



Activities for Grades 3–5

Compliments of Teacher Created Materials and CrossCan Educational Services

April Fools' Day

April 1st



Background Information

April Fools' Day is not an official holiday. However, it is a favorite day among the young at heart. Historians speculate that the recognized practice of playing pranks dates back to approximately 1582 in France when Charles IX adopted the Gregorian calendar. New Year's Day moved from the last week of March to January 1. Because it took weeks for the change to be fully communicated to rural areas—and because some countries resisted adoption for many years—there was confusion regarding the real New Year's Day. (England did not adopt the calendar until 200 years later.) Gifts were historically exchanged during New Year week. Supposedly, pranksters tried to convince people that April 1 was still New Year's Day by giving out mock gifts. Others were reluctant to accept the news about the changes. Those who continued to celebrate on April 1 were called fools.

Another theory is that nature tricks us into thinking spring had arrived with its variable weather. Some speculated that it originated with an ancient New Year

festival celebrating the arrival of spring. Others speculated that it began with recognition that Hilaria, the goddess of nature, could indeed be fickle.

Most pranks in the United States are harmless—clocks are set wrong, children are told that there is no school, people are told their shoelaces are untied, etc.

Around the World

In France, the fool is called a *poisson d'avril*, meaning “the April fish.” In Scotland, an April fool is called an April *gowk*, which means a cuckoo. The Iranian practice of playing jokes on Norouz, the first Irani calendar month, dates back thousands of years. In England, where playing pranks wasn't established until the 18th century, an April fool is called a *gob*, a *gawby*, or a *gobby*. Indeed, many of the best nationwide pranks have been launched by the British. The most famous is the report about Switzerland's spaghetti harvest, complete with video footage of Swiss farmers harvesting spaghetti, carefully grown to be the right length!

Recommended Books

Macguire, Gregory. 2004. *A Couple of April Fools*. New York: Clarion Books.

Pascoe, Elaine. 2005. *Fooled You! Fakes and Hoaxes Through the Years*. New York: Henry Holt.

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Fascinating Facts

- April Fools' Day probably began in 1582 in France. The king adopted the Gregorian calendar. New Year's Day moved from the last week of March to January 1. People who were not aware of the date change and still celebrated New Year's Day during the last week of March were known as the April Fools.
- People used to give gifts on New Year's Day. Some would give gag gifts on April 1. People who received them were called April Fools.
- Some people think April Fools' Day began because the weather changes so much. Nature tricks people into thinking spring has come. Then the weather gets cold again.
- **1989:** People in London thought they saw a flying saucer land. A man in a silver suit came out. It was a hot air balloon made to look like a flying saucer.
- **1996:** Taco Bell announced that it had bought the Liberty Bell. They said they were renaming it the Taco Liberty Bell.
- **1998:** Burger King announced in ads that it was offering left-handed Whoppers, saying they'd been made to make it easier for left-handed people.
- **2002:** A British grocery chain announced it had a new carrot. It had air holes that would whistle when cooked just right, just like a teakettle!
- **2012:** WestJet, an airline, showed an ad about their child-free flying. Children were shown being put into the cargo hold of the airplane before takeoff.

Famous Pranks

- **1957:** The BBC (British Broadcasting System) reports news on TV and radio. They reported that the spaghetti crops had come early in Switzerland. A video showed people taking strands of spaghetti off a tree and laying them in the sun to dry. Some people wanted to get their own spaghetti trees.

Superstitions

- Pranks or jokes must be done before noon. After that, the jokester will get some bad luck.
- Fools who don't laugh off a prank will have bad luck.

Fooling Around With Words

Directions: An *oxymoron* is when two words are used together with meanings that contradict. For example, how can somebody be *seriously funny*? Read this television script for a commercial. How many contradictory phrases can you find? Write them below and explain why they are oxymoronic. The first one is done for you.



among the first _____

It's Named What?

Directions: Some things we encounter each day have funny or odd names. For example, the metal part of a pencil is called a *ferrule*. Think about an object you would like to create a silly name for. Draw the object in the box. Then, write a description that includes the name of the object and what it is used for.





Name _____ Date _____

April Fools' Day Word Puzzles

Directions: The puzzles stand for something about jokes. Write the saying under each puzzle.

	joke's you
1. _____	2. _____

3. tr + - st + ster

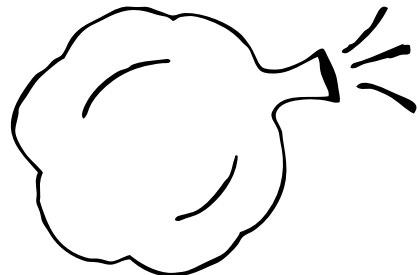
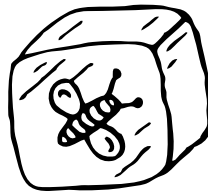
Directions: Each phrase can be scrambled into a new word about April Fools' Day. The first letter is given to you. Write the new word on the line.

4. joke indies i _____

5. warn eye n _____ y _____

6. stern park p _____

7. large hut l _____



Pranksters at Work

Directions: Read these pranks. Do you believe they really happened? Mark each one with a Yes or No.

Are these news stories true? You decide!	Yes	No
1. A giant Lego man washed up on a Florida beach. It was 8 feet tall. It weighed 100 pounds. The Lego Company said they knew nothing about it.		
2. JFK airport in New York City closes its runways several times a year. They need to let turtles cross the runways.		
3. An African elephant was found on top of the Empire State building. No one could figure out how it got there. It took them two days to get it down.		
4. Vermont Governor Peter Shumlin got a surprise one April morning. Four bears were trying to eat from his bird feeders. He tried to shoo them away. One chased him back into his house.		
5. A kitten was born with four ears. The people who adopted him named him Yoda. His hearing is normal.		
6. A truck filled with pigs flipped over in San Francisco. About 50 pigs escaped. It took 20 men seven hours to get the pigs back.		
7. You can't get mail on Saturdays in Canada. They stopped Saturday deliveries in 1969.		
8. Underwear was disappearing from people's clotheslines in Prague, Czech Republic. The thief was finally caught. It was an escaped pet kangaroo.		
9. A dog was born with seven legs. A vet said it would die. But it lived for eight years.		
10. The smallest town in America is Buford, Wyoming. It had one resident. He owned the town for 20 years. He sold it in April of 2012 for \$900,000.		



Name _____ Date _____

My Joke to You

Directions: Think about a time you have played a joke on someone. Describe how the joke was pulled off. Include details about how the "fool" reacted.



A large rectangular area for writing, framed by a decorative border of grey, cloud-like shapes. Inside the frame, there are 15 horizontal lines for text.

April Fools' Day Prank

Directions: Trick your parents into thinking you spilled your hot chocolate.

Materials

- cardboard or other work surface for project to dry on
- waxed paper
- tacky glue (2 $\frac{1}{2}$ ounces per student)
- brown paint
- tablespoon measure
- small paper or plastic cup
- plastic spoon
- small marshmallows (*optional*)



Steps

1. Cover the cardboard with waxed paper.
2. Mix 2 tablespoons glue with 1 tablespoon paint.
3. Pour a small amount of the paint mix down the inside of the cup.
4. Lay the cup on its side on the paper.
5. Make a puddle with more of the paint.
6. Stick the spoon in it. It should look like the cup has spilled over.
7. Add a few marshmallows so it looks like a spilled cup of hot chocolate (*optional*).
8. After it is dry, remove the waxed paper.
9. Take it home carefully. Place it where it will be a good joke!