

April Fools' (fool = imbécile) Day: The uncertain origins of a foolish day

April Fools' Day, sometimes called All Fools' Day, is one of the most **light-hearted** (gai) days of the year. Its origins are uncertain. Some see it as a celebration related to the turn of the seasons, while others believe it **stems** (arrêter) from the adoption of a new calendar.

New Year's Day Moves

Ancient cultures, including those of the Romans and Hindus, celebrated New Year's Day on or around April 1. It follows the **vernal** (vernal, printanier) equinox (March 20th or March 21st.) In medieval times, much of Europe celebrated March 25, the Feast of Annunciation, as the beginning of the new year.

In 1582, Pope Gregory XIII ordered a new calendar (the Gregorian Calendar) to replace the old Julian Calendar. The new calendar called for New Year's Day to be celebrated Jan. 1. That year, France adopted the reformed calendar and **shifted** (décaler) New Year's day to Jan. 1. According to a popular explanation, many people either refused to accept the new date, or did not learn about it, and continued to celebrate New Year's Day on April 1. Other people began to make fun of these traditionalists, trying **to trick** (tromper faire des tours) them into believing something false. **Eventually** (finalement), the practice **spread** (s'étendre) throughout Europe.

Problems With This Explanation

There are at least two difficulties with this explanation.

The first is that it doesn't fully account for the spread of April Fools' Day to other European countries. The Gregorian calendar was not adopted by England until 1752, for example, but April Fools' Day was already well established there by that point.

The second is that we have no direct historical **evidence** (preuve) for this explanation, only conjecture, and that conjecture appears to have been made more recently.

Constantine and Kugel

Another explanation of the origins of April Fools' Day was provided by Joseph Boskin, a professor of history at Boston University. He explained that the practice began during the reign of Constantine, when a group of court **jesters** (bouffons) and fools told the Roman emperor that they could do a better job of running the empire. Constantine, amused, **allowed** (permettre) a jester named Kugel to be king for one day. Kugel passed an **edict** (édit) calling for absurdity on that day, and the custom became an annual event.

"In a way," explained Prof. Boskin, "it was a very serious day. In those times fools were really **wise** (sage) men. It was the role of jesters to put things in perspective with humor." This explanation was brought to the public's attention in an Associated Press article printed by many newspapers in 1983. There was only one catch: Boskin **made the whole thing up** (a tout inventé). It took a couple of weeks for the AP to realize that they'd been victims of an April Fools' joke themselves.

Spring Fever

It is worth noting (il est à noter) that many different cultures have had days of foolishness around the start of April, give or take a couple of weeks.

The Romans had a festival named Hilaria on March 25, **rejoicing** (réjouissance) in the resurrection of Attis. The Hindu calendar has Holi, and the Jewish calendar has Purim. Perhaps there's something about the time of year, with its turn from winter to spring, that **lends itself** (se prêter) to lighthearted celebrations.

Observances Around the World

April Fools' Day is observed throughout the Western world. Practices include sending someone on a **"fool's errand,"** (course d'un imbécile) looking for things that don't exist; playing **pranks** (farce); and trying to get people to believe ridiculous things.

A **fool's errand** is a type of practical joke or prank where a newcomer to a group, typically in a professional context, is given an impossible or nonsensical task by ...

United Kingdom

In the UK, an April Fool prank is sometimes later revealed by shouting "April fool!" at the recipient, who becomes the "April fool". A study in the 1950s, found that in the UK, and in countries whose traditions derived from the UK, the joking ceased at midday. This continues to be the current practice, with the custom ceasing at noon, after which time it is no longer acceptable to play pranks. Thus a person playing a prank after midday is considered the

"April fool" themselves

In Scotland, it was traditionally called 'Huntigowk Day', although this name has fallen into disuse. The name is a corruption of 'Hunt the Gowk', "gowk" being Scots for a **cuckoo** (un coucou, ici un idiot) or a foolish person. The traditional prank is to ask someone to deliver a **sealed** (scellé, fermé) message that supposedly requests help of some sort. In fact, the message reads "Dinna laugh, dinna smile. Hunt the gowk another mile." The **recipient** (destinataire), upon reading it, will explain he can only help if he first contacts another person, and sends the victim to this next person with an identical message, with the same result.

In England a "fool" is known by different names around the country, including a "**noodle**"(nouille), "**gob**"(gueule, bouche), "gobby" or "noddy".

Ireland

It was traditional to entrust the victim with an "important letter" to be given to a named person. That person would read the letter, then ask the victim to take it to someone else, and so on. The letter when opened contained the words "send the fool further".

Prima aprilis in Poland

It is a day when many pranks are played: **hoaxes** (canular) – sometimes very sophisticated – are prepared by people, media (which often cooperate to make the "information" more credible) and even public institutions. Serious activities are usually **avoided** (éviter), and generally every word said on April 1 can be untrue. The conviction for this is so strong that the Polish anti-Turkish alliance with Leopold I signed on April 1, 1683, was backdated to March 31. However, for some in Poland *prima aprilis* ends at noon of April 1, and *prima aprilis* jokes after that hour are considered inappropriate and not **classy** (chic).

Nordic countries

Danes, Finns, Icelanders, Norwegians and Swedes celebrate April Fools' Day . Most news media will publish exactly one false story on April 1; for newspapers this will typically be a first-page article but not the top **headline**. (gros titre)

April fish

In Italy, France, Belgium and French-speaking areas of Switzerland and Canada, April 1 tradition is often known as "April fish" .This includes attempting to attach a paper fish to the victim's back without being noticed. Such fish feature is prominently present on many late 19th- to early 20th-century French April Fools' Day postcards. Many newspapers also spread a false story on April Fish Day, and a subtle reference to a fish is sometimes given as a **clue** (indice)to the fact that it is an April Fools' prank.

First of April in Ukraine

April Fools' Day is widely celebrated in Odessa and has special local name Humorina. For the first time this holiday arose in 1973. April Fool prank is revealed by saying "April First, trust nobody" at the recipient. The festival includes a large parade in the city center, free concerts, street **fairs** (foires) and performances. Festival participants dress up in a variety of costumes and walk around the city fooling around and pranks with **passersby** (passant). One of the traditions on fool's day is to dress up the main city monument in funny clothes. Humorina even has its own logo - a cheerful **sailor** (marin) in **lifebelt** (bouée de sauvetage), whose author was an artist – Arkady Tsykun. During the festival, special souvenirs with a logo are printed and sold everywhere. Since 2010, April Fools' Day celebrations include an International Clown Festival and both celebrated as one. In 2019, the festival was dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the Odessa Film Studio and all events were held with an emphasis on cinema.

Spanish-speaking countries

In many Spanish-speaking countries (and the Philippines), "Dia de los Santos Inocentes" (Holy Innocents Day) is a festivity which is very similar to the April Fools' Day, but it is celebrated in late December (27, 28 or 29 depending on the location, or January 10th for East Syrians).