

3. In France, what do people pin on each other's backs?

4. Look at the section called **April Fools' Day Traditions**.

Find and copy one word that means the same as 'OK' or 'correct'.

5. Fill in the missing words.

Since most _____ was delivered by horse or runner, it took some time for the _____ to spread.

6. Can you think of one silly thing the King's men might have seen and told the King about?

7. Would you like to participate in a Hilaria festival? Explain your answer.

8. Summarise what you have learnt about April Fools' Day in 25 words or fewer.

Answers

1. Where was the '**Washing of the Lions**' supposed to take place? Tick one.

- ☐ Gotham
- ☒ **Tower of London**
- ☐ Scotland
- ☐ France

2. Number the events from 1-4 to show the order that they happened in.

- 3** The men told the King about the villagers.
- 1** King John wanted to build a new home.
- 2** The villagers planned to act like fools in front of the King's men.
- 4** The King decided to build his house somewhere else.

3. In France, what do people pin on each other's backs?

In France, people pin a small paper fish to each other's backs.

4. Look at the section called **April Fools' Day Traditions**.

Find and copy one word that means the same as 'OK' or 'correct'.

appropriate

5. Fill in the missing words.

Since most **communication** was delivered by horse or runner, it took some time for the **calendar** to spread.

6. Can you think of one silly thing the King's men might have seen and told the King about?

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think something the men might have seen is people washing their clothes in muddy water. It is silly as they would never get clean with all of the mud in the water.

7. Would you like to participate in a Hilaria festival? Explain your answer.

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think I would like to participate in Hilaria because it sounds like fun. It would be great to attend parties and play tricks on my family and friends.

8. Summarise what you have learnt about April Fools' Day in 25 words or fewer.

Pupils' own responses, such as: April Fools' Day happens every year on the first day of April. It is when people worldwide play tricks or pranks on others.

April Fools' Day



Roman Origins

Some experts believe that April Fools' Day can be traced back to the Roman festival of Hilaria that was celebrated around 25th March and near the vernal or spring equinox. It included parties, games and making fun of local government officials, family and friends.



Other Theories

An additional theory states that it began in 16th-century France when the country moved from the Julian calendar (a 12-month calendar introduced by Julius Caesar around 45 BC) to the Gregorian calendar (the calendar that most of the world uses today).

This changed the start of the new year from April to January. Since most communication was delivered by horse or runner, it took some time to spread the news. A few people still celebrated the new year on 1st April and they were called 'April fools' because of it.

There is also a slight reference to 1st April being a silly day in a comical story written by a Flemish poet called Eduard de Dene in 1561 called 'Refrain on errand day/which is the first of April'. This story is about a nobleman who sends his servant on various silly errands throughout that day.

Every year on 1st April, many people across the globe tell jokes, play tricks or participate in hoaxes. How or when April Fools' Day began is difficult to determine and how people celebrate varies; however, the fun and mischievous behaviour of this day are common worldwide.

English Origins



Other experts believe it started in a little English town called Gotham. According to local legend, in the 13th century, King John wanted to build a new house there. The villagers were unhappy about it so they decided to act like fools when the King's men arrived. When King John was told about the villagers' odd behaviour, he decided to build his house somewhere else. The hoax had worked!

April Fools' Day



Famous Pranks and Hoaxes

In 1698, people were invited to the 'Washing of the Lions' at the Tower of London, which at that time was home to many animals. However, when people showed up to watch, it was revealed to be a prank.

In 1957, a well-known BBC programme called 'Panorama' shared a news story showing Swiss farmers harvesting spaghetti from spaghetti trees. The BBC received so many calls from viewers asking where to purchase spaghetti trees that they had to admit their prank quickly.

In 1977, the Guardian newspaper published a seven-page supplement about a fictional island called San Serriffe in their 1st April edition.

April Fools' Day Traditions

In the 18th century, April Fools' Day began to spread throughout the UK. Historically, tricks and pranks could be played up until noon on 1st April. Anyone participating in pranks or tricks after that became the new 'April fool'.

In Scotland, April Fools' Day was traditionally a two-day festival called Huntigowk or Hunt the Gowk Day. Numerous innocent people were sent on fools' errands where they had to 'hunt the gowk' (cuckoo bird).

It is called 'poisson d'avril' in France and many people, especially children, pin a small paper fish to a person's back. This is to signify that they are considered a 'poisson d'avril' or a fish of April: usually young and easily caught.



Typical April Fools' Pranks

Several April Fools' Day pranks have become established over time: telling someone their shoes are untied, swapping sugar for salt or glueing a coin to the pavement. There is also a familiar saying, "April Fools!" when the trick or prank is revealed.

For centuries, April Fools' day has been a day of fun when nothing can truly be taken seriously.



Questions

1. In which century did April Fools' Day spread throughout the UK? Tick one.

- ☐ 1st century
- ☐ 13th century
- ☐ 16th century
- ☐ 18th century

2. Draw **four** lines and match each year to its event.

1561
1698
1957
1977

People were invited to the 'Washing of the Lions'.
A news story about Swiss spaghetti farmers was aired on the BBC.
'Refrain on errand day/which is the first of April' was written.
A seven-page supplement about a fictional island was printed.

3. What was the name of the BBC programme that showed spaghetti being harvested from spaghetti trees?

4. Look at the section called **Typical April Fools' Pranks**.

Find and copy one word that shows the pranks have been accepted as tradition.

5. Fill in the missing words.

How or when April Fools' Day began is difficult to determine and how people celebrate _____; however, the fun and _____ behaviour of this day are common worldwide.

6. How do you think the villagers felt when they heard their hoax had worked?

7. What sort of silly errands do you think the servant in '**Refrain on errand day/which is the first of April**' was sent on? Explain your answer.

8. If you could make up a fictional place as the Guardian did, where would your fictional place be and what would it be like? Explain your answer.

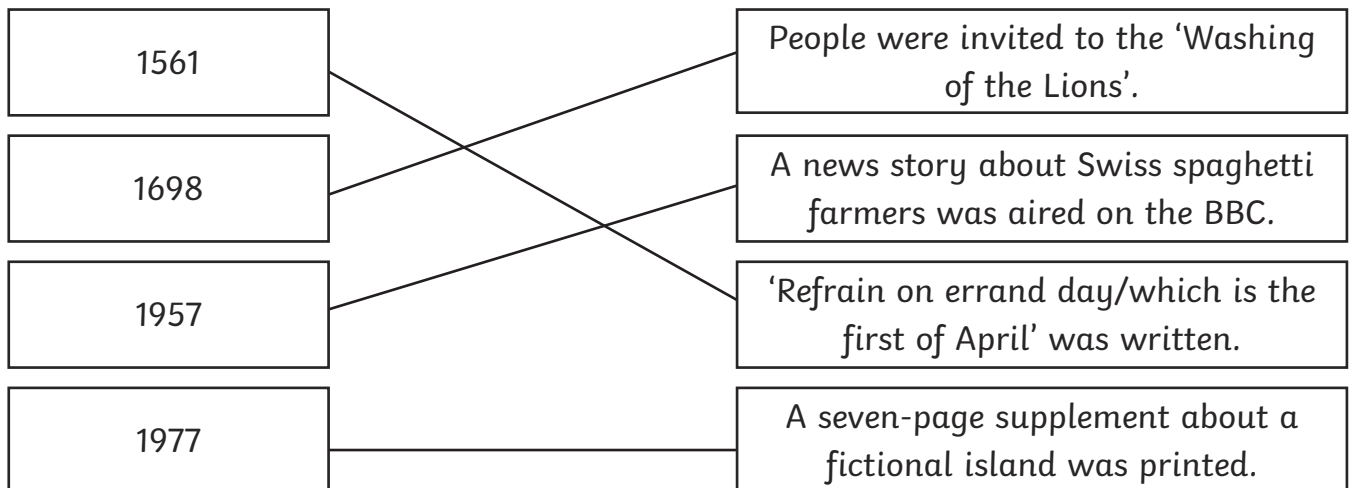
9. What surprised you the most about April Fools' Day? Explain your answer.

Answers

1. In which century did April Fools' Day spread throughout the UK? Tick one.

- ☐ 1st century
- ☐ 13th century
- ☐ 16th century
- ☒ **18th century**

2. Draw **four** lines and match each year to its event.



3. What was the name of the BBC programme that showed spaghetti being harvested from spaghetti trees?

The name of the BBC programme was Panorama.

4. Look at the section called **Typical April Fools' Pranks**.

Find and copy one word that shows the pranks have been accepted as tradition.

established

5. Fill in the missing words.

How or when April Fools' Day began is difficult to determine and how people celebrate **varies**; however, the fun and **mischievous** behaviour of this day are common worldwide.

6. How do you think the villagers felt when they heard their hoax had worked?

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think they probably felt relieved. They were relieved that the King wouldn't be building there and that the King's men had actually believed their hoax.

7. What sort of silly errands do you think the servant in 'Refrain on errand day/which is the first of April' was sent on? Explain your answer.

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think he might have been sent to find a fruit or vegetable that might not be growing at that time. April is right at the start of the year and certain things, such as pumpkins, don't grow until much later on.

8. If you could make up a fictional place as the Guardian did, where would your fictional place be and what would it be like? Explain your answer.

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think I would like to make up a forest where people can see mythical creatures, such as a unicorn or a dragon. It would be fun to write about and describe in detail.

9. What surprised you the most about April Fools' Day? Explain your answer.

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think it surprised me that well-known TV programmes and newspapers participate in April Fools' Day. I didn't realise that they might put on pranks too.

April Fools' Day



Roman Origins

Several scholars believe that April Fools' Day can trace its roots back to the Roman festival of Hilaria. Celebrated around 25th March and near the vernal or spring equinox, Hilaria was a festival that encompassed parties, games and making fun of local government officials, family and friends.

Other Theories

Another theory states that it began sometime in the 16th century when France changed from the Julian calendar (a 12-month calendar introduced by Julius Caesar around 45 BC) to the Gregorian calendar (the calendar that most of the world uses today). This changed the start



English Origins

A different theory is that April Fools' Day can trace its beginnings to a little English town called Gotham where local legend states that in the 13th century, King John was proposing to set up a new residence. Realising that this would not be good for Gotham, the villagers decided to take action. The King sent his men but when they arrived, they saw all of the villagers doing silly things and acting like fools. Hearing of their strange behaviour, the King decided to look elsewhere. The hoax had saved the day!

of the new year from April to January. Since most communication was delivered by horse or runner, news of the calendar change was slow to spread. Some people still celebrated the new year on 1st April and they were referred to as 'April fools' because of it.

There is also an obscure reference to 1st April being a day of pranks in a comical story written by a Flemish poet called Eduard de Dene in 1561 called 'Refrain on errand day/which is the first of April'. This story is about a nobleman who sends his servant on various silly errands.

Annually on 1st April, numerous people all over the world tell jokes, play tricks or participate in hoaxes. The origins of April Fools' Day are difficult to determine but various historians have suggested several possible ideas as to how it started. This ancient tradition varies worldwide but the fun and frivolity of this holiday are common themes that have lasted for centuries and continue today.

April Fools' Day



Famous Pranks and Hoaxes

In 1698, people were invited to the 'Washing of the Lions' at the Tower of London. At that time, it was home to many animals. However, when people showed up to watch, it became clear that it was a joke and not really something that was done.

In 1957, a well-known BBC programme called 'Panorama' shared a news story about Swiss farmers harvesting spaghetti from spaghetti trees that was narrated by distinguished presenter Richard Dimbleby. The BBC received so many calls inquiring about where to purchase spaghetti trees that they had to admit their prank quickly.

In 1977, the Guardian newspaper included a seven-page supplement about a fictional island called San Serriffe in their 1st April edition.



April Fools' Day Traditions

During the 18th century, April Fools' Day began to spread throughout the UK. Traditionally, tricks and pranks could be played up until noon on 1st April. After midday, it was considered bad luck to play tricks on people and those that did became known as the new 'April fools'.

In Scotland, April Fools' Day was historically a two-day festival called Huntigowk Day or Hunt the Gowk Day where innocent people were sent on fools' errands to 'hunt the gowk' (cuckoo bird).

In France, it is called 'poisson d'avril' and has a tradition where many people, especially children, will pin a small paper fish to a person's back. This is to symbolise that they are considered a 'poisson d'avril' or a fish of April: usually young and easily caught.



Typical April Fools' Pranks

Over time, several typical April Fools' Day pranks have become established and well known: telling someone their shoes are untied, swapping sugar for salt or glueing a coin to the pavement are all examples of pranks that are considered normal for this special day. Usually, these pranks are accompanied by the familiar saying, "April Fools!" when the trick or prank is revealed.

For centuries, people all over the world have enjoyed fooling others with creative pranks, jokes and hoaxes on April Fools' Day. It is a time when nothing can truly be taken seriously.

Questions

1. What is a gowk? Tick one.

- ☐ a fish
- ☐ a sign
- ☐ a cuckoo bird
- ☐ a coin glued to the pavement

2. Draw **four** lines and match each person to their description.

King John

A Flemish poet who wrote a poem about a nobleman who sends his servant on silly errands.

Eduard de Dene

He introduced a 12-month calendar around 45 BC.

Julius Caesar

A distinguished BBC presenter who narrated an April Fools' Day news story.

Richard Dimbleby

He wanted to build a new residence in Gotham.

3. When was Hilaria celebrated?

4. Look at the first paragraph.

Find and copy one word that means the same as 'foolishness' or 'silliness'.

5. Fill in the missing words.

The origins of April Fools' Day are difficult to _____ but various historians have _____ several possible ideas as to how it started.

6. Can you think of a hoax that the BBC could make up a story about? Explain your answer.

7. Would you like to visit France on April Fools' Day? Explain your answer.

8. Which well-known prank or hoax did you enjoy the most and why? Explain your answer.

9. If you could play a prank on a friend, what would you do? Explain your answer.

10. Tick one box in each row to show whether each statement is **true** or **false**.

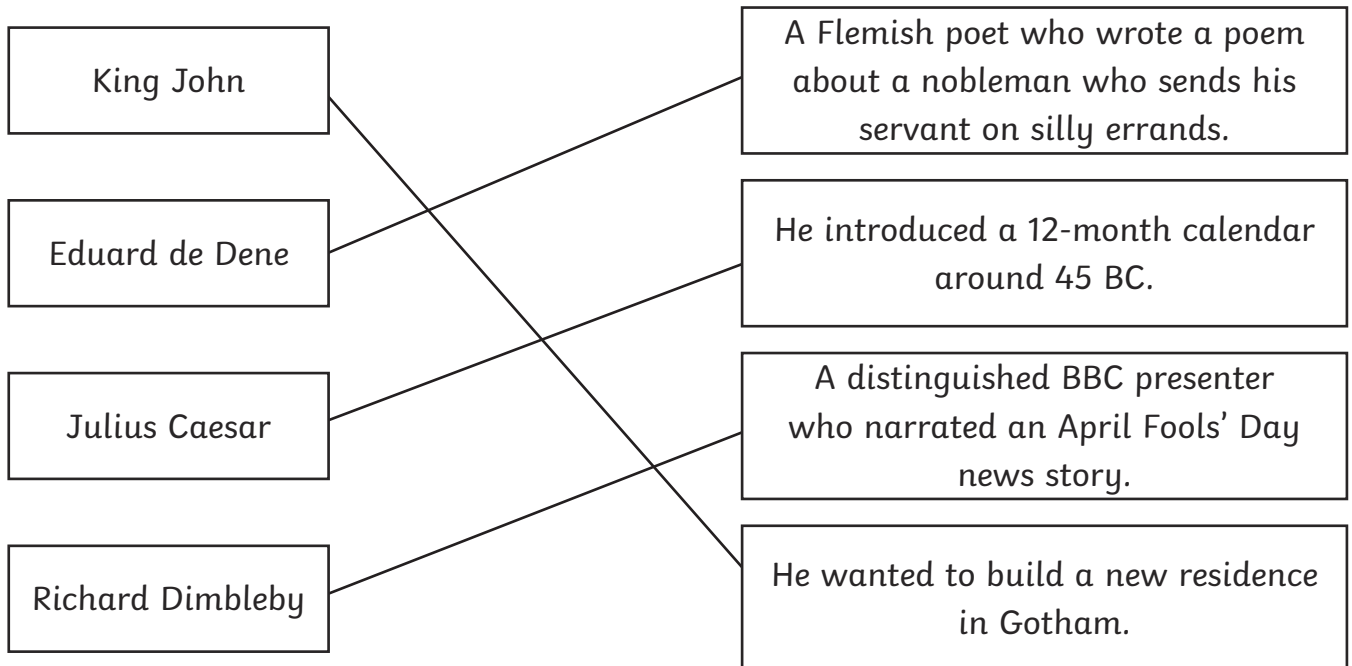
	True	False
Traditionally, it was okay to play tricks after noon on 1 st April.		
The villagers of Gotham did not want the King to build his new residence there.		
Hilaria was a Roman festival.		
San Serriffe was a real island.		
France changed calendars in the 15th century.		

Answers

1. What is a gowk? Tick one.

- ☐ a fish
- ☐ a sign
- ☒ a **cuckoo bird**
- ☐ a coin glued to the pavement

2. Draw **four** lines and match each person to their description.



3. When was Hilaria celebrated?

Hilaria was celebrated on 25th March.

4. Look at the first paragraph.

Find and copy one word that means the same as 'foolishness' or 'silliness'.

frivolity

5. Fill in the missing words.

The origins of April Fools' Day are difficult to **determine** but various historians have **suggested** several possible ideas as to how it started.

6. Can you think of a hoax that the BBC could make up a story about? Explain your answer.

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think they should make up a story about dragons. People love dragons and there have been a lot of TV shows about them recently with very good special effects.

7. Would you like to visit France on April Fools' Day? Explain your answer.

Pupils' own responses, such as: Yes, I think it would be fun to visit on April Fools' Day and see people with fish on their backs. Although, I would have to watch my own back too.

8. Which well-known prank or hoax did you enjoy the most and why? Explain your answer.

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think I enjoyed the spaghetti farmers the most as I can't believe people actually believed it and called the BBC. I thought it was very funny.

9. If you could play a prank on a friend, what would you do? Explain your answer.

Pupils' own responses, such as: I think I'd like to tell my friends that I'm going to appear on the news. I would tell them that I was out with my parents when someone interviewed me. It would be funny to know that they were watching the news and looking for me.

10. Tick one box in each row to show whether each statement is **true** or **false**.

	True	False
Traditionally, it was okay to play tricks after noon on 1 st April.		✓
The villagers of Gotham did not want the King to build his new residence there.	✓	
Hilaria was a Roman festival.	✓	
San Serriffe was a real island.		✓
France changed calendars in the 15th century.		✓

Award 2 marks for all five correct.

Award 1 mark for four correct.